HUDSON'S HOPE CHAPEL

The Faith That Receives

August 30, 2026 · Series: Small Stories, Big Faith · Luke Hughes-Bunger

Main Passage: 2 Kings 5:1-19 (ESV)

Big Idea: Big faith is not bringing impressive strength to God; it is humbly receiving the grace God gives through His Word.

Introduction

Imagine a man who has almost everything.

He has reached the top of his profession. His ruler trusts him, his nation honours him, and other strong people look to him when strength is needed. He has authority, wealth, influence, and access to the best resources his country can provide.

But his body bears a condition he cannot fix. His achievements are real, yet none of them can meet his deepest need.

Hope comes from an unexpected source: a young foreign servant girl with no public status. She cannot heal him, but she knows where help may be found.

The man listens, but he approaches the problem through power. He gets a royal letter, gathers a fortune, and arrives with horses and chariots. He expects an impressive encounter and comes prepared to pay.

Instead, he receives one plain instruction: wash in the river.

He is offended. The word seems too ordinary and too humbling. He almost goes home unchanged because receiving the gift requires him to stop directing the story.

This man is Naaman, commander of Syria's army, and his story is found in 2 Kings 5.

Naaman is a fitting final character for *Small Stories, Big Faith*. Throughout the summer, these Old Testament stories have placed human need beside the faithfulness of God. They have not shown unusually brave people discovering endless strength within themselves. They have shown needy people receiving, trusting, and acting upon God's gracious Word.

Last week, Elijah reminded us that God's work does not finally depend upon our strength. Naaman now shows us something even more fundamental: neither does our salvation.

Our Greatest Strength Cannot Meet Our Deepest Need

2 Kings 5:1-7

Verse 1 piles up descriptions of Naaman's greatness. He is the commander of Syria's army, highly favoured by his king, and a mighty man of valour. The Lord has even sovereignly

worked through Naaman's military success, though Naaman does not yet know Him.

Then the sentence turns on one word: *but*.

"But he was a leper" (2 Kings 5:1).

The term translated "leper" can describe a range of serious skin conditions. Scripture does not invite us to diagnose Naaman, and it does not call his illness a punishment for a particular sin. Illness and disability are not proof of moral or spiritual failure.

The point is simpler: Naaman's strength is genuine, but it has a limit. He can command an army, but he cannot make himself clean.

The story then moves from a great commander to a young Israelite servant. A Syrian raiding party has taken this girl from her home. We should not make her captivity sentimental or call the violence done to her good.

Yet she knows something Naaman does not. She tells his wife that the prophet in Samaria could cure him. She cannot give cleansing, but she can point him toward the place where grace may be found.

Naaman translates her hope into the language of power. The girl points to the prophet, but Naaman goes first to his king. Syria's king sends a letter to Israel's king, and Naaman carries enormous wealth.

Israel's king tears his clothes and asks, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" (2 Kings 5:7). He suspects Syria is creating an excuse for conflict. Yet he also speaks an important truth: this need is beyond a king's power. Giving life and cleansing belong to God.

Our strengths are real gifts, but they make terrible saviours.

We may bring competence, reputation, moral comparison, money, or religious familiarity. Some of these are good gifts. None can cleanse guilt, reconcile us to God, or give spiritual life.

Every resume eventually runs out. Grace begins where we stop asking our strengths to do the work of a Saviour.

Grace Must Be Received Rather Than Managed

2 Kings 5:8-14

Elisha sends for Naaman. The commander arrives at the prophet's home with horses, chariots, servants, and treasure.

Elisha does not come outside. He sends a messenger with a simple word: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean" (2 Kings 5:10).

Naaman responds in anger. His words expose the conflict: "Behold, I thought..." (2 Kings 5:11).

He has already written the scene in his mind. Elisha should come out to him, call upon God, wave his hand, and perform the healing in a way suitable for an important man. Syria has better rivers. The Jordan and the prophet's message seem beneath him.

The simplicity of grace feels like an insult.

We often resist grace for the same reason. God's way is not too difficult; it is too humbling. We want a contribution to make and an achievement to cite. We want grace with a receipt showing how much of the cost we covered ourselves.

But grace will not flatter us. It says, "You cannot cleanse yourself or purchase this gift. Stop directing the scene. Take God at His Word."

Once again, servants see what the powerful man misses. They ask Naaman whether he would have completed a great task if the prophet had assigned one. A heroic quest would have suited a great commander. He could have returned home proud of what he accomplished.

But Naaman has not been given a great task. He has been given a promise to trust.

He goes down into the Jordan and dips seven times "according to the word of the man of God" (2 Kings 5:14). His flesh is restored, and he is clean.

The Jordan is not magic, and seven is not a technique. Naaman does not earn cleansing through the difficulty of bathing. The Lord cleanses him as he humbly receives the word he was given.

