



This Sunday we started a new topical series at Magdalen Road, looking at the counter-cultural 'shape' of the Christian life – especially that 'the way down is the way up'. Why is it that God says we must be weak to be strong, foolish to be wise, go through suffering to enjoy glory, be slaves to enjoy true freedom? We will, each week, be seeking to challenge our 'natural' thinking processes, asking God to help us to think more and more as he does – and trust him that what he says is best.

This week we kicked off the series with a broad overview, examining the account of the healing of the Syrian army commander, Naaman. Here we see one of God's enemies being humbled, cleansed and transformed as he trusts God's (counter-intuitive) plan.

a Broken man...

Naaman is special, important and successful. He sits at the top of the Syrian (Aram is modern day Syria) tree as a very successful and important army commander, indeed in v18 the description of his king leaning upon him points to more than just a soldier – perhaps even the equivalent of a prime minister.

And yet he has a problem – end of v1 – leprosy. It's such a problem that he seems desperate enough to listen to a new servant girl in his house who suggests he heads to see the prophet in Samaria.

Naaman acts as vivid picture of humanity – in one sense successful and achieving, but in another very broken and helpless. He is a 'dead man walking'

... who cannot fix himself

He listens to his new slave girl and is prepared to act. He, in very human terms, grabs his bag of money and a letter or recommendation from the king and heads off to see the Israelite king. He expects for his money or his prestige to make God act and yet he king of Israel v7 – knows that is not how the true God works.

Naaman's mindset is one of man-centred religion where God ends up being little more than a vending machine who works at our whim. Naaman cannot fix himself.

... but who can be fixed by God

Instead of seeing the king, he sees the prophet and actually instead of seeing the prophet he sees his servant. And rather than an incantation being performed over him – he is

simply made to wash in the Jordan. Naaman needs to learn humility. He has to trust God to do things his way. God is strong, his plans are best, he is in charge, he works through weakness.

Who was the human hero of the story? In contrast to the king or to Naaman, the little servant girl who's parents had likely been killed, who had every right to bear a grudge, pointed her broken master to the place where he can find life.

And Naaman's experience and encounter transforms him. He now sees that God is The God, rather than just a god (v15) and hence the arrogance of v11-12 is replaced with humility in v15-19 where he describes himself as a servant 5x. Naaman is not just healed on the outside with new skin, he's healed from within as his heart is changed. It's no longer about success – now it's about service.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

Re-read the account.

How would you describe Naaman in these verses?
What did he do? What would you imagine him being like?

How does he plan to deal with his broken-ness?
Why do you think he's willing to listen to a little servant girl?
Contrast her with him...

How does he eventually deal with his broken-ness?
Why do you think he was asked to do this?
What do you think he's learnt from this?

In what ways do you see him being transformed?

How are we like Naaman?
How does his problem parallel ours?
How does the solution parallel ours?
What ought our response to be? Is it? Why / why not?

Why do you think we looked at this passage to introduce our series?

Extra! Have a look at Luke 4v24-30. Why is Naaman mentioned here? What is he an example of in Jesus' eyes?