

Intentional Love

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[0 : 00] 2 Kings chapter 5. And Amy, would you please come and serve us by reading the scripture?

2 Kings chapter 5, did you find it in your Bible? It's easy if it's in your app, but that'll work too. 2 Kings chapter 5, and Amy is going to read for us verses 2 and 3.

2 Kings chapter 5, and Amy, would you please come and serve us by reading the scripture? Let's pray. Father, we are again grateful for your word. Lord, please help us as we listen to the preaching of your word, to listen with careful discernment, and to be like the Bereans that we read about in the book of Acts, who tested the things that they were taught to see whether these things are true.

Please help me and guard me from saying anything that would be full of error, or that would be unhelpful or distracting. Please keep us focused on those things that need our attention.

[1 : 27] Help the little ones to also be able to be still during this time, and to pay attention where they're able. Father, we ask that you would work in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that we would be humble and contrite and believing and obedient as we read and hear from your word.

Help us to again see our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in his strong and kind name that we pray.

Amen. Last week, I began telling you a story about grace, God's grace. Do you remember that, that we began that last week?

And I put my stand up here because Corey said if I stood here, he was going to sit up in front. And so I prevented that. Anybody coming and being right up in front, but I'm going to back up just a little bit now that I know where Corey's at.

He is over there. I began telling you a story about God's grace, and this is a true story about God's grace. And it is written by a careful historian, but more importantly, it is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 53] We read about it in Scripture, and so it is profitable and useful for us to be reading even these Old Testament texts and looking at what the Lord has to say to us from them.

Not only is it true, not only was it written by a careful historian, not only is it written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but also this is an important story.

I know that it's an important story because 800 years later, when Jesus was walking on the earth, Jesus remembered this story.

So this is an important story. Even though he is not the most important character in our story, the main character is a man named Naaman.

And Naaman is a Syrian. He is the five-star general of the Aramean army, and he reports directly to the king. He is a bit of a big deal.

[4 : 00] He's a mighty warrior at the very pinnacle of his career. But I think he may also be a little bit like King Louis in Disney's adaptation of The Jungle Book.

I'll give you a minute. Because he has reached the top, and now he has to stop. And that's what's bothering him.

Naaman has a skin disease. He has leprosy. And leprosy seems insignificant at first, maybe like a little mosquito bite, but it spreads very quickly because the real problem is not the rash that you can see on your body, but the infection that is spreading within your body.

Leprosy kills slowly from the inside out. It is incurable. There is no drug that can make you well. There is no Syrian doctor that Naaman can go to to get help.

And leprosy is highly contagious. According to God's law, lepers needed to be isolated, not like during COVID, isolated by themselves, outside of the city, away from everyone else.

[5 : 28] And they would have to dress in really shabby-looking clothing so that everybody would easily know that person is not well. They have leprosy because no one would ever dress that way.

And then you would have to go around, and if you did happen to encounter someone, you'd have to cover up your mouth like you were wearing a mask, kind of like in COVID. You'd have to cover up your mouth, and you would have to holler out, unclean, unclean.

Leprosy was a shameful disease. Naaman has leprosy, and leprosy will kill him, and there is nothing that he can do about it.

2 Kings 5, verses 1 and 2. Naaman, commander of the army, for the king of Aram was a man important to his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram.

The man was a valiant warrior, but he had a skin disease. Aram had gone on raids and brought back from the land of Israel a young girl who served Naaman's wife.

[6 : 50] Now, remember, the Syrians are the number one enemy of God's people Israel. And the Syrians were accustomed to going on these raids where they would just make their way into Israel and take whatever valuables they could find and crush and destroy whatever was left.

We know that God was giving Naaman victory even over his people, Israel. Now, verse number one, that's a shocking revelation that should catch our attention.

Naaman has a relationship with the Lord, but he doesn't know it yet. So they go on one of these raids, violent invasions, and by brute force, they steal whatever valuables they can find there. Money, crops, livestock, sometimes even people. And then they would make these people their slaves.

And during one such raid, Naaman's army kidnapped a young girl. And when the spoils of that raid were divided, she became Naaman's property.

[8 : 10] She is a slave. Perhaps Naaman gave this little girl as a gift to his wife.

If that sounds like an uncomfortable sentence, I feel that with you. Imagine this Hebrew family's agonizing trauma at losing their daughter.

Imagine a mother. Hopeless grief. What will happen to her? Imagine a father's helpless sorrow. I have to believe he was unable to do anything about those who took his daughter. Had he been able to, he would have done something about it. Helpless sorrow.

Unable to save his little girl from the Arameans, and now unable to rescue her from them. And imagine this little girl, so scared.

[9 : 22] So alone. Wondering, did my family survive that raid? Is anybody in my family left? And will I ever see them again?

