



Tom C. McKenney
P.O. Box 413
Marion, KY 42064

WORDS FOR LIVING MINISTRIES

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Phone/Fax (270) 965-5060
E-mail: wflm@bellsouth.net
wordsforliving7@gmail.com

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Dear Ones,

I am once more back home, recovering. I have had the surgical placement of a new aortic valve, and the placement of a dual chamber pacemaker. I don't feel quite like the Six Million Dollar man yet, but my patched together heart is working fine and I have, literally, a new lease on life.

The last four years of a cycle of injury, surgery, therapy and recovery have left behind an unfinished book, a great deal of important writing projects hanging in limbo and a lot of unanswered mail to be dealt with. I am now trying to get my feet back under me and go back to work. I want to go to New Orleans to make some plans with my secular publisher, who is also a good friend.

My work on the Bible Study Guide goes on, fine-tuning the text, and I love it. Our excellent Bible Class is still meeting in its virtual classroom, which my daughter Susan set up with Zoom; and, with each book we study, excellent editing and refining occur.

Thank you for caring, praying and for your patience with me.

--Tom



Tom with Susan at digital Sunday morning Bible Study

Introducing Food for Thought: My daughter, Sally, and her husband, Joe Mahoney, have for years gone to a nursing home on Sundays to encourage, teach and conduct small-scale church services. Sally will begin to put some of these brief lessons into written form and email them once or twice a month to the WFLM email list. This newsletter includes the first one of these "Food for Thought" small-scale teachings. If you'd like to receive them by email, please let Sally know by emailing her at wordsforliving7@gmail.com (a gmail account set up for this purpose).

Food for Thought: the Story of Naaman (II Kings 5)

There is much to glean in the story of Naaman, the Syrian officer who was healed of leprosy. This is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject, but let's take a look.

One of the first things to note about Naaman is that he was, well, a Syrian. At this point in history, Syria is a dangerous super-power north of Israel and not at all Israel's friend; however, it is a Syrian whom God will heal (Jesus highlights this point in Luke 4). Naaman, furthermore, is not just a Syrian, but the highest officer in the Syrian army. This is the man whom God will heal. It is a good reminder that God often does things we don't expect.

A young Israeli girl is captured in one of Syria's forays into Israel, and she becomes a servant to Naaman's wife. This young serving girl tells her mistress that there is a prophet in Israel who truly walks in the power of God (Elisha) and that she wishes Naaman could go to him and be healed. One conclusion to be drawn from this is that this girl could have responded to her experience of being captured and carried away into Syria by developing an abiding spirit of resentment and bitterness, but she didn't. If she had, she wouldn't have shared the information that could help Naaman. A miracle will occur, partly because this girl chose not harbor and feed bitterness.

The girl's voluntary and sincere concern for Naaman also tells us that Naaman had to have been a person of integrity (presumably his wife was also). Otherwise the girl wouldn't have cared about him and wouldn't have wanted to help him. This is a good reminder that the way we behave (with integrity, fairness, mercy, etc.) really does make a difference—to God, to ourselves, and to the people around us.

Naaman's wife tells him about what the Israeli serving girl has said, and he and his men decide to seek out this healer in Israel. They make a trip to Samaria in the Northern Kingdom of Israel with a letter of introduction from the Syrian King. Naaman first makes a humorous (to us) visit at the court of King Ahab (which terrifies Ahab because the King of Syria sent a letter with Naaman which is worded in such a way that it looks like he expects Ahab himself to heal Naaman of leprosy). Then Elisha sends a message to the court telling Naaman and his men to come to him. When Naaman arrives, Elisha gives him a message telling him to wash in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman is angry. If he needed a bath, he says, he could've stayed in Syria to do that; then he leaves in a huff. Naaman had imagined Elisha coming to him in person and waving his hand over Naaman's body or something more like what one might associate with a supernatural situation. This is a good reminder that the way God does things is often very different from what we expect and that we fail sometimes to receive a blessing because we are angry when He doesn't do things in the manner we had envisioned.

As Naaman heads home, his men speak up to him and say, "If the prophet had asked you to do something difficult or huge, would you have done it?" (they know Naaman would have). They go on: "Why not go back and do the small thing he asked?" Naaman sees that their point is a good one and heads back to Elisha. Here are additional things to notice. First, Naaman is someone capable of seeing reason and open to a valid appeal or objection; he listens to his men and thinks about what they said. Naaman's men probably deserve even more credit. They had to have been brave to challenge him (they could be killed simply for angering him). To be brave and take that risk, they had to have loved him. This is a good reminder that it takes courage and love to bring about that which is good. Also, we are again reminded that Naaman was a man of integrity and good to his men. If he were not, they wouldn't have taken that risk for him.

Naaman returns and does what Elisha had bidden him do, and he is healed. In this he rejoices. Then, however, he sees that his encounter with Elisha and God are going to change things. He can tell now that the God of Israel is real and that other gods are not (including Rimmon of Syria). Naaman says he will no longer worship or make sacrifices to Rimmon. This is a

good reminder that real faith changes our lives, changes our behavior.



Naaman is healed

Naaman is worried, though, because one of his jobs is to help the feeble Syrian king hobble into the temple of Rimmon, and he asks that God would pardon him when he performs his duties in the Temple of Rimmon. Elisha tells him to go in peace. This is a good reminder that it is important to seek God's will regarding difficult situations in this life. Also, the fact that God showed mercy and understanding to Naaman regarding this situation doesn't mean that we have license to do whatever we want to, but it does remind us that some of God's answers are not of the one-size-fits-all variety.

As the story nears its ending, Naaman offers Elisha costly gifts. Elisha demurs, but his servant Gehazi is overcome by temptation and follows Naaman down the road and lies in order to get some of Naaman's gifts. This is a sobering side story. Gehazi did this sinful thing after serving Elisha for quite some time; this was not his first day at work. He knew Elisha's God was real, yet acted as if God wouldn't notice or care. This is a good reminder that nobody is beyond temptation. This is why we are called to be diligent about it. --Sally

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## **Milestones**

**Died:** 8 March 2020. Franklin Holland in Cantonment, FL. Frank was formerly of Monroe County, KY where he was a long time and beloved Veterinarian. He and his wife, Jean, were long-time, faithful and consistent Believers' Retreat Board members. If there was one way to describe Frank, one would say, "you can count on Frank in good times as well as hard times."

## **A Final Word**

Treasure and use each day as if it were your last, and never give up hope: God has a limitless supply of new beginnings, and He makes beautiful things out of broken pieces.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sally".