

I. Introduction

- A. Welcome to Neighborhood.
- B. This past week, I've been blown away by what God is doing through all the people of Neighborhood. The fourth step of the Grace Pathway is God Uses You. He does use you. And me. And all our grace-motivated service combines to this beautiful messy, grace-filled thing called Neighborhood.
- C. Last weekend, we saw people in our church make the most dramatic, impactful decision a human can make. They received Jesus as their Savior, and were saved. Sixty five people in our services. And in our junior high group, 10 students the same day.
- D. It's awesome.
- E. But so is this. We're testing different ways to deliver our ministry and messages online. And last week, for the first time ever, we tested Facebook Live.
- F. While I was here, leading people in a prayer of salvation, one of our pastors was online. He told people who were viewing, that if they received Christ, to just type YES, or COUNT ME IN, in the comment box on Facebook.
- G. Well, three people did that, and another one later, so four...and it just blows my mind.
- H. But it's cooler than that. Because another person from Neighborhood was joining us online too... he was on vacation, in Hawaii, watching on Facebook live.
- I. When he saw people say yes to Jesus, do you know what he did? He replied "Welcome to God's Family" to each one as they were being saved. So I'm in Redding, people are watching from wherever, and he's in Hawaii welcoming people into God's family. I think that's amazing.
- J. But it gets even better.
- K. This guy from Hawaii texted me to say that one of those people had basically died and been resuscitated, and was watching from a hospital bed when he received Christ. Here I am preaching dry bones and life from death, and this guy is experiencing it literally, physically, and spiritually.
- L. There is no greater miracle than that. The gospel is the power of God.
- M. The man in the hospital posted it on Facebook. I asked his permission to share what he posted, and here it is:
 - 1. Saved by Jesus (you know how you can set your status to Engaged, or Married, or whatever? His says Saved By Jesus.)
 - 2. Had a seizure last night and had to be brought back to life by my wife and mom and the paramedics. Had to get a life flight to Mercy in Redding. All I know is that God was watching over me because I am still here today! I got to watch the service online this morning and got to give myself to Jesus! Thank you Neighborhood for the online stream for this to be able to happen! Thank you God!!!
- N. Amazing.
- O. Can I give you one more?
- P. Another man who received Jesus last Sunday called the office on Monday. He said, "When I was 9 I was baptized as a Mormon, but that didn't mean anything to me. Yesterday, I was saved by Jesus. I want to know if I should be baptized again." Pastor Ken went over to his house, and said the man went over the whole sermon perfectly and understood every part. He said, "I've been searching all my life."
- Q. Ken said, "Let me ask you. When you're searching for your keys and you find them, what do you stop doing?"
- R. "I stop searching."
- S. "That's right," Ken said. "When you found Jesus, you found the keys to everything. You can stop searching now."
- T. That man is very sick. He is making end of life provisions, right now. And today, in Ken's office, he will be baptized by sprinkling, because baptism by immersion would be too much for him.
- U. I am blown away.
- V. This is the true power of God. God saves you. God blesses you. God grows you. God uses you. The gospel never loses its power.
- W. And here it is again, in an ancient story of a man with a very difficult problem.

II. Naaman the Leper

- A. *Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but... (2 Kings 5:1, NKJV).*
 - 1. His name is Naaman. He is a commander in the army of Syria. These were neighbors of Israel.
 - 2. Don't miss what the Bible says here. Then by him, this man who did not worship God, but worshiped idols, by him the Lord, Yahweh, the invisible, creator God of the Jews, had given victory to Syria.
 - 3. Even when people don't realize it, God is involved in their lives. And this is lesson number one.
 - a) *Lesson 1. God is Sovereign: he is the caring and powerful ruler of my life and my world.*
 - 4. He rules all things, governs all things, and puts limits on all things bad. He owns the start button. He owns the stop button. On everything. There is no one above him. He needs no counselor.
 - 5. He's more mighty than governments.
 - 6. He's more powerful than armies.
 - 7. His will reigns supreme.
 - 8. God found a man named Naaman who wasn't even thinking about him. He was a military man, a noble profession. He lived in a nation that didn't even worship the living God.
 - 9. Yet God was involved in his life. By him, it says, the Lord had given victory to Syria.
 - 10. Everything's good, and he is successful.
 - 11. But there's something bad in his life.
- B. *Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper. (2 Kings 5:1, NKJV).*
 - 1. Leprosy today is called Hansen's disease.
 - 2. It is a bacterial infection that causes skin sores and nerve damage throughout the body. It's disfiguring and painful.

