

199617 thehealingofmasman revpdemarchant

Somewhere here on the grounds is the granddaughter of our bass singer, and I owe an apology to her because she didn't understand my compliment of his singing this morning. But I had a second thought as you guys were singing that first song, was it Drink from the Water? Drink from the Well. Boy, they know how to get a song together, don't they? I just got to thinking that some of the best music groups, like this one, if you ever notice the bass singer is usually the more mature of the group, which I mean his hair looks a lot like mine, and that gave me confidence that maybe there's still hope for me if my voice would just change one more time, you know.

Maybe I could be in a group like that, you know, I don't know. Isn't it good to be together and celebrate the things of God? God has been very good to my wife and I. Joan comes from a family, we're not Christians, but she found Christ through the ministry of the youth group at Royal Oak, Michigan, where both of us were from. She first caught my eye in junior high when I was playing trombone and she was playing flute in the same junior high band, and I would kind of squeeze my chair over so I could see over into the flute section and thought she was pretty neat.

We actually played a flute trombone duet once, only once. There were never any requests for a repeat and we haven't seen fit to force that on anybody, but that was how we kind of got together musically and God brought our lives together. We had one date a year for four years.

I think it's good to start things slow and really kind of measure them. Actually, the real truth of the matter is it took me that long to convince her, you know, for more than one date a year. But how God has blessed our lives in leading us, first of all, to Haiti and then into a pastoral ministry near South Bend, Indiana at Granger for 11 years.

We never stopped being missionaries. We felt that God had us there to bring missions to that church, and we were blessed to see that happen. And then we were on staff at Port Huron for two years and then they asked us to be district superintendent, something I said I would never do, and found out that we loved that ministry.

God gave us a heart for the pastors and their wives and we were at a stage in our life that Joan could go with me every weekend and she was having seminars, retreats really, for pastors' wives. And we found that pastors' wives are some of the most hurting people in our district and needed times together. And they had groups of eight to twelve small groups, very intimate times, and oh how God blessed that.

We were anticipating staying on and they wanted us to do so, but God had a fresh challenge for us that we thought was beyond us and still do, but are so grateful to have this more direct participation once again in the missions arm of the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada and of the U.S. Missionary Churches through World Partners. We do have three children. God

didn't see fit to bring healing following some surgery.

We couldn't have children. And so we adopted a son and God brought Jeffrey into our life. He's like most of the other Jeffreys I've met.

I don't know what your experience has been, but most of the Jeffreys I know are high-g geared, high-energy people, and ours certainly is. In fact, Dr. Dobson wrote a book about him once called *The Strong-Willed Child*. And I say this because God has really answered prayer for our son.

I'm going to share a bit about him in the message in a moment. But Jeff has lots of abilities. He's a career navy man, a nuclear electrician, and is just finishing three years in Washington, D.C., and he hopes going on a submarine.

He's going to find out this week. He's been on aircraft carriers and missile cruisers and was in Haiti as the translator when the American Army went in to try to settle that thing and maybe made it worse. I'm not sure.

Two years ago, but Jeff was our translator, intercepting secret documents and doing all kinds of wild Rambo-type things that we couldn't know about until he got back, like jumping out of helicopters with green berets and crashing through doors to arrest the bad guys. And God protected them. God has given him a Christian wife whom Jeff has led to the Lord.

Our family expanded then with two daughters born to us. Ginny and her husband are in seminary. Jay is our Presbyterian connection in our family, a very evangelical, conservative young man, and studying for his doctorate in theology at Princeton University.

And instrumental to bring apologetics back to that campus for the first time since the 40s. They have not even offered a class in apologetics, a defense of the faith at Princeton University since the 40s. And Jay is part of a small group that is doing that on campus and is publishing a conservative theological journal four times a year.

And we're grateful what God's doing through their lives. They met at Asbury Seminary and went on from there. Jay's going to have more degrees than the rest of us put together in our family.

But we're grateful for God bringing him into Ginny's life. Then we have an afterthought that came along that is a precious jewel of our family. Holly is just going to be a senior this year at Bethel College and is looking towards missions.

She'll be in Ecuador this fall for the semester abroad program. She's got most of the artistic talent in our family. But God's been so faithful.

There's times we have felt very much failures as parents. I'm going to share a bit about that type of thing in the message today because I found that many, many parents are feeling guilt about their parenting. And we found God has been faithful with our humble efforts to present a

Christian example to our kids and to find them latching on to that as a point of praise we offer to the Lord.

I would like you to open your Bibles to 2 Kings chapter 5. This has got to be the cream of the people that would be back in the tabernacle at naptime at 2 o'clock, especially after dinner. My word, if you had the dinner that I had, these people know I'd have Sunday dinner that's worth the name around here. Then what comes next is a nap.

Maybe you squeezed one in before. If so, I'm happy for you. 2 Kings chapter 5. I'd like to call this seven ducks in a dirty stream, otherwise known as the healing of Naaman.

I've taken a little liberty with that. The story of how God worked in the life of a pagan military leader through the testimony of a little slave girl. And I want this to be a message of encouragement.

