

Do the easy thing. It's easier. (2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c)

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At the heart of Naaman's story is a brilliant question. I don't know the names of those who ask it; they're anonymous servants in the text, supposedly the minor characters whose words don't matter. But their question cuts and burns: "If the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean?'"

Naaman is a decorated military general, a man of great wealth, power, and influence. He has the ear of his king, the respect of his soldiers, and the easy confidence of a man accustomed to getting his way.

Imagine, then, the horror he feels when he contracts leprosy--a painful, debilitating, and socially isolating disease. Imagine the shock he experiences when all of his sure-fire resources fail to restore his health, and he finds himself taking the medical advice of a servant--a child, a Jew, a slave, a girl. Imagine the outrage he feels when he shows up at the famed Elisha's door with caravans of silver, gold, and festal garments, only to have that audacious prophet send him away without so much as a personal hello. And to where? To the Jordan river--a muddy stream--to wash.

I understand Naaman's indignation. I understand why he almost quits and returns home in a huff--loathing the prophet, cursing his leprosy, and nursing a bruised ego.

But I'm also glad his servants stop him. "If the prophet had commanded something difficult, would you not have done it?" They know their master well. Why not do the easier thing? Isn't the easier thing...easier?

Well, actually--here's a big surprise--it's not. At least for me, all too often, it isn't easier.

I want God to work in my life in ways that are more sophisticated, more dazzling. I want spiritual tasks commensurate with my assessment of my intellect, my experience, my education, my fortitude. I want the arduous trial; I want to sweat and struggle and show off. I want to venerate the thing that *looks* holy.

But no, that's not how or where the sacred generally reveals itself. Take off your armor, God says. Yes, all of it. Yes, even though people are watching. Now step into that muddy water. Yup, it smells. Yeah, you'll have to stoop down. That's it, step on in there. All the way in. Now wash. Good, now wash again. Now wash *again*. And again and again and again and again.

It's amazing how often I needlessly complicate the Christian life. But what does God want me to *do*? I groan. What is God's will? How shall I hear God's voice and discern God's plan?

Are the answers really all that hard? Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly. Pray, listen, learn, and love. Break the bread, drink the wine, bear the burden, share the peace. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Naaman's story is a story of reversals. Festal robes give way to nakedness. Kings and generals make way for handmaids and servants. Pomp surrenders to prophecy. Dignity bows to wholeness. And faith--the simplest, purest kind--emerges in a muddy river.