If you were writing this story, what happens next? How about some participation? If you were writing this story, what happens next?

If this is chapter one, what does the end of this story look like? Who has an idea? What do you think it should look like? Evan? She gets rescued.

That would make a ton of sense, wouldn't it? Who else has an idea? Oh, I thought this would generate a little, I thought we were a little more creative this morning.

Maybe the snow is dampening us just a little bit. Justice would prevail. Justice would prevail. Thank you, Tim. That somehow this wrong would be made right.

[10 : 31] This is how we would write this story. Somebody would fall in love. Thank you, Sean. That is actually the one that I was thinking about.

Let's talk about Tim's first. Maybe through some personal resolve, right? Maybe through some strength of her own character and some pixie dust and an imaginary friend, right?

She escapes and steals a horse and poisons the people who have taken her and rushes off and makes her way back to Israel. Yes, with singing.

Now we are getting some life here. Now, how about Sean's idea? Maybe there would be a swashbuckling Jewish prince who would show up and swoop in and save the day.

Rescue her. Sweep her off her feet. Throw her on the back of his horse. And they would together make their way off to Israel and fall in love.

[11 : 39] Thank you, Sophia. But we are not writing this story. And that is not what happened in this story.

This little girl has no security. No one cares for her. Instead, she is caring for the needs of others. She has no hope of a better ending to her story. No expectation of Prince Charming coming to rescue her. This child is a slave in a foreign country.

Crimes against children are heinous crimes. The Geneva Convention and other modern treaties that countries participate in have specific obligations for how you treat children in times of war. But more importantly, crimes against children are heinous according to the teaching of Jesus. Jesus loves children.

[12:57] It's not just a kid's song. Jesus loves children. And Jesus had this to say about those who would hurt a child.

Matthew chapter 18. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to fall away. Some translations say to stumble.

It would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.

It would be better for him to have a brick chained to his neck to be thrown overboard and drowned. Crimes against children are heinous according to the teaching of Jesus.

Violating a child's trust is a serious offense. And mistreating a child according to Jesus deserves the death penalty.

[14:01] Some translations say offend. If anyone offend a little child. And I think that perhaps is woefully inadequate for what they did to this little girl.

Naaman's men viciously tore her from her family and cruelly kidnapped her to Syria and treated her like property.

Like any other spoil of war. Naaman. Naaman. And Naaman. Naaman. He's guilty. He knew what his men did.

He knew where she came from. He knew that she was a Jewish, a Hebrew child. And he had the power to return her to his family. To her family.

But instead of using his power to care for her, he used his power to exploit her weakness.

[15:09] Naaman persisted the evil injustice by forcing this child into slavery. Oh, the irony of this.

Oh, the irony of this. That Naaman is a master. But he is also a slave.

Naaman. This is what Jesus has to say in John chapter 8. Everyone who commits sin. Your translation may say practices sin.

Everyone who commits or practices sin is a slave to sin. Naaman has blood on his hands because of the abuse done to this little girl.

And Naaman now has not one, but two problems. First, he has leprosy. A terminal skin condition that he is rightly concerned about.

[16:20] But second problem is this. Naaman is guilty in God's eyes. He has a spiritually deadly sin condition.

That he is either ignorant of. Or as of yet, unconcerned about. And sin.

Sin will destroy his soul. As surely as the leprosy will destroy his body.

Consider the contrast between these two characters that we have introduced so far in this story. He is an influential Gentile.

She is a despised Hebrew. He is strong. She is weak. He is the abuser.

[17:22] She is the abused. He is a great man, the scripture tells us. She is a little maid. He's in a position of authority. She has not even personal agency.

He is the master. She is the slave. He is the commander of the Syrian army.

She is a captive in enemy territory. The king values him. The king doesn't know she exists.

He is the man. He is the man. He is the man. He is the man. We don't even know her name.

He is a leper. And she has something to say about that. Verse number three.

[18:31] She said to her mistress, If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his skin disease.

Sometimes children say funny things. Little one-liners.

The first time that our son Samuel saw snow, he said, and we're all thinking this today, he said, Ew, mess. One time when Samuel and Chloe were making brownies, Chloe said, don't breathe that, Sam.

That's butter. I don't even know what that means. But it was funny, and we wrote it down. One time when Sam was four, and he was praying, he said this, Courage mommy's heart when Chloe and I

have bad attitudes.

And dear sweet Lydia, she used to call it Fleet Flarm.

[20 : 00] She is not the most character, most important character in, she is, let me start that over.

She is not the main character in our story. But she is the most important character in our story.

She does not have the most lines. That's how we tell whether someone is an important part of the drama. Is that true, Josie? By how many lines you get, right?

She gets one line. But it's the most important line in the whole story.