3. It's also contagious through close and repeated contact with body fluids.
4. In the Bible, it is also a cause of uncleanness. A person with leprosy in Bible days became an outcast. They were isolated. They were avoided. They were ritually unclean. It was a pretty horrible thing to have.
5. And this man Naaman who was so successful, had this difficult problem in his life. So lesson number 2, which is very familiar to most of us.
 - a) *Lesson 2. This fallen world is a morally broken pain machine.*
6. This goes back almost to the beginning. God created a good world. It was beautiful, and there was no sorrow, no sickness, no pain, and no death. But when we humans pushed back against God, and when we sinned, we opened the door to everything bad. WE did that, and we can't blame God.
7. In theology, this is called The Fall. The fall introduced a twist into the fabric of the universe. Everything is messed up. Everyone is messed up. The fall distorted your mind, your will, and your emotions. Most of you is shut down. Because the morally broken pain machine is messing with you every single day.
8. Nobody gets a pass. Everybody is affected. Even the successful. Even a hero like Naaman.
9. But you say, Bill, how does lesson 1 work with lesson 2? If God is sovereign, why doesn't he just stop the pain machine from chewing us up?
- C. *And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife. Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus said the girl who is from the land of Israel." (2 Kings 5:2-4, NKJV).*
 1. So, the pain machine keeps grinding away. This is a tragedy for the young girl from the land of Israel. It's a tragedy for her mom, dad, and her village.
 2. And now, she is Naaman's servant, his slave. Pain machine, pain machine, pain machine.
 3. But something is happening. This girl has the solution to Naaman's problem. And she's in Naaman's home.
 4. How did that happen?
 5. The pain machine got her. Something happened to her that she prayed against. Something happened to Naaman that he prayed against. It was the pain machine.
 6. Where is God when the pain machine is doing its worst?
 7. He is still sovereign.
 8. He is still the caring and powerful ruler of my life and my world.
 9. But he is not shutting off the Pain Machine. This is the worst thing in the world.
 10. We've all been there. This is the hardest dilemma about God to make sense of. It's the second biggest objection to Christianity and to God.
 11. It's called The Problem of Pain, or the Problem of Suffering.
 12. It's Christianity's second biggest problem, and people have been talking about it and philosophizing about it since the dawn of civilization.
 13. By the way the first biggest problem is easier. People want to be their own gods, but that's for another sermon.
 14. The second biggest problem is this man right here with leprosy, and this young woman who's been taken a slave.
 - a) And our lesson number three is this:
 - b) *3. God is not the pain machine.*
 15. It is not his creation, not his energy, and not his will for the world.
 16. The Fall is the event in history when the human race chose against God. We did this at the dawn of civilization through our earthly father Adam. We jumped into sin, eyes wide open. The Fall opened the door to evil. It invited death and cruelty into the world. It distorted our nature and triggered our self-destruct sequence. We asked for it.
 17. The pain machine is what happens—what must happen, and only what can happen—when rational beings exist in the shadow of a holy Creator and reject his will and ways.
 18. When I was in high school, my chemistry teacher did a cool demonstration. She painted a chemical called phosphorous onto a piece of paper.
 19. A few seconds later, it burst into flames.
 20. Because when phosphorus is brought into an atmosphere of oxygen, it burns. That's its nature.
 21. And when moral beings like us are brought into an atmosphere of a holy and pure God, we burn, in a sense. We feel the pain of being less than we were made to be. The pain machine is what happens when rational beings exit in the shadow of a holy Creator, carrying the corruption called sin.
 22. God didn't cause that. We all put ourselves into that position. But there is good news today, and here it is:
 - a) *4. Though God doesn't cause evil, he can hijack evil and use it for his own purposes.*
 23. If you are hurting today, if you are sad today, if you are in pain today, if you are feeling the effects of evil today, then I think God brought you here to be reminded of this great truth. God is not the pain machine. He is not the author of evil. He hates it more than you do.
 24. Just as Naaman hates his leprosy. And the little girl hates her slavery.
 25. But now, she mentions that there's a prophet back in Israel that might bring hope.
 26. After some back and forth with the king of Israel, Naaman comes to see this prophet. He shows up at Elisha's house with a big entourage. Soldiers and servants and all that.
 27. Here's what happens:
- D. *Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean." (2 Kings 5:9, 10, NKJV).*
 1. Elisha the prophet is sitting inside. He's reading a book. He's drinking dark roast coffee. There's a fire in the corner, and some bread on a plate. An intern is sitting in a chair dozing.

