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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

AUGUST 12, 2007

PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR FRY: We have been doing vacation Bible  
2 school for families because we have been doing the Bible  
3 story in worship as part of the message.

4 By way of review, Pastor Mark started us off with  
5 the first chapter of Joshua and talked with us about how it  
6 is that Joshua was chosen by God to fill the boots of Moses,  
7 pretty big boots to fill.

8 So God told Joshua be strong and courageous, you're  
9 going to be able to do it, be strong and very courageous,  
10 told him that three times.

11 In the next week Mark talked about Rahab, the  
12 prostitute, and how it was that she protected two Israelite  
13 spies so that they could come into the city of Jericho and  
14 prepare it for the battle that was to come, the battle of the  
15 falling of the walls of Jericho.

16 And then in the third week Mark spoke about Joshua  
17 3-4, and remember he has been teaching us that at the end of  
18 January we had a retreat, there were about 70 leaders that  
19 met with Pastor Mike Breen at Camp Carol Joy Holling.

20 And we listened to God together and the very first  
21 word that came up was Joshua 3-4.

22 At the time we didn't know if that meant Joshua,  
23 Chapters 3 and 4, or Joshua 3, Verse 4.

24 We immediately looked up the verse which says follow  
25 it, for you have not passed this way before, and believed

1 strongly that God has been urging Bethany and her leaders and  
2 her pastors to be strong and courageous and to follow God's  
3 leading and to listen to God's voice because we have not  
4 passed this way before.

5 And so he expounded on that and that of course was  
6 when Joshua took the people of Israel across the Jordan River  
7 into the promised land. That would have been a rush.

8 And then we talked about the walls of Jericho coming  
9 down and we had an opportunity that week a couple weeks ago  
10 to see a group of people that are meeting every other week in  
11 their homes.

12 And death touched that life group and they stood  
13 before you with the woman and the children whose father was  
14 killed and the ex-husband of that woman.

15 She stood up here, I know that really touched your  
16 heart, you couldn't believe that death had become so close  
17 seven days earlier and she was standing before you.

18 But she was able to do that and the walls that are  
19 so often erected around tragedy and death, like fear and  
20 depression and hopelessness, those walls, you saw them, they  
21 just dissolved.

22 And we could see that because of the support of that  
23 life group.

24 And we talked about how it is that we want that sort  
25 of thing for every one of you, because we all come up against

1 those kind of walls daily in our life.

2 Last week Pastor Mark talked about Balaam and his  
3 donkey and the first recorded episode of road rage.

4 And I learned so much last week as we talked about  
5 Balaam and his donkey.

6 And I loved that when Pastor Mark said Balaam wasn't  
7 even surprised that his donkey was talking to him.

8 That was one of my favorite lines, but we learned  
9 last week that as God's people we know the difference between  
10 right and wrong and we often don't say no when we know that  
11 no needs to be the answer.

12 Sometimes we don't say yes when we know that yes  
13 needs to be the answer.

14 We looked at some great Bible stories during  
15 vacation Bible school, and today another one, the commander  
16 Naaman who was healed.

17 It's called the healing of Naaman. It's found in  
18 the second Book of Kings.

19 I invite you to turn to that. It's on page 340 in  
20 the pew Bible, 2 Kings, Chapter 5, verses 1 to 15.

21 "Naaman, commander of the king of Aram, was a great  
22 man and in high favor with his master, because by him the  
23 Lord had given victory to Aram.

24 "The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from  
25 leprosy.

1           "Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a  
2 young girl captive from the land of Israel and she served  
3 Naaman's wife.

4           "She said to her mistress, 'If only my lord were  
5 with the prophet who is in Samaria. He would cure him of his  
6 leprosy.'

7           "So Naaman went and told his lord just what the girl  
8 from the land of Israel had said.

9           "And the king of Aram said, 'Go then and I will send  
10 along a letter to the king of Israel.'