This little girl could have hated Naaman for what he did to her. She could have wished the worst for him.

[21 : 08] Just imagine it. Leprosy is better than what you deserve. I can't wait to watch you rot from the inside out, you filthy Syrian.

I hope your nose falls off next. She could have wished the worst for him.

But instead, her heart is full of love. kindness and compassion and grace come out of her mouth.

You can get a sense of it probably in the way that your Bible, although this is not in the original writings, right? The way that your Bible probably ends her statement with an exclamation point.

There is a sense of emotion here. Would, would that my master, if only my master, we might say, oh, I just wish my master.

[22 : 22] This is the kindness and the compassion and the intentional love that is welling up inside of her and comes out in the words that she says.

she doesn't want Naaman to suffer. She wants him to get help.

She's a child. She's trusted with simple responsibilities and yet she understands, hear this, that her life has purpose and meaning that is greater than her circumstances.

Do you believe that? I don't even know if I believe that. So even as I ask you, do you believe that?

In my head, I'm asking myself, do I believe that?

Do I believe that my life has purpose and meaning that is greater than my circumstances?

[23 : 41] Do you believe that God has you exactly where he wants you and that it is no mistake that you are there and that you are right where you need to be?

Do you believe that there is purpose for those who are within your sphere of influence?

People that you rub shoulders with, people that you bump up against, people that you have conversations with, people that you see often or regularly, co-workers, people who serve us meals at restaurants or hand us our coffee through the coffee shop window, people in our families, people we talk to over teams meetings, do you believe that those people are in your sphere of influence with purpose, God's purpose?

Do you believe that what you do has meaning and value no matter how temporal, no matter how empty it may feel on any given day?

Wherever you are, whoever you have contact with, whatever you do, as Paul says, do all for the glory of God.

[25 : 25] It's not a mistake. It's not chance. It's not fate or destiny. It's God's good purpose. She understands that her life has purpose and meaning that is greater than her circumstances.

And she responds to this person who has been so cruel to her. She responds with love.

Something or someone was at work within this little girl because she is good. And I'm not talking about just, oh, you're such a good little girl or you're such a good little boy.

Her goodness is intentional. She understands exactly what Naaman's problem is. He has leprosy. This is hopeless.

There is no cure. He is filled with shame because of it. And she doesn't offer him thoughts or prayers. She doesn't offer him thoughts or prayers.

[26 : 37] She points him instead towards real help. She is good. She also proclaims peace.

She is far from home. She's in a foreign land. And yet, hear this, she speaks good news. Isaiah writes about this in Isaiah 52. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the herald who proclaims peace, who brings news of good things, who proclaims salvation.

peace. This is what she does. She proclaims peace. She is joyful. This is more than just a cheerful, exuberant personality.

Her words are optimistic. They are encouraging. They are enthusiastic. They are hope-filled and hope-giving. She's offering him something.

She's inviting him to have faith. Grab what's out there. Pull it into the present and act as though it is already true.

[27 : 56] She is good. She proclaims peace. She's joyful in spite of her grief. She remembers her homeland and without shame. She speaks expectantly about the man of God who is there.

This little girl loves her enemy. And she proves this by her empathy and her concern for Naaman's well-being.

She is not merely a good person. This kind of love defies conventional wisdom. Jesus talks about this in Matthew chapter 5.

You have heard that it was said love your neighbor and hate your enemy. That's conventional wisdom. That's common sense everyday practical wisdom.

Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. You do that you're being good. Jesus says oh no not in my kingdom not my people I tell you Jesus says verse 44 love your enemies.

[29 : 22] Naaman is her enemy and she loves him. This is not just unnatural. This is supernatural.

something or someone is at work in this little girl to cause her to respond this way to someone who has been so utterly cruel to her.

What motivates her behavior? How can she be so intentionally loving toward someone who has terrorized her country tore apart her family and kidnapped her without remorse?

Why love it all when your only expected return is ongoing slavery? This goodness this peace this joy this love these are the fruit of the Holy Spirit and they are supernaturally produced from what seems like doesn't it the most unlikely of soils what is the personal benefit to her like what does she stand to gain I think the risks outweigh the reward that's how I judge this this feels like conventional wisdom says it's too risky the risks of saying something outweigh the reward you could be ignored they might just blow off what you've said and ignore you you could be shamed for thinking about your homeland and the man of

God they might say don't you know we killed him too you might be punished for speaking about your homeland and the man of God who lives there worse what if he takes your advice and you go there and the man of God is dead or what if he's not willing or not able to heal this could be all bad for you but despite Naaman's unworthiness and despite his sins against her people and her family and despite his active ongoing abuse towards her she does not grumble against God and she does not hold on to bitterness against her captor instead she stands with him against his horrific disease she is faithful a traumatized child far from home without the support of other godly adults she is not embarrassed she is not timid there is no maybe or he might or he could do you see that in the text there is no hedging there is no hesitation this is unqualified faith in

