

November



# Unnamed

BY: Melanie Franks

In II Kings 5, we find the familiar story of Naaman, commander of the Syrian army, who suffered from a skin disease. When reading this passage, we often focus on Naaman and what he had to do to receive healing. We may even focus on Elisha, the bearer of the prescribed course of healing. Most of the time, we skip over the young servant girl who was bold enough to speak up to tell her master how he might find healing. Although young and placed in a challenging situation, this girl found herself used in God's story for His glory.

Scripture doesn't tell us much about this girl. The Hebrew word for a young girl in II Kings 5:2 is "Naarah," meaning a girl between infancy and adolescence. Her family was probably among the remnant left in Israel who had not given into the worship of Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Undoubtedly, from early in life, she was taught about God and those He used to complete His work. She knew about God's prophet, Elisha, and the miracles he had done in God's name. Her parents had instilled in her a strong foundation of faith in God that I'm sure none of them realized would be tested so soon.

When the passage of 2 Kings 5 starts, the Syrian army had been raiding the land of Israel, and among the items they took, was this young girl—a girl so seemingly insignificant she isn't even named. After being taken from her family and homeland, she was forced into slavery in Naaman's house, where she served as a handmaid to the commander's wife. Even though Scripture doesn't give us much information about the girl, we can surmise a few things about her from these verses.

### **Relationships**

First, she built a relationship with those around her. Although this wouldn't have been your normal relationship because she was a slave, the girl still did what she could to foster relationships. When the problem arose with Naaman's skin disease, she felt confident she could tell her mistress about Elisha. She knew the man of God could help if it was the

Lord's will, but without a relationship, she couldn't explain it to her mistress.

### **Faithfulness**

We also see she was faithful despite her circumstances. This girl was in a challenging situation in a foreign land. She was probably scared and missing her family, yet she didn't allow these feelings to consume her. Because she faithfully served, this unnamed servant girl was trusted and had the ear of an army commander, the commander's wife, and the kings of Syria and Israel.

### **Love**

Next, this young girl loved her enemies and was open to making peace with the ones who had taken her. She could have begrudgingly gone about her duties, but rather than allowing hate to build up, she chose to love. The Bible defines love as a concern for others leading to action. This is the kind of love God shows us. Her love was manifested in her concern for Naaman.

### **Peaceful**

We must follow the servant girl's example and make peace with those around us. She had every reason to be hostile to those who had taken her captive, yet she chose to love, forgive, and pursue peace.

### **Bold**

Lastly, like the servant girl, we must be bold in our witness. Even though she faithfully served and spent time building relationships with her superiors, she was still a slave. This meant she was to carry out her duties quietly and obediently. She wasn't supposed to be noticed or heard. Yet, this young handmaid boldly spoke to her mistress out of concern for Naaman's health. This young slave had every reason to fulfill her duties silently. She could have let bitterness consume her. Instead, she allowed God to use her in a mighty way. We have an advantage she did not have. Acts 1:8 tells us we will receive power from the presence of the Holy Spirit. He empowers us to be His witness. We can witness through the power of



God. We could go about our daily lives silently, filled with bitterness over how the world treats us, but we must instead choose to obediently share our story of Christ's love with the world.

Because this handmaid was **faithful, loving,** and **bold** in her actions, Naaman was healed of his skin disease and came to know about the one true God. In verse fifteen, he declared, "I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel." Her witness was not limited to Naaman and his wife. She impacted the kings of Syria and Israel, Naaman's army, and readers of the Bible today. God had a plan of redemption for this girl's life, and she was willing to allow God to use her for His glory.

Even though I wasn't forced from my homeland and family or plunged into slavery, I can identify with this story in several ways. In 2017, after serving at the same church for almost eighteen years, my husband and I knew God was calling us to leave and plant a church in Alabama. This was not where we wanted to go, but it was where God said to go.

As we moved to Athens, Alabama, and began the journey of starting a Free Will Baptist church, I had to be like this servant girl and begin building new re-

**lationships.** I didn't know anyone in this new town. Our family began going to community events to meet people. When I went to the grocery store or Walmart, I had to get out of my comfort zone and find ways to chat with the people I met. Joann (my church planting teammate) and I joined a gym and began taking group classes, which took me way beyond my comfort zone! This was not only good for us physically, but it allowed us to make connections with women in the community.

As we began building these relationships, we would ask our new friends to our houses for meals and Bible studies. Of course, not everyone we've met has visited the church, but God has blessed our efforts. Building relationships is key to building a church. If the young servant girl had not made a relationship with those around her, she would not have been able to tell Naaman about the One who could heal him physically and spiritually. The same goes for us.