11           "He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six  
12 thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments.

13           "He brought the letter to the king of Israel which  
14 read, 'When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to  
15 you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.'

16           "When the king of Israel read the letter he tore his  
17 clothes and said, 'Am I God, to give death or life, that this  
18 man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look  
19 and see how he's trying to pick a quarrel with me.'

20           "But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king  
21 of Israel had torn his clothes he sent a message to the king.  
22 'Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he  
23 may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.'

24           "So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and  
25 halted at the entrance of Elisha's house.

1           "Elisha sent a messenger to him saying, 'Go wash in  
2 the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored and  
3 you shall be clean.'

4           "But Naaman became angry and went away saying, 'I  
5 thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and  
6 call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand  
7 over the spot and cure the leprosy. Are not Abana and  
8 Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters  
9 of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?'

10           He turned and went away in a rage, but his servants  
11 approached and said to him, 'Father, if the prophet had  
12 commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have  
13 done it? How much more, when all he said to you was wash and  
14 be clean?'

15           "So he went down and emersed himself seven times in  
16 the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God.

17           "His flesh was restored like the flesh of a young  
18 boy and he was clean."

19           I'm going to stop at that point. We are going to  
20 look at that fantastic story, but before we do I wonder if  
21 some of you saw the lead article in the Post Gazette a couple  
22 weeks ago.

23           This was the caption. "We're Really Blessed. It's  
24 A Miracle".

25           That was a direct quote from Kerry Fishbaugh, who is

1 a member of our Bethany family, and her son Jake plays in the  
2 Forever His high school worship band, and her husband Jeff  
3 also plays in our worship band.

4 And maybe you remember that in March we began  
5 praying for that young man, Tommy, and for Jake, right after  
6 their accident.

7 It was a fantastic article. "Families View Their  
8 Sons' Recovery As A Miracle".

9 The first line, "An Elkhorn High School senior, who  
10 was in a coma in March after a car accident, is back on his  
11 feet and back to swimming.

12 "The accident, which happened March 4th, left Thomas  
13 Leidenthal in critical condition, and his buddy Jake  
14 Fishbaugh injured as well.

15 "Jake was able to return to school after a couple of  
16 weeks, but Tommy had a long and somewhat miraculous  
17 recovery."

18 And one of the pictures down here is, the caption  
19 says three months after the car accident Tommy Leidenthal was  
20 swimming with his team. Absolutely miraculous.

21 Maybe you remember one weekend he came into worship  
22 and he had a helmet on.

23 And the reason he had that helmet on is because they  
24 had removed half the bone of his skull because it was  
25 fractured so that could be healed and then put in an acrylic

1 bone. Just amazing.

2 He really should not have lived, and Kerry is quoted  
3 in here as saying, "We are really pleased and blessed. It's  
4 a miracle."

5 Robin, Tommy's mother, said about graduation, "He  
6 walked across the platform with a cap on his head, the whole  
7 nine yards. It was very emotional. We were thrilled,"  
8 because they didn't expect him to be able to do that.

9 They didn't expect him to walk across there, let  
10 alone have the mental capacity to finish two more classes in  
11 that time between March and May.

12 Miraculous, and this miracle of healing, as I read  
13 through this article, it made me think that in order to  
14 respond to God's healing power in our lives we must take some  
15 steps.

16 And the steps that Tommy and his parents, and Kerry  
17 and Jake, and all those people, their families and friends,  
18 the steps they took were physical steps, hard work for Tommy,  
19 Jake had some come back as well, but it involved physical  
20 work, emotional work.

21 You can imagine each and every day the setbacks, the  
22 going forward, the emotions, working through the feelings.

23 And then, of course, all the prayers, and then all  
24 the decisions.

25 In the Bible God says love me, people, love me with

1 your heart, your feelings; your mind, your thoughts; your  
2 soul, your spirit; and your strength, right? Your body.