Two o'clock on Sunday afternoon, you need encouragement anyhow. God's word is encouraging. I just find a lot of encouraging stuff in this account from 2 Kings chapter 5. Didn't really intend it, but this one has to do with the Jordan River too.

You think, my word doesn't got to know anything else. But we're back at the Jordan River again in this story, 2 Kings chapter 5. It reads like this. Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram.

He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. We should read that to Syria. He was a valiant soldier, but, and we just circle that little word.

You do mark your Bible, don't you? It helps things to pop out to you another time. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. Wow, does that make a left turn in the middle of that verse, huh? A valiant soldier.

Boy, we admire him to this point, but he had leprosy. Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel and she served as Naaman's, excuse me, served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, if only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy.

Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. Well, by all means go, the king of Aram replied, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel. As much as we're saying, I know how, you know, we kings operate.

If you're going to go, I'll send a letter from one king to another king and they'll take good care of you. And so Naaman left taking with him 10 talents of silver, probably 750 pounds, 6,000 shekels of gold, probably 150 pounds, and 10 sets of clothing. The letter that he took to the king of Israel said with this letter, I'm sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy.

Oh boy, you'd like to get a letter like that, huh? From one king to another. Well, as soon as the king of Israel, that was Joam, read the letter, he tore his robes. Why? Because he knew he didn't have power to heal anyone of leprosy.

He in fact says, can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he's trying to pick a quarrel with me? This is a setup. When Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message. Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.

And so Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him saying, go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed. Easy to do, right? But Naaman went away angry and said, I thought he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.

Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I have washed in them and be cleansed? So he turned and went off in a rage. Now Naaman's servants went to him and said, my father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, some hard thing, would you not have done it? How much more than when he simply tells you wash and be cleansed? And so he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times as the man of God had told him and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. And then Naaman and all of his attendants went back to the man of God.

He stood before him and said, now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Amen. God's word to us today.

I love this story. I think there's a lot of drama. There's some amazing things in the story.

And I think there are some eternal principles that can be of encouragement to us. Could you imagine being by the River Jordan that day, as I'm sure there were, people taking water, people washing clothes, people crossing. And if we had happened to have been there that day, it would have been quite an astounding thing to see, as we would have glimpsed a large entourage of very important looking people approaching the river.

And perhaps a murmur went through the crowd and said, you know, it's the military commander from Damascus. This is the enemy. This was the second in command of the nation that had in recent times been giving the most trouble to Israel.

A very important man with all of the pomp and the elegance that went with his entourage. He came with animals heavily laden with silver and gold, as we've read, and very costly sets of clothing that were intended as gifts to the king of Israel and to whomever could heal this important man. And they stopped beside the water, and perhaps as we step back and watch, we see him partially disrobe and take off some of his clothing.

And then a gasp may have gone up from the crowd as they realized that this man, with all of his privilege, with all of his power, with all of the prestige, and all of the servants at his command, was a leper. And where moments before we would have envied him, we suddenly no longer envy him, because leprosy makes all the difference. We find later that it was the prophet of God, Elisha, who had not come to him, but actually sent a servant.

Oh, don't you love it the way God kind of humbles us when we think we're somebody? And this man that was used to having everybody kowtow and bow to him, found that Elisha didn't even come out, but sent a servant. He wasn't used to being dealt with that way. And then, of all things, to tell him to go bathe in a muddy stream, when they had the clear waters of the higher land of Damascus nearby.

He said, I easily could have bathed in them. If I want to take a bath, I'll do that there. I didn't come all this way to be toyed with like this.

And with a rage, he turned off. Well, that had been perhaps hours earlier. And unknown to us as we were by the river that day, his own servants had taken him inside and said, now wait a minute, Naaman, we've come all this ways.

What harm can there be in simply doing as he said, it's not a hard thing. Why don't you do it? And he did listen to his men. And so he is there by the water.

We watch him go down into the water and dips once. We think, well, he's not really hardly bathing, he's just dipping in the water, or ducking, if you will. And a second time, and a third time, there's no change.

And I believe we're reading it correctly to understand that four times, five times, and six times, he ducked beneath the muddy waters of the Jordan with no change. Time to go home. This isn't working.

But on the seventh time, as the prophet had commanded him, as the word of God, he was entirely cleansed and his skin was like that of a young boy. That's a great story, isn't it? Is it true, or is it one of those fables, as some folks think, that is simply to make a point? Unless there's anyone here who thinks that, would it encourage you to know that Jesus believed that this story was true? Jesus accepted this story as being literally true, having happened on a day in time. For in Luke chapter 4 and verse 27, Jesus said, read letters in my Bible, there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, and yet not one of them was cleansed, only Naaman the Syrian.

Jesus remembering this account, that a Syrian was cleansed, the only one at that time who was cleansed. We see some insights about leprosy that I know are not unfamiliar to most of you in this room today. Leprosy is very much like sin, as it's compared in the Bible.

It's a progressive disease, a disabling one, one without a human cure, and one which ultimately can claim the life of the person. It was considered a curse of death in Bible times. We know

more about the nerve system today, but there's still really no cure for leprosy.

