

Letting go of your Dignity

"Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, "My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 2 Kings 5:13

Naaman, the masculine version of "Naomi" or "Pleasantness" is in almost all ways the envy of nearly all others. As the commander of Syria's elite fighting force he is resplendent in prestige, as a minister of the King he is great and honored, as a military leader, undefeatable, and personally he was as wealthy in valor as he was monetarily. Who wouldn't want to trade places with him?

Well, everyone! But why?

Then we read that he is a man in need, dire need. You see he was a leper, one slowly decaying away by what is called Hansen's disease today. It is a degradation of the synapses caused by an acid-fast rod-shaped bacterium that had, somewhere previously entered undetected into his mucus membranes. Now his nerves of steel are eroding into lifeless canals like deserted streets through ghost towns. His rugged brassy skin and vitality dry to dust and tumbleweed away. What a strange dichotomy, the emblem of success in the body of defeat.

His military exploits have left in the spoils a Jewish servant, which tells me that this man was considered foe to Israel. Ironically his relationship with his captive appears affable and benevolent. It is she, his wife's maid that will offer him hope beyond his own fading strength. She tells of a prophet from her land, the land he had previously stolen her from. It has been said of him that he has the power of God to heal. Naaman's dusty veins drench with direction and resolve. He is going to go there and find healing. But what would make this man respond so favorably to his enemy? Naaman comes with a parade-full of pomp and presence, and roughly 2 ½ million dollars jingling in his saddle-bags.

So here he comes, the might of Syria weakly flexing in his chariot and horse show, and there he stands at Elisha's door, awaiting a welcome of equal grandeur. Oddly enough, he will not even see the face of the prophet, but rather, a servant of such insignificance that even the Bible chooses not to name him. His message is. Perhaps, proportionally as unusual, "Go and dip yourself in the Jordan 7 times."

Imagine working so hard to present all the trophies of your importance only to be met by some no-name butler who flips open the door and nonchalantly tells you to go jump in a lake, seven times! And then, slam goes the door. This spontaneously ignites this general's fiery indignation. "How could he?" "Who does he think he is?" Each thought becomes another can of gas dropped into the inferno raging in his bosom. As the Tempest of a man stomps off, bags still full, but pomp spent and pride charged he heads off in a trail of verbal sparks among the brush of his emotions. Again, a servant of his comes to his rescue. "If he had told you to do something heroic, wouldn't you have?" inquires the voice of reason.

You see the problem was that he came there with a concentration on his dignity, not disease, his nobility more than his need.

This becomes the problem with any self-made man. The flashfloods of pride so commonly wash away any avenue to genuine healing and restoration, for it's a torrent ignorant of God's love in revolutionizing the humble who tend to forget less from where their healing came. God tells me that His tools for me are simple yet have remarkably profound effects. That's what makes them so hard for me to inculcate

"I would rather have a checklist of Herculean feats, then I could know I've earned it..."

into my self-reliant personal make-up. They require simple obedience to allow God to do the complexity of His work. but God isn't looking for my heroic earnings, but rather the humility of my trust.

Naaman will finally concede, at the cost of his pride, not pocketbook. It will cost him seven trips into a slimy, dirty, and rather chilly river of faith as if with each entrance another layer of that self-reliance will walk in and a new, greater, and meeker man will step out.