2. There's noise outside, and then a knock at the door.
 3. Elisha nods at his intern, and keeps reading. The intern answers the door. He comes back to Elisha.
 4. "Sir, there's a man outside, I think he's pretty important. He has leprosy, and he's heard that you can do miracles. So he's travelled all the way to Israel, and he would like to meet with you."
 5. Elisha takes sip of coffee. Smacks his lips. Turns the page in his book. Thinks for a moment...
 6. "Tell him to go and wash in the Jordan river seven times, and his flesh will be made whole, and he will become ceremonially clean."
 7. Elisha waves his intern away and returns to his book.
 8. The intern looks at him for a moment, turns, runs to the door, opens it, looks at Naaman's feet, and says, "My master says to go wash the Jordan River seven times, and you will be made whole, and clean. Um... have a nice day."
 9. He slams the door.
 10. This is what you call really bad customer service.
 11. Naaman isn't just mad, he's furious. We'll get to him in a moment. But what's the lesson?
 - a) *Lesson 5. One of God's great purposes is to remind us again and again we're not the boss of the universe.*
 12. We have great power, but we're not in charge.
 13. The pain machine makes that crystal clear, don't you think? Here is Naaman in his military dress. Polished metals. Insignia of the highest rank. Crisp attention. Glory. He's the commander of the Syrian army. He's in charge of everybody. He's used to getting his way. People snap to at his command.
 14. Even though the pain machine has disrupted his life, he still thinks he's the boss.
 15. So when Elisha breaks every custom of hospitality and doesn't even meet him at the door. And it was Elisha who invited him, back in verse 8.
 16. You're not the boss, Naaman. You can't control everyone. And you can't control everything.
 17. How do you like them apples? Not so much.
- E. *But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.' Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. (2 Kings 5:11, 12, NKJV).*
1. Naaman had an ideal picture in his mind. He wanted magic. He wanted Elisha to wave his hand and make it go away. He wanted the easy button. He wanted something cool and grandiose.
 2. This was not it.
 3. Elisha sends him to the Jordan River. It isn't pretty. The water is brown. It's muddy along the banks. Whatever the Jordan River is, it's not the Shire. It's not the pretty river in a painting meandering through the glen with a little cottage beside it.
 4. It's just a plain, unremarkable, not pretty river.
 5. How do you react when the reality falls short of your ideal picture?
 6. Naaman is finished. He's out of there. He's mad and ready to leave. I don't blame him.
 7. Because dealing with God always messes with your preconceptions, and planned-out routes, and ideal picture.
 - a) *Lesson 6. When dealing with the Giant Pain Machine, your job is FAITH, God's job is OUTCOMES.*
 8. Naaman wanted the high way of something impressive and magical. God sent him the low way of faith. Take me at my word. Believe me. But Naaman refuses. He turns around his chariot and starts to head home.
- F. *And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" (2 Kings 5:13, NKJV).*
1. Naaman would rather hand the giant pain machine a victory than humble himself before the will of God.
 2. Think about that. I heard my hillbilly grandma tell somebody, you would cut off your nose to spite your face.
 3. I'm still not sure what that means, but I think it fits here.
 4. Because Naaman's people rush up to him, and they say, "Would you rather stay proud and remain leprous or humble yourself and be healed?"
 5. Boss, he just said wash and be clean.
 6. Kind of like believe and be saved.
 7. It's too simple. It's too humble.
 8. It's demeaning. Just like coming to Christ. You want to do something, You want to show off your performance, or your religion, or your rituals, or your obedience.
 9. God just says shut up and look at Jesus. See him paying your way. See him paying in blood. See him doing all the heavy lifting. Just believe. Just have faith.
 10. Even in your trials and even when the pain machine has its way with you. Keep looking to Jesus. Just believe. Just have faith.
 11. And here's a huge lesson God teaches me over and over again:
 - a) *7. In the spiritual realm, victory isn't the victory; faith is the victory.*
 - b) *And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. (1 John 5:4, NKJV).*
 12. Naaman, what if you dip in the Jordan River and you're not made whole? Was it all a waste?
 13. No.
 14. Because the faith to go to the Jordan is worth more than all the healing in the world.
 - a) *Because when you keep faith with God, God keeps faith with you by piling up treasures in heaven that will blow your mind even if you never see a good result on earth.*
 - b) *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (2 Corinthians 4:17, NKJV).*

