

1 **How to Fail in Ministry**

1 Kings 5

2 **Review**

- The Syrian nation (Aram-Damascus) had an antagonistic relationship with the nation of Israel.
- This included the occasional raids into the border nations of Israel to carry off slaves and plunder.
- Namaan, the general of Syria, was a mighty man of war whom God had blessed.

3 **Review**

- But despite all of Namaan's apparent success, he was a leper.
- This leprosy was something that hindered Namaan's effectiveness as a general and could ultimately prove fatal.
- In middle-eastern culture, lepers were considered to be "dead men walking."

4 **Leprosy**

- Leprosy as it is described in the Bible was not exclusively what is referred to as Leprosy (or "Hansen's Disease") in modern times.
 - Hansen's Disease is a disease that causes the body to reject and seal off nerve endings, as well as the upper respiratory system. Hansen's disease is actually rarely contagious, as 95% of humans have a natural immunity to the disease.
 - Most of the isolation for Hansen's Disease has to do with social stigma.

5 **Leprosy**

- The biblical definition of *Tzaraath* (found in Leviticus 13:2) corresponds to a dangerous, painful skin-eating fungus called *Trichophyton violaceum* that continues to be a problem in the middle east to this day.
- This fungus is highly-contagious and is spread by contact, necessitating the stringent Levitical laws for the isolation and purification of lepers.

6 **Tzaraath**

- *Tzaraath* is also used in Scripture to refer to other kinds of fungal infections, including mold and mildew.
- A fungus is an organism that grows and feeds where there is death or decay.
- This is exactly what leprosy indicates in Scripture: that there is death and decay – that there is an unfitness to come to God.

7 **Namaan healed**

- Namaan hears that there is a prophet in Israel who can heal him of his leprosy, so he travels to Israel to find Elisha.
- Elisha doesn't even greet him – rather he commands him to wash in the Jordan river.
- Although he is initially reluctant, Namaan agrees, follows the prophet's command, and is healed.

8 **Namaan's gifts**

- *So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy."* – 1 Kings 5:5-6

9 **Namaan's gifts**

- Namaan had brought what was really a small fortune with him as "gifts" – essentially as money to pay for the healing.
- It was not uncommon for prophets or seers in this culture to accept large sums of money for a favorable prophecy or other supernatural act (e.g. Balaam).

10 **1 Kings 5:15-16**

- *Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant." But he [Elisha] said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I*

stand, I will receive none.” And he [Namaan] urged him to take it, but he [Elisha] refused.

11 **Worthy of his hire**

- Scripturally, there are no prohibitions against someone in the ministry accepting payment for the service that they render:
- *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”* – 1 Timothy 5:17-18

12 **Elisha’s refusal**

- We are not given a reason for why Elisha refuses the payment from Namaan – he certainly did not refuse the generosity of the Shunaamite woman and her husband.
- There are, however, a number of good reasons that Elisha might have refused these lavish gifts:

13 **Elisha’s refusal**

- 1) The extent of the gifts – the gifts were far beyond what Elisha would have ever needed. A talent is approximately 75 pounds, and a shekel is about 11 grams.
- Thus, Namaan’s gift would have been 750 lbs. of silver, and 2,122 troy ounces of silver.
 - \$3,666,816 in gold
 - \$371,858 in silver
 - \$20,000 in clothing

14 **The food that is needful**

- *Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the Lord?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.* – Proverbs 8:30

15 **Elisha’s refusal**

- 2) The intent of the gift that Namaan brought was not to reward Elisha as a faithful servant of God (as was the Shunaamite’s generosity), but rather to purchase a miracle.
- For Elisha to accept would thus be giving the appearance or setting the precedent that the blessings of God could be bought and sold – regardless of Namaan’s changed intent.

16 **1 Kings 5:19-20**

- *But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, “See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him.”*

17 **1) Have a good excuse**

- Every great failure begins with a good excuse.
- In this case, Gehazi’s excuse for his greed is the fact that Namaan is a Syrian, and Elisha has let him off far too easy given that he is one of Israel’s enemies.
- Great moral failures begin when we try to justify our behavior by what we or others do or don’t deserve.

18 **1 Kings 5:21-22**

- *So Gehazi followed Naaman. And when Naaman saw someone running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him and said, “Is all well?” And he said, “All is well. My master has sent me to say, ‘There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing.’”*

19 **2) Make it about you**

- Gehazi is 100% focused on his own self-interest and happiness.
- Ironically, the more focused we are on ourselves, the less-likely we are to see the ultimate consequences of our decisions.
- The moment you become the focus of your ministry, you are already headed down the path toward failure.

20 **3) Have a good lie**

- Gehazi's lie is that two poor, destitute prophets have come up to visit Elisha, and that Elisha would now like a change of clothes and some silver to give to them.
- Naamaan, young in his faith and implicitly trusting this supposed man of God, is only too eager to help.
- Very often this lie takes the form of what sounds like very good intentions.

21 **1 Kings 5:23-24**

- *And Naaman said, "Be pleased to accept two talents." And he urged him and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and laid them on two of his servants. And they carried them before Gehazi. And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and put them in the house, and he sent the men away, and they departed.*

22 **1 Kings 5:25-26**

- *He went in and stood before his master, and Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant went nowhere." But he said to him, "Did not my heart go when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it a time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants?"*

23 **4) Be sure your sin will find you out**

- Elisha was frequently told things by God before or during when they actually took place – Gehazi was even witness to this a few times.
- Thus, it is not at all unusual to find that Elisha knows the truth of what Gehazi just did.
- When you are in the ministry, you can be confident of one thing above all else: *the truth will out.*

24 **1 Kings 5:27**

- *Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever." So he went out from his presence a leper, like snow.*

25 **Gehazi's leprosy**

- Leprosy was a flesh-eating fungus (fungus feed on what is dead or rotting) that made you unfit for fellowship or for worship.
- Gehazi's soul had been in a state of spiritual leprosy for some time now.
 - This may have been why God refused to work through him
 - Ultimately, this physical manifestation of leprosy was only an external picture of the state of his heart.

26 **Self-examination**

- What is your ministry?
- What is the *why* of your ministry?
- Do you treat your calling to ministry as some kind of spiritual street-credit?
- In what ways does your ministry continue when you leave the church building?
- Do you justify activities or attitudes based on what you or others deserve?