3 So it makes sense to me that healing is going to  
4 involve all four of those things.

5 It's going to be a physical work. It's going to be  
6 an emotional work, a spiritual work, and a mental work.

7 Kerry is quoted as saying, "I'm the type of person  
8 who says I can handle it myself, but I asked God to help and  
9 he sent me these people. I let people into our homes, our  
10 lives, and our hearts."

11 Kerry and Jeff have a tremendous faith, but she is  
12 telling us in this article that this even stretched her.

13 It humbled her to let these people into their lives  
14 and into their hearts and into their home.

15 It strikes me that healing is an active process;  
16 it's not a passive process, and that's what the story of  
17 Naaman teaches us as well.

18 There are steps that our spirit must go through in  
19 order to respond to God's healing power, and that's what we  
20 are going to look at today.

21 Let's go to 2 Kings, Chapter 5, and take a look at  
22 this great story of the healing of Naaman.

23 It starts out by telling us that Naaman was the  
24 commander in chief of the army of Aram. Aram is present day  
25 Syria.

1           He was a foreigner. He wasn't one of God's own. He  
2 was not an Israelite. He was a foreigner.

3           And so was Rahab, remember? She was a foreigner.  
4 And so was Esther, remember?

5           There are so many stories in the Bible that teach us  
6 that God wants to reach out to all people, to all of his  
7 people.

8           And he uses people that are often from foreign lands  
9 to help us understand his grace and his healing power.

10           Naaman is the commander of the army of the king of  
11 Aram. He was a great man and in high favor with his master.

12           He was well respected. He was a mighty warrior,  
13 successful.

14           This is what we learn in the first verse, a  
15 successful, powerful man, not really in need of anything, can  
16 do without anybody's help.

17           Except it tells us at the end of that verse that he  
18 suffers from leprosy.

19           If you have good eyes you can see in your Bible that  
20 leprosy is a term for several skin diseases, precise meaning  
21 uncertain.

22           He has a skin disease. We don't really know exactly  
23 what it looks like, but here is what I was thinking.

24           He's a warrior, and that would be so irritating,  
25 because when you go into battle you would be sweating.

1           I can just imagine that that would be really  
2 irritating for a mighty warrior.

3           So while he had gotten used to being like that, and  
4 had been successful at it, it was still a part of his life.

5           And a slave girl tells him that if he were to go to  
6 a prophet in Israel he could be cured.

7           What we don't know is how long it took Naaman to  
8 think about taking that step toward healing.

9           We don't know that. We don't know if it was five  
10 minutes, or an hour, or a day, or if it took him a year to  
11 decide to change his life.

12           You know what that is like, at least it's familiar,  
13 to think about changing your life.

14           Seeking a change in your behavior is sometimes  
15 daunting because it's easier to just stay the way you are.

16           An alcoholic thinks to himself, will I be as  
17 interesting without a drink in my hand?

18           A woman who has been abused by a spouse might think  
19 to herself, will I be loveable? Would anybody else love me?  
20 At least I love him. Sometimes it's good, but it's not  
21 always good, but would anybody else love me?

22           The thought of changing our behavior, or our  
23 situation in life, can be daunting, because what is out there  
24 is not what we know.

25           It's not what is familiar, and so that is why I

1 think it's amazing that Naaman, he doesn't need to change,  
2 he's doing fine in life, but he decides that he's going to  
3 go.

4 He takes that first step, and that first step, it  
5 takes so much courage to take that first step toward healing,  
6 but he does it. And so he goes then.

7 In Verse 6, "He went, taking with him ten talents of  
8 silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of  
9 garments."

10 What this teaches me is that after Naaman takes the  
11 first step, this is what this points out to me, he's willing  
12 to invest.