Faith is not payment for grace. Faith is the empty hand that receives it.

We can spend years trying to manage what can only be received through self-improvement, promises, productivity, religious activity, and carefully maintained appearances. We may imagine that if we become impressive enough, God will owe us peace.

God cannot be managed, but He may be trusted. The question is not whether we have brought enough. The question is whether we will take Him at His Word.

Received Grace Produces Worship and New Allegiance

2 Kings 5:15-19

Naaman returns to Elisha. The man who first arrived with demands now stands before the prophet as a servant and confesses, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

His skin has changed, but so has his allegiance.

Naaman offers Elisha a gift, but Elisha firmly refuses it. Naaman must not return home believing that he purchased cleansing from Israel's God. His silver, gold, and clothing had nothing to do with the gift.

Grace is not merchandise.

Naaman then asks for Israelite soil, apparently to use for an altar when he returns to Syria. His understanding is still incomplete, but his purpose is clear: he now intends to worship the Lord alone.

That new allegiance immediately creates a difficult question. Naaman's public responsibilities require him to accompany his king into the house of Rimmon, Syria's god. The king leans on his

arm and bows. Naaman asks the Lord to pardon him in this conflict.

His concern shows that something has changed. If he still regarded all gods as equal, he would have no troubled conscience. He has confessed the Lord alone and is beginning to understand what that confession will mean within a complicated life.

Elisha tells him, "Go in peace" (2 Kings 5:19).

This does not declare idolatry harmless or resolve every question. It shows a new believer with genuine faith, incomplete understanding, and a conscience learning how loyalty to the Lord reshapes ordinary responsibilities.

Grace begins changing everything, but few people understand everything on the first day. The church should not excuse compromise. We also should not demand that new believers resolve every complicated question before we recognize God's grace at work.

Received grace produces worship and humility. It gives us a new Lord. Over a lifetime, that allegiance reorders the rest of life.

Path to Christ

Jesus leads us directly from Naaman's story to the gospel.

In Luke 4, Jesus reminds the people of Nazareth that many lepers lived in Israel during Elisha's ministry, yet Naaman the Syrian received cleansing. The people become furious because grace reached an outsider and an enemy commander. They assumed that religious familiarity gave them a claim upon Jesus, but God's mercy cannot be treated like a hometown entitlement.

Naaman's illness should not become a simplistic symbol saying that every sick person is especially sinful. Jesus' point is that the Lord gave cleansing to someone who could not claim it as a right.

The king of Israel asked, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive?" Jesus is God the Son who gives life. He welcomed those called unclean and cleansed lepers by His own authority.

At the cross, Jesus did something deeper than restoring skin. He bore our guilt and judgment so sinners could be forgiven, reconciled to God, and made new. He rose from the dead so this grace could be offered freely to insiders and outsiders, the respectable and ashamed, lifelong churchgoers and people who are only beginning to explore faith.

We cannot command this mercy, purchase it, or claim it because of our family, goodness, or religious familiarity. We can only receive Christ.

Application and Conclusion

Come to Christ empty-handed. Stop negotiating with grace. Bring the need you cannot fix and the guilt you cannot cleanse. Receive the mercy Jesus purchased at the cross.

Take God at His Word. Faith rests upon the character of the One who speaks. When pride says, "I thought God would do it my way," faith receives the word God has given.

Return to ordinary life with a new allegiance. We do not repay God for grace. We belong to Him because He has been gracious. Let that truth reshape the complicated decisions waiting at home.

Point others toward grace. Naaman's servants cannot cleanse him, but they can tell him where to go and help him receive the word. We cannot save anyone, but we can faithfully point people to Christ.

The people in *Small Stories, Big Faith* were not enough. That is precisely where they learned that God is enough.

Their faith was not big because they were big. Their faith was big because the God they trusted was faithful.

Big faith is not pretending to be strong. It is entrusting ourselves to a strong and faithful Saviour.

Discussion Guide Questions

1. Which parts of Naaman's position and reputation make him appear strong?
2. Why is it important not to treat Naaman's condition as proof of a particular sin?
3. What does the young servant girl's witness teach us about pointing others toward grace?
4. Why does Naaman approach Israel through political influence and wealth?
5. What strengths or good gifts are we tempted to treat like saviours?
6. What do Naaman's words "I thought" reveal about his expectations?
7. Why can the simplicity of grace feel offensive to human pride?
8. What is the difference between earning a gift and receiving it by faith?
9. How does Naaman change after receiving cleansing?
10. What wisdom should the church learn from Naaman's questions about worship in Syria?
11. How does Jesus use Naaman's story in Luke 4, and why does His hometown react with anger?
12. What would it mean for you this week to come empty-handed, take God at His Word, return with new allegiance, or point someone toward Christ?