The need for faith and obedience is seen in this story, as well as the wonderful conclusion of cleansing and restoration. Some powerful forces at work here. I'd like to suggest five of them that I see.

First of all, the power of a little word. The power of a little word, and it's the one I invited you to circle, but he had leprosy. Isn't it interesting how quickly our life can change with the interjection of a single word? The word cancer does that to people.

The word death. The word fired can change your world real quick. There are many words when they come into our life become a source of bondage, and the word leprosy had become a bondage to Naaman.

It had changed everything. Where he had the world as it were at his command, when second in command in the kingdom where he served, highly regarded by King Ben-Hadad, suddenly one day appeared a spot. Perhaps his wife noticed it.

Perhaps they thought it was a rash and it would go away, but it didn't go away. You know the sequence of these kinds of things as they come to people's lives? Is it a tumor? Is it a malignant melanoma? What is it? They went through all of that only to discover that unmistakably it was leprosy, and this type of sin became a plague and a scourge to his life. It's rather common really, more than we'd like to admit, to realize that many of the people that are esteemed and admired by the world, you would not envy if you only knew the shoes in which they walk.

That young wife that you encounter in the grocery store who seems to have everything together with the sharpest of clothes and a fancy hairdo and climbs into a beautiful car out in the parking lot as she puts her groceries in the back, the two lovely children, maybe living in a home that's full of strife, that's full of abuse, that's full of guilt, and that couple that sits across the aisle from you in church that appeared to be the finest of Christian family, maybe more times than we realize is living with heartache, is living as two strangers in the same home, and the heartaches and the pain that is felt in our world by person after person are that which we can only guess at times. I remember reading in the papers, it's been two or three years ago now, when Mario Lemieux was first diagnosed as having a type of cancer, Hodgkin's, I forget now which it is, I believe it is. I used to play just enough hockey to enjoy following it, you know, and I've confessed my sins already in Canada that I still root for Detroit Red Wings, and they invited me back anyhow.

So, but that was in the day of Gordie Howe and company, but I remember reading about Mario Lemieux, what is he, six foot six or something like that, big hulking guy, nobody should be that good and be that big at the same time, you know, and threatening to rewrite some of Gretzky's scoring records, and then that hit. Now, thankfully he's doing better these days, but it didn't look good for a while, and I remember thinking, wow, that changed everything real quick, doesn't it? And the things that come to our life have that power to bring bondage. You see, the

power of a little word is it can invade your life just like that, and suddenly everything's different.

You woke up in the morning and you never expected it, absolutely blindsided you. For some people it is, as I've mentioned, the word cancer. It was four years ago when we were at Port Huron that I went in for a skin cancer check because I had a couple little spots on my nose and we saw in yesterday's paper, which I'd only gotten out because my wife asked me to look up something, and I saw an advertisement for a free cancer check that I'd missed when I'd really read the paper.

I see God's hand in all of this because I'm ready to throw that paper out. But now, second time through, I saw there was to be a free cancer checkup and I noticed it and said, why don't you go to that? You know, we got those couple spots here and I had a terrible complexion problem as a young person, as a teenager, and they gave you light treatments in those days not knowing that that causes cancer. And then we spent 10 years in the tropical sun of Haiti and I know my skin complexion is such I need to watch it.

So I went in for the checkup and found that one of the doctors that was there to help us that day turned out to be a doctor from the missionary church at Port Huron. I didn't know it at the time. It had a stroke that morning, so they were behind schedule, not handling people well.

So because there was a lineup, we had to wait quite a while in the waiting room. And because we had to wait quite a while, I picked up a brochure that I would not have otherwise read and saw pictures of malignant melanoma. And because they were only checking the things that people asked them to check, and because I'd only intended to ask him to look at my nose, I was never going to take off my shirt and show him my back.

But because of seeing the brochure, I said to Joan, you know, hey, wait, you know, this, this picture looks like that thing on my back. Well, maybe you better show it to him while we're here. So we got in the room a little bit later, took one look at my nose, say no problem, just kind of watch it, look at my back.

Now this is a problem. This has got to come up. Wow.

Was God ever good to work all those circumstances together to get me there and then to see the picture and to ask them to check because it's just a few weeks later, I had three inches cut out of my back. And I thank God that they feel it was clean. And I've been checked for five years.

And it looks like that that's that's all. But I remember the day I got the report back. There is no cure for malignant melanoma.

You either get it in time or it gets you. And I remember thinking, I'm going to get a report today and it could be cancer. And it made me think of all the times that I'd shared with people in my ministry that God's never surprised by the things that happen to us and the things that he allows to come into our life, he will use for his own glory.

And it's safe to trust him with that. Those are those are great words when you're giving to other people. Yeah.

Suddenly I tried him on for size. I don't know if the report comes back cancer. It did.

I remember feeling so full of joy that night. Does that sound crazy to you? When I realized, you know, it works. What I've been telling people, it works.

It's right. It's OK. It's OK.

Because God's purpose for me is to not get me through this life without pain. God's purpose for me is not to keep me here forever. Aren't you glad? I mean, I'm not just about me, but about you, too.

