

## Small Things, Huge Impact

By Vonda Hogle

What kind of mark do you want to leave with your life? Have you thought much about it? To be honest, my thoughts about this are either one extreme or the other. I either think I want the impact of my life to be huge, or I almost get defeated as if I am stuck in the mundane, the everyday ins and outs of life, and think, what I do does not make a difference. I mean, I am never going to be able to touch as many lives as Billy Graham. The story of my life pales in comparison to so many others who have faced persecution for their faith and stood faithful.

When I start to feel overwhelmed by not doing enough to make an impact in grand gestures, I like to put things into perspective with one of my favorite stories found in 2nd Kings Chapter 5. It is a story of a great army strategist, interaction of kings, a huge entourage, tons of swag in silver and gold, a full wardrobe the Kardashians would love to have, and a prophet of God. None of these things are my favorite part of the story, but let me give you a paraphrase.

The story is about a great commander for the nation of Aram named Naaman. He was very successful in battle, which led to his having a great position, wealth, and influence with the king. Naaman also had contracted leprosy. This disease had no cure, so his fame and wealth could do nothing to save him. As a matter of fact, unless something miraculous happened, he would have to leave all that he had behind and become a member of the colony of outcasts who all shared the same disease that would strip him of his position, power, family, and ultimately his life.

At some point in his conquests, he had acquired a young girl from Israel and made her a maid for his wife. This young girl is my favorite part of the story. We don't even know her name – I like to call her Rachael. Here she is in a foreign land, a slave to a people who had captured her and taken her away from all that was familiar. What makes her stand out is that she lived out her faith in a way that was impactful. She knew of the God of Israel and whole-heartedly put her faith and hope in Him. In fact, she had such a great faith in God that she was compelled to tell Naaman's wife about the prophet Elisha, the man of God, in Samaria.

That is all we know about a girl I call Rachael that briefly appears in 2 Kings 5:2-3. It really was a small thing. This is what she said in verse 3: "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy." Two short sentences. Less than 20 words. But the impact was amazing.

Upon hearing this, Naaman went to the king. Sit with that just a moment. On the word of a young servant girl, a foreigner to the country of Aram, this mighty commander goes to the king of the whole nation with what she said. This floors me every time I read it. How did this conversation go?

Naaman: *"King, I don't know if you have noticed, but I've been wearing my gloves quite a bit these days. I suppose it is time that I come clean with you. If I take these gloves off, some of the finger might come, too. You see, I have leprosy."*

King: *"Oh my goodness, Naaman! This is awful! Didn't you pack the hand sanitizer on your last conquest? What a waste of a great commander as yourself, but have you staked out your corner of the outcast community yet? You know we cannot have someone unclean in our midst."*

Naaman: *“Oh, I know, sir, it is awful, but there is something that I heard that may help me.”*

King: *“How far progressed is this leprosy? Is it affecting your mind? Everyone knows there is no cure for it!”*

Naaman: *“Yes, but hear me out. See, on one of our conquests, I brought my wife back, well, a souvenir of sorts. She had been complaining about all the work around the house, so I brought her one of those young Hebrew girls to attend to her. She has worked out well, but she said something to my wife that got us thinking. She said that there is a guy in Samaria who is a prophet for her Hebrew God, the one they call Yahweh. Anyway, she said that if I could just go see him, she is confident that I will be healed.”*

King: *“Let me get this straight – she is a young, female Hebrew, and you are ready to stake your life on what she says?”*

Naaman: *“I know it sounds crazy, but, Your Majesty, if you would see her. I can’t explain it, but there is a hope that just exudes from her. It is contagious. Her confidence in what her God can do, well, it has given me hope that I have not found anywhere else.”*

I’m not sure that was exactly what happened, but verse 5 just says that Naaman told the king what she said. On her word and her word alone, the king’s response was amazing. He wrote a letter of introduction for Naaman to present to the king of Israel and gave Naaman his blessing to go on this quest. Then, on the word of this girl, Naaman assembled an entourage that included 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. Think about the manpower it would take to coordinate and move this caravan into Israel and on to Samaria.