13 He's taking money with him, and he's taking ten  
14 changes of clothes.

15 For that time, that could have been two or three  
16 months? Do you understand?

17 He's willing to invest time and/or money in his  
18 healing.

19 A lot of people aren't willing to invest money in  
20 their healing. They are not willing to invest time.

21 How many times did you go to counseling? Well, we  
22 went twice and after that he didn't want to go anymore.

23 How many times? Twice.

24 If you want healing, you have to stay the course.  
25 You have to go at least six times to see if there is

1 something. It's not going to feel good.

2 What Naaman teaches is the steps toward healing are  
3 most often uncomfortable.

4 We don't want to do it, but I love that he takes a  
5 bunch of money with him, and he takes ten changes of  
6 clothing, because he's teaching us that he's willing to  
7 invest time and money in healing.

8 Now, the next part is kind of interesting, Verse 6  
9 and 7, so he goes to the king of Israel and brings this  
10 letter.

11 And when king of Israel gets the letter he tears his  
12 clothes. In other words, he's upset.

13 And isn't it weird, he goes, "Just look and see how  
14 Naaman is trying to pick a quarrel with me."

15 But what the king of Israel knows is that healing is  
16 not going to come, am I God? I'm not going to heal you.

17 And sometimes this is where we stop. We make a step  
18 toward healing, we get to the counselor's office, and we find  
19 out that that counselor is not going to be able to help us,  
20 so we quit. Forget it.

21 He's made a step, but it's just the wrong one.  
22 That's not what the slave girl said anyway. She said there  
23 is a prophet who is Samaria, not a king.

24 Naaman, it's amazing, he goes, he hears, the prophet  
25 Elisha sends for him, he comes with his horses and chariots

1 and he halts at the entrance of Elisha's house, Verses 8  
2 and 9.

3 He could have quit already, but he doesn't. He  
4 keeps going, because apparently he wants to be healed.

5 He believes in that slave girl from Israel, that she  
6 knows about this God of Israel.

7 So Elisha, and we have to find out who Elisha is.  
8 We are going to do a quick Bible story, jump back with me to  
9 1 Kings 19, Verse 11.

10 Elijah is one of the great prophets of the Bible.  
11 Remember, he is the one that is with Moses and Jesus and  
12 Peter and James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration and  
13 he does fantastic miracles.

14 At 19-11 is that story about him being tired as a  
15 prophet and he just goes to see God, he goes up on this  
16 mountain and it says, "But the Lord was not in the wind, and  
17 the Lord wasn't in the earthquake, but he was in the still  
18 small voice."

19 It's just after that story that the Lord says,  
20 "Elijah, why are you here?"

21 And he says in Verse 14, "I have been very zealous,  
22 Lord. Lord, I have been working hard for you. I alone am  
23 left and they are seeking my life to take it away."

24 In other words, I'm probably going to be dying  
25 pretty soon because so many people have tried to kill me

1 because of my word from you and he's weary and tired.

2 God in Verse 15 gives him three things to do.

3 Return and anoint one king, and another king, and also you  
4 shall anoint Elisha as prophet in your place.

5 So we learn right there, it can be confusing because  
6 Elijah and Elisha sound so much alike, but Elisha was  
7 Elijah's successor, and he was the prophet that God wanted  
8 him to choose in his place.

9 So now go to 2 Kings with me, 2:11, this is a quick  
10 Bible story, it's an aside on Elisha, so Elijah is going to  
11 die just a few chapters later.

12 Do you know who the two people in the Bible are that  
13 did not die but that went up into heaven?

14 Enoch and Elijah are the two people that were  
15 brought up into heaven without dying and here is the account  
16 of Elijah doing that.

17 Chapter 2, Verse 9, when they had crossed over the  
18 Jordan, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you  
19 before I'm taken from you."

20 What a great mentor. What do you need from me  
21 before I die? Before I leave you?

22 And Elisha says, "Please let me inherit a double  
23 share of your spirit."

24 And he responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet,  
25 if you see me as I'm being taken from you, it will be granted

1 you; if not, it will not."