Like the servant girl, we must remain **faithful** even during difficult times. Planting a new church is difficult. Planting a new church and having unexpected health issues arise is even more challenging. Planting a new church while having unforeseen health issues





during a worldwide pandemic is nearly impossible. But even when times are hard, we must remain faithful to God's call. In Matthew 28:19-20, He called each of us to go and make disciples. These verses don't say to go and make disciples if it's easy and convenient. He just said to do it, and we can because He promised He would always be with us.

Fortunately, we have not been met with much opposition in our new community until recently. God has blessed our church to be able to purchase the local movie theater, and we are in the beginning stages of renovating it for our forever church home. While we have not been physically attacked on the streets, the social media attacks have been strong. Many community members are unhappy the local theater and drive-in is being converted into a church.

So, what are we going to do about it? Fight back? Throw up our hands and quit? No! Instead, we are going to choose to pursue **peace** and show **love**. We will use that drive-in to show family-friendly movies to the community. We will open the doors of this new building for many different events where we can show the community of Athens, Cultivate Church loves them, and so does God. God will bless us when we pursue peace, just like He blessed the servant girl.

As a young girl growing up in Winfield, Alabama, I can assure you I never dreamed God would have me living in Alabama, working with my husband to plant a multicultural church. I vividly remember telling one of my dear teachers in high school I did not need to learn Spanish because I would never use it. She sweetly said I had no idea where God was leading me, and I might need to know the language one day. Now here I am, almost thirty years later, involved in a church plant with a growing Hispanic ministry where I need to use Spanish daily. I remember telling my husband I would go anywhere he thought God was leading him to serve—except back to Alabama. Yet, here I am in Alabama, as happy as I've ever been.

Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares

the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." God knows my life infinitely better than I do. There is incomprehensible joy when I allow Him to use me to accomplish His plan. We don't read of the servant girl beyond verse three of 2 Kings 5, but I can only imagine her delight when she heard Naaman was healed of his skin disease. Imagine her joy when she heard he had turned to the Lord! We can also experience this joy when we allow God to use our lives for His glory. *W*

\*All Scripture is quoted from the ESV.

*About the Writer: Melanie and Joel Franks are church planters in Athens, Alabama, which is a suburb of Huntsville. Their work is a joint project with North American Ministries and Alabama State Missions. The Franks have two children, Jonathan and Makayla, who are seniors in high school.*

## APPLICATION

- + What are you doing to build a strong faith in God in your children or grandchildren? In Deuteronomy 6, we are commanded to teach our children. I'm sure the servant girl's parents were so thankful they had taught her about God, so she was equipped to remain strong in her faith when the hard times came. Are your children prepared for the hard times they will face?
- + If we are going to see our churches grow, we must actively foster relationships with others outside of the church. What are you doing to build relationships with the people in your community?
- + Are you a person of peace like the servant girl? Is there someone that has wronged you that you need to forgive? Maybe you have wronged someone, and you need to seek forgiveness. Ask God to help you be a person of peace.





Aunt  
Donna



I want to introduce you to my friend, Donna. Around our house and among the children at Cultivate Church, she is known as Aunt Donna. We first met Donna as she was working in the Lowe's Commercial Customer Service Department. While working on our church buildout, my husband Joel would always go to her cash register and offer her a friendly smile. He learned he could pick at Donna, and she would reciprocate the gesture. Their friendship continues the same way today!

After becoming friends, Joel invited Donna to come to one of our home Bible studies. Donna quickly informed Joel church wasn't her thing. This didn't stop Joel from being friends with Donna or inviting her to Bible study. As their friendship grew, he asked Donna why she was so against going to church. Donna shared with him that she had once been actively involved in church but had been severely hurt by people within the church.

Thankfully, after showing love to Donna, she came to our first preview service and has become a vital part of Cultivate Church. I recently sat down to chat with Donna about what made her change her mind about the church and why she finally visited us.

Melanie:

Donna:

You said you had determined not to return to a church. Why was that?

I was hurt by people at church. I was actively involved. I was giving God and the church my all, but then people within the church turned on me. They mistreated me. They hurt me deeply. There are so many hypocrites within the church that I decided I didn't need them and didn't want to be involved.

Melanie:

Donna:

What changed your mind and made you try Cultivate Church after years of not attending church anywhere?

You were real and didn't put on a façade. I knew that Joel was genuine. He was easy to talk to, and I could tell he cared about me. I felt loved and included when I met the rest of your family.

Melanie:

Donna:

How has the love in your Cultivate Church family affected you?

Honestly, the love of my church family has been a complete shocker. I have never experienced genuine love within a church like this before. Sometimes I can't even accept it and run from it because it scares me! My church family cares for me even when I mess up. I sometimes can't even comprehend why they would love me like they do.

My family and Cultivate Church are blessed to have Aunt Donna in our lives. I'm thankful Joel was bold and persistent in witnessing to Donna when he visited Lowe's. I'm also grateful Donna was open to making peace with both God and the past hurts in her life, so she could return to Him.