Who wants to stay here forever? You know, God has bigger purposes than that. And I didn't even tend to tell you that. But that word invaded my life one day.

And you say easy for you to say because you had a good result. I know. I know.

And I know it could come back. And if it does, it's OK, because our lives are in God's hand. I think that takes a whole lot bigger faith, doesn't it? For us to reach and stretch around that and to think nothing bad will ever happen to me, because that's not true.

And then when it does, we don't know how to handle it. We have a wonderful, sovereign God who loves us and will see us through the darkest days. But oh, how we need to have understanding for those people who have just discovered an ugly word like that or tumor or stroke or divorce.

There are people who are living in great bondage to these words that have invaded their life or loneliness for the one who has lost their life partner. And the loneliness is almost tangible. They get up in the morning and almost feel it.

I'm reading a letter that Dr. Pronoy Sarkar wrote me just a couple of weeks ago. He says, I get up in the morning and I look for my wife and she's not there. She died in the month of December.

I'm still looking for her. He knows she's not there. But you understand, don't you? Some of you here really understand.

Loneliness, it can become that which brings bondage. Fear is the word that brings bondage to some others. Bankruptcy to others.

Failure, the keen sense of having failed. And we feel so unworthy. Oh, what bondage that brings.

Rejection, guilt, unworthiness, hopelessness. These are all the little words that can become a

source of bondage for us. But the encouragement, the good news is that there's deliverance from that kind of bondage.

My wife has a dear friend whose story of abuse you would think somebody surely would have had to make up. It could not be real. But Sherry is a trophy of God's grace today.

We happened to visit the church, and I won't mention which one, in Michigan, when she shared her testimony for the very first time publicly. And it was in the Sunday school class. And she about died when she realized that the DS's wife was going to be in the class.

She didn't know us. She and Joan had become close friends. And Sherry has shared her testimony in those pastor's wives' retreats that I referred of to you.

It's been a victory to her to share her testimony. And I've not been there, but Joan has shared there's not a dry eye in the group. Though no one has had exactly the same experience, everybody has had their hurts.

And hers is one of abuse by relatives, by neighbors, to the point that Sherry felt that she's such an unworthy person, that she's like dirt to God. And a part of her testimony is that she would look in the mirror. She said she literally would see in the mirror as if there was manure on her face.

But that's what Sherry was living with. She surely must be worth nothing because of all she'd been through. And to see her rise from the ashes of that, to realize she's precious in God's sight, that she's a beautiful person, and that God is bringing restoration.

And not only restoration, but ministry to Sherry. And she's able to share with others who out of their hurt, different from hers, but still a bondage in people's life, are experiencing a new kind of freedom. Does Satan still attack, bringing those thoughts of unworthiness? Sure he does.

He's relentless, isn't he? But there's victory over those kinds of things. And I praise God for that. I wonder what is the word that's invaded your life today? As we've shared here, we maybe didn't get to it, or I may have mentioned it.

But if there's anything in your life and mine today that is a source of bondage, the good news is Jesus wants to help you deal with that. He is the bondage breaker. He is the one that sets us free and helps us see our worthiness in him.

Not of ourselves, but because he chose to love us and focus himself upon us. Oh, I'm so grateful for that. That even for Naaman, the head of the army of a pagan country who was given fits and problems to God's people, God loved him enough to set him free.

Isn't that good news? That's good news, friends. The power of a little word to invade our life. What is it that binds your spirit today? Would you dare name it to God in prayer? Would you dare share that with somebody to say, here's the thing God spoke to me about today, and I'm

going to give it to him, and I'm going to walk in his new victory.

Would you ask me next week how I'm doing? That'd be good. There's also in this story the power of a simple witness. The simple witness was by this little girl, this little slave girl, who said to her mistress, oh, Mrs. Naaman, if only Master Naaman could go back to where I come from, there's a prophet of God there.

I just know if he'd go to him, he could heal him. Now, isn't this remarkable? I mean, get the picture, friends. Stop and think about it.

If there was anybody in Syria where this little girl had been taken captive who had a right to say, Naaman's got leprosy, yes. There is justice in the world after all, isn't there? Now, those would be very human responses, wouldn't they be? Come on, fess up. Those would be human responses.

This is a man responsible for taking her from her family. This is a man responsible for changing her life and snatching her away from everything that she knew and making her a slave. Remarkable that this girl could still bloom where she was planted and say a positive word, a good word, a helpful word, even though humanly speaking she could say he doesn't deserve it.

Wow, this gal's a hero of this story. You say, why is that encouraging? I think it's encouraging because you don't have to be a Bible school graduate, you don't have to be a theologian, you don't have to be a pastor, you don't have to be a missionary, you don't have to be a Sunday school teacher to bloom where you're planted and say the right thing, the helpful thing, the encouraging thing, the godly thing, and that God can use it beyond your expectation. Who would have believed that Naaman would come to recognize the God of heaven? Did he live for God after that? I don't know.