2           Interesting, isn't it, disciples? Remember, we're  
3 learning together that we hear God's voice by seeing, by  
4 hearing, and by feeling.

5           So Elijah says keep looking, and he does, and he  
6 gets a double share of his spirit, and this is how it metes  
7 itself out in the scriptures.

8           Elisha's miracles double the amount of Elijah's  
9 miracles. Isn't that cool?

10           He actually literally did receive the double share  
11 of his spirit and it manifested itself in a double amount of  
12 miracles. That's just awesome to me.

13           That's who Elisha is, okay. We could spend more  
14 time in Elisha and Elijah, but Elisha, as I said, he doubles  
15 the miracles.

16           They are all over 2 Kings 4 and 5, really fun  
17 stories to read. That's who Elisha is, and he sends for  
18 Naaman. Back to the story now.

19           And he says go wash in the Jordan seven times and  
20 your flesh shall be made clean.

21           But Naaman, this is really interesting, Verse 11,  
22 "But Naaman became angry and went away saying, 'I thought  
23 that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on  
24 the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over  
25 the spot and cure the leprosy.'"

1           Isn't that how we want it? God, I don't want to do  
2 anything. Just make it better. Just stop this pain.

3           I don't want to take any steps. I don't want to go  
4 seven steps toward healing. I don't want to.

5           Naaman becomes angry and the Bible says that he goes  
6 away in a rage.

7           But before he does that he makes excuses. Do you  
8 see that?

9           Verse 12, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of  
10 Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not  
11 wash in them and be clean?"

12           The Jordan is dirty. I've got an idea. How about  
13 if we do it my way, Naaman says. So he's making excuses,  
14 like the ones we make.

15           I don't really drink that much. It's your problem.  
16 You go to counseling. It's your fault.

17           I'm not hurting anybody. I'm just in my office by  
18 myself with my computer, I'm not hurting anyone by using  
19 porn.

20           Forget this marriage. Maybe I'll just find somebody  
21 else who will love and appreciate me.

22           And we go off on a rage. That's hard. God says  
23 here, here is a twelve step program. Here's seven steps  
24 towards healing. Here's three. Here's eight counseling  
25 sessions.

1           Can't you just wave your hand and make it go away?

2           Here is the best part of the story, Verse 13, these  
3 are two of his servants, people that respect him, otherwise  
4 they wouldn't call him father, father, we don't get it.

5           "If the prophet had commanded you to do something  
6 difficult, would you not have done it?"

7           You are a powerful warrior. You have done harder  
8 things than going down to a river and dipping.

9           All the guy is doing is saying go wash and be clean.  
10 They hold him accountable.

11           This is key in healing. If you want to make a  
12 change in your life, tell one or two other Christian friends  
13 what you're doing.

14           If you're going to go on a diet and you don't tell  
15 anybody and you eat a whole bag of chocolate chip cookies, it  
16 doesn't matter.

17           Tell someone what you're doing so they can call you  
18 and say how's it going?

19           How's your healing journey going? Have you made  
20 that call? Have you written that letter? Have you prayed  
21 that prayer?

22           It's interesting to me that at the point of  
23 accountability, that's the point at which the Bible says he  
24 went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan  
25 according to the word of the man of the God and his flesh was

1 restored like the flesh of a young boy.

2 Jesus says, unless you become like a little child,  
3 you will not enter the kingdom of God.

4 He was restored like the flesh of a young boy.  
5 Jesus says, unless you become like a little child, you cannot  
6 enter the kingdom of God.

7 We are his children. We are his sons and his  
8 daughters. We bear his image.

9 As women we bear the feminine heart of God. As men  
10 we bear the masculine heart of God.

11 That's what it means, male and female. He created  
12 them. He wants healing for his people.

13 He wants them to be who they have been created to  
14 be, men and women together.

15 There is so much that mars God's original design.  
16 Cancer, I hate it; porn, I hate it; overuse of alcohol and  
17 drugs and food, I hate it.

