

life groups discussion guide

faith requires an action step



"If there is only one strand of faith amongst all the corruption within us, God will take hold of that one strand." -- Oswald Chambers

"The tendency is to look for the marvellous in our experience; we mistake the sense of the heroic for being heroes. It is one thing to go through a crisis grandly, but another thing to go through every day glorifying God when there is no witness, no limelight, no one paying the remotest attention to us." -- Oswald Chambers

One of the things I love about the Bible is that so many stories contain wonderful nuggets of spiritual gold that can be mined from them, but which are not immediately obvious. I think that's why it's very common for believers to read the same story many, many times, then suddenly one day find a revelation that wallops them upside the head. One that had been there all along, but had, for whatever reason, not stood out in the same way that it does now.

Q :: Can you remember any of that sort of revelation in Scripture in your own life?

Q :: Why do you suppose the Bible sometimes works in that way?

The story of Naaman's healing in 2 Kings 5 is like that. There are some great things that we can take out of this story, but some of them are not immediately obvious. At its core, it's the story of two powerful men; both prominent in their own field. One needs a healing, and one delivers the prescription for it. This is a common enough Sunday school story, we've all probably heard it before today – but we don't often talk about the little girl at the root of it.

There are some remarkable children in the Bible: Samuel, David, even Mary was hardly more than a child, but this little girl is quite something – and we don't even know her name. And yet, when you really think about it, the story never takes place if she is not in it – her role is that crucial.

Think about that for just a moment. In the much larger story God is writing, a young, unnamed slave girl (who would have been considered incredibly insignificant in that culture – especially in the circumstances she was in) plays perhaps the biggest role of anyone (short of God, of course).

While we don't know her name, we can piece together a profile of who she is. Captured in a raid on her village or town, it's likely her family is dead and that she has seen things we would hope our children would never see. Certainly she has been forcibly taken from her home against her will. This little girl has been sold into slavery and is working in the house of a high-ranking Aramean official as his wife's maid. We don't know from the text how long she has been there, or how she has been treated; whether she has violent or benevolent owners. But what is striking about her is that despite all this she still has the courage to speak up and to honour Elisha, the prophet of Israel's God – who, let's be honest – has not saved her from captivity!

I find it fairly remarkable that she speaks up at all. I mean, who could blame her were she to be glad that her captor, owner, oppressor, is ill; seriously, debilitatingly ill. Perhaps her future would be uncertain if he died, but I don't hear self-interest in her little speech. This is simply a child making a suggestion to her mistress, which frankly could have cost her a beating!

Q :: What are some of the reasons she could have had, or told herself, to justify NOT speaking up?

Q :: Are any of these reasons the same ones we might use to stop ourselves from speaking up when we have the chance?

Q :: Pick apart her suggestion. What is she saying? What is she not saying? What experiences in her life before captivity could have been behind her suggestion?

Another remarkable thing is that, despite everything, she still had faith in Almighty God and his prophet. God had not prevented her capture or suffering, but she still believed that he was the answer to Naaman's problems. She still believed in his power, in his faithfulness to heal, in a prophet to work on his behalf, in miracles done in his name. There is no 'could' but rather a 'would' in her mind. She believes God and his prophet WILL heal her master - even if they didn't save her.

The more I ponder this young girl, the more I admire what she did.

Q :: When God has allowed tragic circumstances into our lives – and not rescued us from them – how hard is it to speak to someone else a message of how He will step into their situation and bring about deliverance, when our own lack of deliverance is staring back at us? What other things might make it hard to speak about how God will work in someone else's life?

Q :: Because God has not rescued her does not mean, in her mind, that he won't help. In fact she is convinced that he will. How can a child have come to a level of faith like that? Or is it the innocence of childhood?

Q :: If we are to possess that same level of faith, what beliefs must be deeply rooted – and active – in our own hearts and lives?

To be honest, I look at the faith of this young girl and there's some inner, knee-jerk, reflex sort of thing that asks a question that doesn't, itself, sound very full of faith – but I'd be dishonest to not acknowledge that it's there: "What does she have to gain from speaking up for her owner?" I mean, she seems to have more reasons to be bitter, than to be faithful. But very soon after that question pops into my head, I am reminded of an answer – found right in the middle of one of the Bible's most famous passages about faith, Hebrews 11. Verse 6 says: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

The question isn't whether or not we like where our circumstances have us right now, it's whether or not our circumstances will dictate whether our faith stands, and further, whether or not we keep it to ourselves. This little girl who **MUST** have cried tears of bereavement, of confusion, of homesickness and exhaustion, somehow **STILL** has faith in him. Enough faith to pass on to someone she ought to hate, but cares about.

Q :: Was the faith of the servant girl rewarded? If so, how?

Q :: What insights might we glean from this story about the rewards of earnestly seeking God (as seen in Heb. 11:6)?

Naaman's life was literally transformed – physically *and* spiritually – not to mention that of his family's, his servants and maybe even the king of Aram! Who would have thought that the faith of one little girl could have that kind of ripple effect?

Q :: What testimonies do you have of God's faithfulness that might encourage others in difficult times? Share some...

While what the servant girl did was courageous and bold in its own way, it was also a simple thing as well. Too often I am guilty of wanting to do the big thing for God, when perhaps the simple, smaller, step of faith is what God might be looking for from me. In that way, I'm afraid, I'm often more like Naaman, bristling at the simplistic request to wash and be cleansed than I am like the servant girl who simply speaks a pure desire of her heart for the betterment of someone else.

Q :: Are we prone to look for the "big thing" we can do to demonstrate our faith instead of the smaller?

Q :: What is some small thing you can do to release your faith this week?