But he came to a point of acknowledging there is no God in Israel but the true God. Because of a little girl who just said the right thing. I don't know, that encourages me.

Aren't you encouraged? Nobody's smiling. But I want to tell you, you can go back where you come from and you can be the source of hope for some people. You really can.

Because we've got the message. I think about Denny Silvius and our pastor at Granger. Denny's one of these dear guys, come from one of the most wonderful families, steady.

Boy, something going on at the church, any ministry you want to name, they're going to be part of it. But Denny's not an up-front kind of a guy. He works at UPS, delivery man.

Steady as the day is long. But he'd be totally out of his element to be up in front of people. He's not a singer, you know.

But one day, Denny was getting gasoline at a convenience store with his UPS truck. And, you know, you go into those places regularly and you kind of get to know the people behind the

counter. And there was a young lady that worked behind the counter and they just small talk, you know, as they'd come.

And one day, she sensed something about Denny, apparently, that he was a different kind of person, a caring kind of person. She started opening up and told Denny that she was considering having an abortion. That she really couldn't handle a child coming into her life right now and she was thinking of having an abortion.

Now, nobody appointed Denny to do anything about that. That wasn't his decision. But you know what Denny did? Just in a loving, non-judgmental kind of way, he says, you know, maybe you don't really want to do that.

You know, there is another option for you to adopt the baby out. She said, oh, who would want my baby? He said, I wouldn't be surprised there's people right in our church that would adopt your baby. She said, I know a couple that's been waiting, waiting, wanting to adopt a baby.

He was thinking about Dave and Judy, folks that I know. Well, they left it there and he came back again another day. She still wanted to talk.

Do you know that today Dave and Judy ask you, the Greens Missionary Church in Indiana have a lovely little girl because of Denny, who just simply had the courage to say to a young lady who was at a hurting point in her life, you know, there's another way. He said it wasn't any of his business. Well, it was God's business, wasn't it? And he was trying to listen to God in his life.

Doesn't take a theological degree to do that. No, not everybody will respond quite that way. But I just kind of think we have this many people going back home to just try to say the right thing, the godly thing, the encouraging thing, the righteous thing at the right time with a good heart.

And we're going to see God do some things that are going to surprise us. I think about Laura Bear, her husband Ben is pastor of a missionary church in Elkhart, Indiana. They lived out in California at the time and Laura was a new employee of the law office.

Judy Witt was the office manager. She was really in charge of about, I think about a dozen lawyers. They thought they hired her, but she was really, you know, the one that knew what was going on around there.

Like most places, the secretaries run the place, you know, and don't we thank God for them because they point us in the right direction every morning, you know. Judy's one of these capable, capable people, so efficient. But she didn't know God.

Her husband Ray didn't know God. They were both from fractured backgrounds and the result of divorce. And Ray's son was going to get married and he was far, far from God.

His life was a mess, the son was. And the fiance he was going to marry was pregnant at the time with somebody else's baby. Just to give you a little picture, kind of fractured background,

just a whole lot like the world out there, right? And when you're going to get married, what do you need? Well, you need a preacher, of course.

Well, where are you going to find a preacher? Well, in the yellow pages, of course. You look up a church and see if there's one nearby and the one that's close by must be the best one. And so Ray looked in the yellow pages to find a church.

And as they were looking, trying to decide, suddenly Judy says, you know, there's a new gal at the office. She's the sweetest thing. Her name's Laura.

And I think she said her husband's a pastor. I just really kind of like what I see. Let's talk to her.

Well, to shorten the story up just a little bit, they ended up going to Ben Behr at the Missionary Church in California for some counseling. Now, he said, for me to do your wedding, I'd have to meet with you several times. Well, they never heard of a pastor like that, because after all, pastors do weddings for the money, you know, and the more the merrier.

And they'd never heard of a pastor that insisted on investing something into the lives of the people. And so the young couple, they were not really up for that. And after one session, they took off for Reno or wherever it was and got married.

Isn't that delightful? Yeah, great. Might as well all look, because I know you're looking anyhow, you know. And after they got married, Ray said to Judy next Sunday, he says, you know, I think I'm going to go over there to that church.

He says, I'm intrigued by a pastor that would insist on counseling to get married. And so he visited the church. And you know that Pastor Ben was preaching on the same text that the Sunday school teacher had taught on 30 years before the last time that Ray had been in church.

And he remembered us from Galatians. It all came back. God's just picked up without missing a lick right where he needed to come.

The second Sunday, Ray Whit took his wife back with him. The third Sunday, I think his daughter went along. I'm not sure about that.

Well, they found Christ and Ray eventually became a deacon. You may not know their names. Others of you recognize them already.

Ray and Judy Whit are world partners missionaries in Spain right now. And I don't know if they would have been. I don't know if they would have found Christ if it hadn't been for the sweet aroma of Laura Bear's testimony in the law office, who just made her somebody you'd want to approach.

That if she's like she is, then maybe her husband's okay too. You know, that's not always true, you know. And they ended up going there for counseling and found Christ.

So it's encouraging to me. And these folks, I want to suggest to you, follow in the train of this little girl who is snatched from her family, put in a pagan country, and yet bloomed for the Lord in that place. God does choose the lowly things of this world.