18 There is so much that mars God's original design for  
19 us as God's people.

20 He wants us to be whole daughters and sons. We are  
21 his children. Unless you become like a little child.

22 His healing is not complete until 15. This is  
23 amazing.

24 He returns to the man of God, that's Elisha, and all  
25 his company.

1           Naaman doesn't care now what anybody thinks of him.  
2 He's had a conversion.

3           He went down, dipped in, and not only was his body  
4 clean, but his spirit was transformed so much so that he  
5 takes his whole entourage with him and says to Elisha now I  
6 know that there is no God in all the earth except the Lord  
7 the God of Israel.

8           He stands in the power of his healing and he says I  
9 know who healed me.

10          He didn't just wave his hand and make it all go  
11 away. I had to actually take some steps.

12          What Naaman teaches us is that there are steps to be  
13 taken toward healing.

14          No matter what it is that is your malady, or  
15 whatever it is that you're anxious about in life, it could be  
16 an addiction, but it could just be depressive thoughts, he  
17 wants you to be healed.

18          And he's not going to wave his hand, but he is going  
19 to challenge you to take some steps.

20          It might be emotional work. It might be physical  
21 work.

22          I just taught a woman yesterday in my office how to  
23 get her anger out with a tennis racquet, because sometimes  
24 grief leaves us angry.

25          What are we going to do with that? Drink? Eat more

1 chocolate?

2           Steps toward healing are physical. That's what  
3 Naaman teaches us today. Physical.

4           Because, remember, God says love me with your  
5 strength.

6           The steps toward healing are emotional. Remember,  
7 God says love me with your heart.

8           The stops toward healing are mental. Remember, God  
9 says love me with your mind.

10           The steps toward healing are spiritual. He says bow  
11 down on your knees and pour out what it is so I can unleash  
12 heaven to help you in your healing. He want us to be healed.

13           In the Book of Revelation, the very last chapter,  
14 there is a vision that John has, and he sees this river going  
15 down the middle of the city, and he sees the beautiful leaves  
16 on either side of the river and he says I saw the tree of  
17 life which is for the healing of the nations.

18           That's you and me. God wants us to live lives that  
19 are whole, and he has powerful healing love.

20           And in order to respond to it we have to go toward  
21 it. We might have to take a few steps.

22           I called Maestro, we have been working together  
23 awhile Thursday and I said, "Do you owe me one?"

24           That was the first line. He said, "I don't think  
25 so."

1 "Well, now I'm going to owe you."

2 So we switched it up, because our musicians are so  
3 fantastic because of Gene's devotion to them, and so we are  
4 going to sing "Down to the River to Pray", one of my  
5 favorites.

6 And what I've always envisioned on this, first we  
7 have sisters, brothers, fathers, mothers, and how about this?

8 Here is a river, these are river rocks, these tiles,  
9 and this is padding in the river in case you would like to  
10 kneel down in the river and take a dip this morning.

11 But I was thinking, during that song wouldn't it be  
12 cool if we saw sisters come up?

13 So maybe you are a sister. If you're a mother and a  
14 sister, just decide what you want to do, sister, mothers,  
15 brothers, fathers, wouldn't it be cool to see this river  
16 today filled with that as we sing that song.

17 Let's respond to God's word today by coming to the  
18 river and realizing that there's healing power there for all  
19 of us today.

20 Lord, we need you to show us the way. Some of us  
21 here today desire healing of their mind, healing of their  
22 soul, their body, their heart.

23 Lord, show us the way, for you invited us to come  
24 down to humble ourselves, to dip into the river of living  
25 water, for out of Jesus' side flowed a river of living water

1 and blood to wash us and strengthen us to be your people in  
2 this world, for you did come for the healing of the nation.

3 Thank you, Lord. Go with us now on our way. And  
4 all of God's people said amen.

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