

As Buzz Light Year would say. This is one sad strange little man. No wait. Not sad, not glad, Naaman is mad. It says so in our scripture today.

But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God and would wave his hand over the spot and cure the skin disease!

Here's the story as we know it. The prophet Elisha is called upon to help Naaman. Naaman is a man of influence. He is none other than the captain of the host of the king of Syria. He is mighty, he is proud. He is self-sufficient. Except for that dread disease, leprosy. A diagnosis of leprosy back then would be just like a diagnosis of any terminal illness today. He was a gonner.

His wife's maid was a young slave from Israel and she knew a guy. Elisha a prophet of Israel. Elisha was a man of God known for his miracles. When Naaman's wife told him this, boy was he eager to meet Elisha. He asked the king of Syria to help, and the king sent a letter of introduction to the king of Israel. The message of this letter found its way to Elisha, and he agreed to have Naaman come for a visit.

Naaman EXPECTED to be made well. He pictured in his mind how Elisha would approach him. This proud man was used to having people recognize his importance. He expected things to happen in a certain way. Yes, he wanted healing, but on his own terms. He wasn't about to humble himself to be healed. Now, God saw the pride in Naaman's heart. God brought him face to face with his pride and sense of self-importance. God saw his attitude that said, "God, this is the way I want it!"

For Naaman pride and an overactive sense of self-sufficiency was a hindrance. Things had to change before he could be cured of leprosy. How often do we hang on to our own preconceived idea of how God should work? How often do we say, "God, this is the way I want it!"

This passage shows us how to prepare ourselves for the work God wants to do in us.

First we need to prepare our hearts. Yes Naaman EXPECTED to be healed, but his heart wasn't prepared for it. He was used to people catering to him and recognizing his importance. He was used to "pulling strings to get what he wanted." He was used to taking "short cuts" by knowing the "right people."

Like so many others, Naaman showed very little respect for prophets, except for now when he wanted something. People using other people to get what they want. Not much has changed, has it? Want better grades in school? Want a better job? Want the right friends? Don't want to put any real work in it? Kids using parents, friends using friends, people using God. After whatever the name of your crisis, it's back to not giving these same people the time of day. Elisha could see right through Naaman. Naaman only wanted the "gift" of healing not the "giver" of healing.

Naaman first wanted to be put on a pedestal. Then Naaman would take his gift of healing and be on his merry way. Give God the time of day? Beneath him.

Elisha knew just what to do with Naaman. He knew best how to prepare Naaman for his healing.

1. Elisha did not go running out to greet Naaman. He sent a messenger.
2. Elisha did not lay hands on Naaman and give a powerful prayer. Which meant Naaman didn't get to hear his favorite word. His name. There was no special healing service either.
3. Elisha's message to Naaman? Do this one thing--dip in the Jordan River 7 times to be cured.

Dipping in water was a custom back in those days, but it was painful for lepers to dip in any water, let alone the muddy Jordan River.

This was not acceptable to Naaman. Elisha didn't cater to him. And Elisha gave him a take it or leave it offer. But Naaman was in such desperate need. This was just so cruel! Or was it?

Think about problems you've faced. Some buried deep within you. Problems that just might take a desperate situation for us to face them and clear them out of the way. Problems that may not go away overnight. Problems that make us want to leave in a huff.

Problems that might make us say things like. "I'll never go back to that church again! I'll never forgive that person! I'll never speak to that person! I'm not gonna make the first move. It wasn't my fault. I've been a Christian for 40 years! I didn't deserve that! I think they should apologize to me! I, I, I.

Going in a huff is exactly what Naaman did. Healing was within his grasp--as close as the Jordan River. But Naaman was blind to this. "I thought Elisha would surely come out to meet me--that's the LEAST he could do for me.

Stand and call on the name of the Lord his God...

Say my name

Lay hands on me

Heal the leprosy---why not make a big show out of it.