First Corinthians 128 tells us. The lowly things and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are. This little girl was more powerful than Naaman, because she had a powerful God inside her.

And she just simply shared the truth. You know, I wonder if more than we realize there's folks that live on the same block where we do or go to the same stores or work where we work, who just, goodness sakes, need somebody to tell them God loves you. You know, there is hope.

Can I pray for you right now? Do you ever do that? You know, it blows people away. My wife's better at that than I am. You pray with people leaning by the car or wherever, and it totally takes them back.

You know, it's nice to say I'll pray for you. You know, that's a glib thing you can say, but could I pray for you right now? They're not ready for that. And your genuineness, don't fake it, but your genuineness, the reality of that, that people really can stop right where they are and talk to God.

That'll speak volumes. Those people will lay awake thinking about that. There's power in that.

And here's a young girl with a simple witness, and it inspired hope in the heart of a man that was far from God. I'm glad for that, the power of a simple witness. The power of a godly home is suggested in this passage, for that little girl got this somewhere.

She got it in her home back in Israel. She had godly parents. How do you know? Well, I think so.

She had godly parents because there was an example here that environment couldn't root out. You know, it's easy to stray when you go away from home. Some of us that are here maybe did that when you first left home.

You went to college. It's a key time to pray for our young people, isn't it? You know, a little bit away from mom and dad. You can stay out later, and usually there's less rules.

It's not bad. We have to learn to function with internal rules. It's part of what you call growing up, you know.

But it's a key time, isn't it, to pray for young people. They're in a strange land with strange people. The customs are different.

The beliefs are different. They eat different food. They worship a different god.

And it would be real easy to just go along with the crowd. A lot of people do. There was something in here that caused her to not fit in, but to say, you know, there's a god in Israel.

And the prophet of God that gives his word, he could have hope for Master Naaman. And she got this at her home. I thank God for my son.

I referred to that. Jeff spent the first five years in the Navy, never darkening the door of a church or the chapel. We prayed for Jeff.

He was our closest thing to a rebel in our family. A lot of things he didn't get into. We're grateful for that.

But he couldn't wait till he'd leave. And we went through those painful years of wondering, well, how soon could you leave? You know, you say parents should never say that. You haven't hurt yet at that point, if you don't know what that feels like.

I remember feeling the horrible sense of failure. I was a pastor of a church. How could I be having these ugly scenes with my son? Was I not supposed to be in control of my family? God knew I was trying.

I remember the heap of guilt that the accuser of the brethren brings to us. Unworthy. And I thought surely I could never still be in the ministry by the time we got this boy launched.

Love him? Oh, you bet. Enjoy? No, not for a while. Not for a while.

I'm sharing with you the real stuff here this afternoon, okay? And some of you have been there. Others of you, your children are young, and you're raising them in a day that's even harder. You know, there is a promise in the scripture, train up a child in the way he should go, and when he's old he'll not depart from it.

Some of us have thought that that means the kids can never rebel, and I struggled with that. I remember the day, it was like the Holy Spirit came to me and taught me, and it dawned on me that God has chosen to present himself to us as a father. He's described himself in scripture as a father, our heavenly father.

I thought, wow, God's a father. Who were his children? Well, he put Adam and Eve in the garden, didn't he? What was God's batting average? Wow, zero for two. They both went bad.

You say, yeah, but it was because they had their own will. Exactly so. You see, when Adam and Eve chose wrongly, it broke the heart of God, but it did not change who he was.

It did not change God's character. It did not change his desires for them. It did not change his wishes for them.

It did not change the example that he had given them, and somehow I felt my heart lifted to realize that we have a son that was just, for now, disobeying God, but that was not the pattern we'd given him or taught him. It encouraged me as I thought of that, and we began to claim it for Jeff. Well, it was after the period of time that there was a call up for Desert Storm, that his future wife-to-be was also called up, and Tracy and Jeff got acquainted.

She's from a Mormon home in Utah, never really bought into it, very bright gal, but that was the only background she knew. It affected her more than she realized, but it awakened in Jeff's heart the fact that he really, down deep, knew who he was. He knew what the truth was, and she didn't know the truth, and he began to be burdened for her salvation, though he wasn't even going to church.

Can you beat that? Why? Because you can't get away from what's taught down there. I think that's what that scripture means. When he's old, he can't depart from, you cannot get away from the Holy Spirit bringing that to mind.

They ended up going to a little Nazarene church, liked it so much he'd go mow the pastor's lawn. Man, I couldn't get in to mow my lawn, you know. They started helping with the youth group.

I said, this is my son, you know. One day he called, and he said they were having Bible study. He said, Dad, could you marry somebody who's a Christian with somebody who's not? I said, no, I couldn't do that, son.

Didn't think so, you know. Told me two things. Told me down deep he still believed, and down deep he knew she didn't.

Both was good, okay. They started having Bible study. Call up and have long questions, you know, and talk to this gal.