[32 : 46] God if Naaman will go he will be healed she is an ambassador in chains like the apostle Paul isn't she she's a mediator she is a preacher not like the office of the church but like the preacher that Paul talks about in Romans chapter 10 how then how then can they call on him they have not believed in and how can they believe without hearing about him and how can they hear without a preacher she proclaims peace and she speaks of salvation boldly confidently expectantly believingly faithfully how do how do you respond when life is hard when your circumstances seem unfair or unreasonable when you have been mistreated like she has been perhaps you tend to withdraw maybe you just try to change your attitude you know like if

I have a positive and uplifting attitude my circumstances will look better and so you do more and you try harder and you try to be better and then you find perhaps that your circumstances don't change and the mistreatment doesn't stop and the shame doesn't go away and you find yourself at the end of all of your positive and uplifting attitude what then maybe you react out of pain maybe you react out of anger maybe when you are mistreated maybe you take it for a while but then you allow that bitterness to ferment and foment and it eventually just rises up and there is an explosion of anger and frustration and resentment that has been built up after all hurting people hurt people I find myself rebuked by this little slave girl I don't want to be good to those who hurt me I can't fathom that I'm alone in that but maybe I am I don't want to be good towards those who hurt me I don't want to bless when I am cursed I don't want to be kind when I am mistreated I don't want to pursue peace when someone is ignoring me I don't want to be faithful in a foreign land I do not want to love my enemies I am rebuked by this little slave girl even if I do happen to share the gospel I am tempted to wash my hands you know to say well

I said it there I have done it I prayed with you one time I pointed you to the way towards Jesus one time and now I am going to wash my hands and be done with you kind of like Jonah and now if

judgment falls on you so be it because I stand with sinners against their sin and so easy to stand with smug self righteousness against sinners friends we will only love those hardest to love when we remember that we love because he first loved us when

I was his enemy God sent his son for me when I was filthy and destitute and hopeless and a blubbering fool stubbornly committed to my sin Christ Jesus died for me Jesus didn't say leave them in their sin they have brought it upon themselves no Jesus went to the cross and suffered and died there as a substitute in the place of sinners and because Jesus willingly joyfully faithfully lovingly did that for us the father now runs towards sinners with mercy even the grossest sinners sinners we love because he first loved us

[39 : 26] I don't know the details of every relationship that you are in perhaps the relationships that are now sort of circling in your mind those relationships that you think that person is really hard to love I don't know the details around every relationship that you have so I can't tell you exactly what intentional love looks like that will require wisdom and will require the work of the Holy Spirit in you and perhaps depending on the relationship counsel from those who know you and love you and care for you but I know this we should not expect loving those hardest to love to be easy loving our enemies is never going to be easy but I do expect that intentionally loving those who we find hardest to love will be worth it why because

God is working in you and in that person do you see that God is working in you and in that person right here in the most unlikely of soil when it seems as though this soil couldn't be any worse for some fruit of the Holy Spirit to be produced right there where the soil seems most unlikely is the place where the Holy Spirit will produce his beautiful luscious fruit in you he's working in you and he's working in me and he's working in the people that God calls us to love Naaman has received a message of hope from the most unlikely source his wife's little slave girl who loves her enemy how will

Naaman respond you'll have to wait and find out let's pray oh good father when we cast our mind to calvary and we see our savior the lord jesus suffering and dying bearing alone the weight of our sin in the dark on the cross in his body on the tree enduring your wrath against our sin oh good father when we come face to face with this our consciences are pricked and we are reminded of the grossness of our sin and our desperate need father as our consciences are pricked by this reminder of our savior would you help us not to leave here unchanged give us holy spirit level resolve to be producing holy spirit's fruit right where you have us in the most unlikely of soil conditions father as we have had a few moments to contemplate those who are hardest for us to love would you forgive us for our failure and give us fresh faith to trust you and to sense the holy spirit's work in us so that we are committed to responding to those who are hard to love with kindness and compassion and grace so that father father in your will we would look back and we would just say i don't even know where that came from i don't know where that kind response came from it was so out of character for me and we would recognize that's the work of the holy spirit father help us as we take a few moments and examine our hearts in preparation to celebrate the lord's supper together father your word isaiah i can't think of the chapter says though your sins are scarlet they shall be white as snow and so we claim and plead not our own righteousness but the blood of our savior the lord jesus and his righteousness as the ongoing payment for our great need thank you for the forgiveness of our sins we were so undeserving and you were so intentionally loving towards us help us to trust the forgiveness that we have received to move forward in the grace that is ours through our lord jesus christ help us to love those who we find unlovely in jesus name amen and