Why? Because I want RECOGNITION

I'm IMPORTANT

I want a CEREMONY

I want a NICE PRAYER

"So no, I'm not going to do that. Jordan River thing"

There are plenty of other rivers better than that anyway. I'm not about to dip in a muddy river of all places. "God, I want it this way."

Pride, self-importance, and self-sufficiency showed up in his huffy departure. But that's not all bad. All of this was no longer buried deep. It was forced to the surface.

Sometimes when God convicts us of something and we get angry and go away in a huff, that's not a bad thing because the same things that Naaman is guilty of are surfacing. They are coming to a place where they must be faced.

When Naaman was confronted by God, and went away in a huff, he still had the leprosy. He still had this great need. And He was still a proud man; He was still self-important. He was not ready to humble himself yet.

He wanted the prophet Elisha to do it all for him but instead Elisha gave him an assignment. A very easy one. But for Naaman it was too common, too cheap--too ordinary. We can think of similar responses in our own time. "I want my problems to be solved. I want to be healed." But I don't want to have to go to church, I don't want to have to quit drinking or quit drugs. I don't want to have to change. "God, this is the way I want it!"

This pride was what God wanted to get out of Naaman. But Naaman had the choice. At this point he seemed determined to cut off his nose to spite his face.

Lucky for Naaman, God Was Not Finished with Him Yet. God was still working on him to effect change. God sent different people his way to say things to him. People who wouldn't accept excuses like. "Well, he is so stubborn and so headstrong. He's not going to change." Remind you of anyone? (Please don't say anyone's name out loud)

There are things you might not know about that person you just thought of. Who God is sending their way. What is going on in their hearts. Who is talking to them. In Naaman's case, his servant said to him, "Lord, if the prophet asked you to do some great thing, you would do it. Can't you do this easy thing?"

God used his servant to reason with Naaman, and he listened. The servant's approach.

Respectful, rational, considerate.

God used these people to say the right thing at the right time in the right way. It made an impact on Naaman.

The servant did not say. "You're going to hell if you don't do this or that." He did not try to beat Naaman over the head. He let the Holy Spirit put on the pressure.

I must confess that I myself have left in a huff with the Lord. I've taken on the attitude of "God, this is the way I want it!" One such case was the summer I went to Mexico City for missions. I wanted to stay for the fall session. God wasn't listening to me. Nothing was working out for me

to stay. I felt that huffy response welling up. “God, this is the way I want it.” But I calmed down, I began to reconsider. I began to soften up a little bit. Just like Naaman did and obediently returned to college in the fall.

When people go off in a huff, as they surely will, keep praying for them. We may not know how to get through to them but God does.

Just like God got through to Naaman from the urging of his servant. With that he turned around and became willing to receive healing in whatever manner God wanted to deliver it. Why the change of heart? God knew the kind of pressure, the circumstances and the people to reach him. God’s way is always better than ours. We may not understand His way of working. Naaman sure didn’t. But trust in God’s plan even when it seems too simple to be any good.

Just as Naaman could have gone either direction, we are faced with choices too. We might think about resisting. We may have to think about it. We might even go away in a huff. This huff just might be the thing that leads us to the answer. The answer based on God’s terms.

For Naaman, accepting God’s terms meant even more. "And he returned to the man of God, and he and all his company stood before him and said, "Behold, I now know that there is NO GOD in all the earth but in Israel." Naaman went from recognizing many GODS—to recognizing no GOD in all the earth but Israel’s God.

Naaman was a different person--not just physically but spiritually. He recognized God in his life. With his hindrances gone, he could fully receive the God of Israel.

Church family. What are you asking of God that might involve you saying, "God, this is the way I want it! Sign here on the dotted line." If you need to leave in a huff, do so. But do so knowing this, whatever is holding you back will be brought to light and God just might bring pressure, circumstances and people to reach you and show you how to accept the answer on God’s terms. Amen.