Never laid eyes on her, but I knew how she was thinking, and gave her answers about scripture. One day Jeff called again. He said, Dad, you could do that wedding.

That was a good call. That was his neat way of telling us that Tracy made a decision. Today, if you pin Tracy down, try to find out what she is, meaning Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, whatever she is.

She said, I'm a Christian, and I wouldn't be if it wasn't for my husband. I love it. Now, they need to grow yet.

They aren't done growing, and they aren't where we know they're going to be, but there's no question about that faith, and that encourages me. The power of a godly home, and I share that because there's some folks here, I can guarantee it with a crowd this size, there's some folks here with a broken heart because you've got kids that aren't serving God. Some of you do, or it may be grandkids that are not walking with God.

Don't give up, and don't underestimate the power to change now. You say, yeah, but Paul, you don't know. I really blew it back then, or I wasn't even a believer back then.

God knows that. The Apostle Paul was writing to Timothy, and he said, I'm reminded of the sincere faith that was in your grandmother, Lois, and in your mother, Eunice. We don't think

that Timothy's dad was even a believer.

That's hope for the single parent home. Though the ideal is a mom and dad who love each other and love God together in the family, that isn't always there, but even then, God, by his grace, can help a single parent. And God can help us to go back and to confess to our kids, you know, back then I really didn't do as I should have, and if I only understood back then what I understand now.

Nothing wrong with confessing that to our kids and say, you know, as of today, your mom and I are praying for you every day, and we're praying you'll walk with God. We're praying that with your wife and your kids that you're going to find a church home, and you're going to walk with Jesus. I believe that the Bible talks about restoring the years that the locusts have eaten, that when it comes to our parenting, there's way too much guilt that's being accepted in the hearts of Christian parents when we need to be saying, God, help me to start over today, and being the Christian grandparent today.

Some of us can be as grandparents, provide the influence that our kids are not given to their own children right at the moment, and we can provide some of that for them. We have a little granddaughter who was born out of wedlock before our son was married, and you know, God has given us such a precious, precious relationship with her mom and the man she eventually married. A little bit awkward when I was pastoring at Grainger to have them visit and say, this is our granddaughter and this is her mom, and explain who they were, you see.

And we just decided there was no sense being secretive about that, because here's a precious, you want to talk about precious grandkids, I have to tell you about Cassie. Tender heart, and she loves Jesus. We're the only Christian family that her mom has, so she's like a daughter-in-law for us.

Wouldn't work if Jeff and Tracy were uncomfortable with that, but our whole clan was at their wedding. Our daughter played the piano, and we were all part of her wedding. I don't know any other families that have had that happen, but we thank God that he's given us a love for her, and we're her Christian family.

Now that should have never happened, but out of that is the power of a godly home that I thank God for that's extended to that generation. I look back at the influence of my own home. I have a dad, I mentioned this morning, who was a mail carrier.

He would never do the things that I've been called to do, because dad wouldn't be at home at all up in front of a group. He's been treasurer, he's been recording secretary of the church for many years, and was faithful, but you know I thank God for the example of my dad, and I started to think recently about that, and one of the most significant things is I remember my dad, all six foot three of them, and my mom about half that, a little more, having mom sit on his lap and kissing him. You shouldn't have a display of affection.

If you don't have some affection in your home that your kids see there's something desperately lacking, now there's an appropriate way for all of that, but I remember how good that used to feel when we were kids, and mom and dad really loved each other. Now occasionally they'd get into a little spat. I don't want you to think it was a perfect home, but it never bothered me too much when I heard mom and dad in a spat, because I knew how much he loved her, and I realized what a precious, precious thing that was, and I've watched our daughter Holly has this most wonderful smile.

You can't hide anything. Holly can't hide anything. If she likes a guy, I know it, because she gets that kind of little grin, and that's the look she gets if she sees me give my wife a hug or a kiss.

She kind of gets that little, you know. I thought, you know, our kids have begun to thank us for the stability of their home, because they're of an age now that so many of their friends already not only have their parents divorced, but have their own marriage fractured. One of the greatest things we can give our families is a secure marriage, where there's absolutely no question mom and dad love each other, and together they love God.

I thank the Lord my dad gave me that. And then on one of those camping vacations we told you about this morning, I recall the time that we stopped for roast beef in Gaylord, Michigan, and mom got the end piece of the meatloaf in her sandwich. She asked for it.

She really got it. It was food poisoning. And that night in the tent, it was the biggest storm of the season.

It laid flat, huge trees at the end of the lake at East Jordan. And we were in a tent, and that thing was trying to fly. And it was raining cats and dogs, and maybe other things along with it.

And we're in the middle of the tent, and mom is dying for sure of food poisoning. I mean to tell you, we were in one pickle. Where do you go? How do you get out of here? And I remember by the flickering light of a lamp in the middle of night, with the wind blowing and the rain coming down sheets of my big dad down on his knees by the cot, sobbing and praying to God to spare mom.

Then dawn on me quite recently what an indelible memory that is. It told me two things. How much my dad loved mom, and how much he believed in prayer.

Friend, that's worth more than money. That's worth more than anything my dad could leave me in an inheritance. And every one of us can give that kind of thing to our kids and to our grandkids.