15. Faith in God is never wasted. Faith in his word is never a mistake. Faith in his promises. Faith in his character. Faith that God is true no matter what the evidence says.
 16. That faith is working for you, up in heaven. It is making rewards and glories and superpowers and privileges that other people up there won't have.
 17. Your faith to go down to the ugly Jordan and dip... that faith makes the angels cheer, and makes the demons flee, and makes God light up heaven with a smile.
 18. Faith is the victory. One more day. One more prayer. One more obedience. One more gift. One more day of opening your Bible and building your faith. It's not a waste of time.
- G. *So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. (2 Kings 5:14, NKJV).*
1. Can you picture that?
 2. Naaman gallops up to the river, his chariot raising a cloud of dust. He's still angry. But he's got faith.
 3. He steps off his chariot. His staff is all around. They watch as Naaman sets down his shield and his sword. He removes his belt and lays it on the ground. He sets the medals of his achievements out of site. Strips off his cloak. Lays down his uniform. Comes empty handed and stripped down to this tantalizing offer of grace.
 4. He wades into the muddy Jordan.
 5. What are the voices in his head telling him?
 - a) This is stupid. This will never work. So humiliating. Why did you ever come to this man of God? What will people think?
 6. He looks back at shore. His staff is holding their breath. They have fought for him. And he has led them. They have never seen him so needy and weak.
 7. He rubs the spot on his arms. His neck. His chest. The growing whiteness of leprosy. The problem he cannot solve.
 8. It is time.
 9. He bends his knees and dips his head beneath the water. He feels the current pressing by. He stands and looks at his arms. Still the open sores. Still the leprosy.
 10. But faith would mean dipping seven times.
 11. So he does.
 12. Two times. Three times. Four times. Five times. Six times.
 13. He doesn't know what to think. He doesn't know what will happen. His arms are open sores. His back and neck and fingers show the ravages of a disease no one can cure. The pain machine has owned this part of his life for years.
 14. Naaman looks to shore again. Sees his men there, watching and waiting.
 15. He dips a seventh time. The water pushes against him. He rises. The water sheds off of him. He can scarcely bear to open his eyes.
 16. And when he does... when he looks at the arms that bore the ravages of leprosy and rubs his neck, the wounds are gone. The skin is whole. He's clean. He's healed. He's whole.
 17. And he puts his faith in the living God, and never worships an idol again.
 18. But don't miss the big point: what does he go to God to get? Healed of his leprosy.
 19. What does he get? The skin of a little child.
 20. His flesh was restored, and he was clean. That is grace.
 21. And his flesh was like that of a little child. That's amazing grace.
 22. So there's one more lesson, and I'm done.
 - a) *Lesson 8. God's heavenly realm is an infinitely giant GRACE MACHINE, and the Grace Machine chews up the PAIN MACHINE and spits it out in the end.*
 23. Who is the forgotten hero of this story?
 24. A little girl who's been taken captive, torn from her family, and made a slave. No, God doesn't turn off the pain machine. No, God doesn't answer every prayer with a yes. No, for every Naaman who is healed, there are ten thousand others who aren't.
 25. So, what do we do?
 26. Give up hope?
 27. Never. We believe in a God who loves us. In his great plan, no suffering is wasted. No tear is wasted. God keeps track. And one way or another, grace wins in the end.