The power of a godly home. It's powerful stuff. The third thing, and I'll try to share this quickly, was a New Year's Eve service when my dad got up.

And he wasn't even real comfortable to even talk in the testimony, but he did that night. Wanted to share with everybody that here we are at the end of the year, the beginning of the

new year, and that he and mom had pledged a year earlier to increase their tithe. It was a certain amount, I don't recall now, something beyond 10 percent.

And we had never had a lot of money, never had a new car. And we seemed to have enough medical bills every year that it kind of was just like I was on schedule. As soon as you get them paid, something else had happened.

But he and mom had pledged to give something more than the tithe, whatever it was that year. And he got up and testified. He said, you know, here we are at the end of the year.

We've been able to do that. And somehow the bills all got paid, and we even had some money left over to do some extra things this year. Now, I wasn't any taller than that, but I remember this, and I'm 56.

And I think that's part of the reason I never had a problem with tithing. My first paper out, first time mowed lawn, never had a problem with tithing, because I saw an example in my dad. And friends, if you tithe and your kids don't know it, for goodness sakes, tell them.

That's not something to keep secret from our kids. It's good for them to know that we're putting God first in those areas. Oh, what a powerful thing it is, a godly home.

And it's not too late to rebuild on that foundation. There's also here the power of a sovereign God. A lovely little girl is taken into slavery.

That should never happen, should it? No, it should never happen. But we live in a fractured world, don't we? Could God have stopped that? Yeah. Why didn't he? I don't know.

There's a lot of things I don't know, and I don't suppose you probably do either, why they happen. But God works in the midst of those circumstances and can bring good out of evil. We all know the story of Joseph sold into slavery.

When he met his brothers later, he said, you meant it to me for evil, but God intended it for good. That's a faith statement. And for somebody here today that's in the midst of a hard situation, I want you to know that God is the God of your situation.

God is the God of your situation today. He is a sovereign God. That's not a favorite word to us theologically in our tradition, but it's a good biblical word.

It just simply means that God's over and above all the decisions of people. God's able to bring forth his purposes even out of the wrath of men. He'll do it.

He can do it. He can bring good out of our hurt. And he did so on this day because of a little girl who was willing to bloom where she was planted and say the right thing, even to an unworthy person and found that God worked out good from that.

And finally, this power of total obedience in this story, the power of total obedience. You see, it

wasn't one seventh of his healing that he received each time he dipped into the water. It doesn't come that way, but not until he was totally obedient, dipped seven times in the Jordan, not until the seventh time did the first sign of healing come and then it was total.

Wow, that's a tough lesson, isn't it? We want to see things kind of gradually, you know, is this is this worth it? Why am I not beginning to see results? Have we been faithful to the end? Not yet. Then keep studying. Keep studying.

I love the illustration by a pastor whose theology I don't totally vouch for, so his name will go unspoken. But he wrote about why prayers are unanswered. And in his particular home, there was an unmistakable rule when he was a young boy that there would be no smoking.

And one day he was in town and he found what was left of a big black cigar. He said black. I don't know.

I thought they're usually brown. That's what I know about cigars. But he found it on the sidewalk and thought this would be his chance to experiment and took up that cigar and was seeing what it was like when suddenly he realized his dad was walking down the sidewalk of Main Street.

I just love it. It doesn't God have a wonderful sense of humor, you know, how he works things together. And he realized his dad was coming and realizing that the best defense is a good offense, you know, or is it the other way around? Either way, he spotted a circus poster across the street.

Thank the Lord for the circus poster. Put the cigar behind his back and say, Dad, the circus is coming to town. Can we go? Well, dads are smarter than young boys realize, and especially moms.

I mean, moms know things that only God could have told them, you know. And his dad, not to be fooled, looked across at the poster and he said, son, never make a petition while holding a smoldering disobedience. My word, that was a flowery kind of King James kind of way of saying that, you know, but never make a petition while holding a smoldering disobedience.

And I read that story. I just loved it. I said, you know, I wonder how many times God wants to answer our prayers that way.

Say, I hear what you're saying, son, but you got disobedience in your life. Why are you hanging on to that stinking smoldering thing? And you're asking me for this good thing. Deal with what you got behind your back.

Fess up and let's deal with that. Ah, that's a wonderful lesson. You see, the power of total obedience is that it's only through total submission to God, even in the small things that his blessings are unlocked and begin to flow to us.

So I thank God for this story. There is power in a little word to invade our life, but thank God there's also deliverance. And I wonder what word it is that binds your spirit today.

Could you, in the final moments of this service, just commit that to him. The power of a simple witness to inspire hope in other people. It's something we all can do.

We don't need a degree to do it, but go from here with the resolve to say the encouraging word. We live in a discouraging world, and it will stick out like a light in a dark place when you and I can offer the encouraging word, the loving word, the hopeful word, and watch God work. The power of a godly home, and to go back committed to start something this week that would strengthen the witness of our home, and to instill values in our children and our grandchildren.

The power of a sovereign God to inspire hope.