Eventually, they get to Elisha’s door, but Elisha does not go out and meet him. Instead, he sent his messenger with the message for him to go dunk himself in the Jordan River seven times, and he would be healed. You know, at this point, he had to think of my friend, Rachael, back in his home at his wife’s side. Was this a crazy prank on her part? Did she know who he was and how outrageous and disrespectful it was for her to send him on such a wild goose chase?

Naaman was furious and got all caught up in his feelings. He thought Elisha would come out and meet him; thought he would perform some ritual or pray over him and that Yahweh would heal him at that point. Go to the river – the Jordan River to boot – and bob up and down seven times? Ridiculous. Besides, how could this make him clean, especially when he knew there were rivers in his homeland that were much more pristine. That was it; he was out and headed back home to face his doom.

Thankfully, some of his officers were able to put this whole journey into perspective. They said if Elisha would have asked him to do something hard, he would have done it. What did he have to lose? Do the simple thing; if it didn’t work, he hadn’t lost anything. And in all of their minds, I wonder if they thought, “After all, we came all this way because of what a servant girl said. That was crazy, so why not do one more little crazy thing.”

As a result, Naaman did go and do the simple thing and was healed, just as Elisha said that he would be. He was overwhelmed, as anyone would be who had received such a healing. No doubt, his testimony would be told over and over again throughout Aram upon his return, and we have no clue the impact that it had on the people, then and for generations, as the story was retold. All this because Rachel, a servant girl to Naaman, made one small comment to his wife.

There are so many different aspects of this story that will preach all on their own, but none of it would have made it in the history books of scripture if this young servant girl would not have done the small thing that she did. Was it easy for her? Probably not. I'm sure she wondered what her mistress would think of her, or even feel she was being disrespectful. Also, why should she help Naaman? After all, she was being held as a slave away from her own homeland with a bunch of heathens. Did he even deserve to know about the hope she had in God?

I don't know what thoughts went through her mind, but I do know that her faith outweighed any argument she had in her mind. What she knew for certain about God didn't hinge on her circumstances or her feelings. She knew the stories of how He provided a ram for Abraham to sacrifice instead of Isaac. She knew how He had led her people out of Egypt. She may have even seen the rocks that stood as monuments along the Jordan River, where Joshua led them through on dry ground and knew they were there as a tribute to this God in whom she put her trust. This was a faith that compelled her to tell others, no matter who they were, their position, or even how they treated her, of His power and the hope that she had.

Something else that strikes me about Naaman's response is that it doesn't say that she spoke to him directly. She told Naaman's wife, who then told him. In essence, she sent a messenger to Naaman, and he received and acted on her words. In contrast, when Elisha sent a messenger, he was offended. By the time Naaman reached Samaria, I'm sure he had done some research on Elisha and knew some of the things that God had done through him already; how he purified the water at the spring, that was the supply for Jericho when their water was unclean. Or, how when the boys made fun of him, he cursed them, and a bear came out and killed them. By these things, he would have known of the position of spiritual authority that Elisha had, and maybe he considered him more of a peer, and that is why he wanted to speak directly to him.

The young servant girl, though she seemingly was nothing and had nothing, spoke and moved commanders and kings into action. I believe there were a few things at play here, and I believe they are applicable just as much today as they were then.

First and foremost, God was in it. It wasn't by chance that she was in the place that she was at the time that she was. God had prepared the hearts of Naaman's wife, Naaman, and the king of Aram to respond to what she said. She didn't have to pull out all the data for what she said. Up to that point, her lifestyle had proven who she was, and no doubt, they based their trust in her word on the action they had seen from her while she had been serving. The reason her words were so impactful and taken seriously wasn't because of something that just happened in the moment. Whether she realized it or not, she had been earning trust before she shared about the man of God that she knew of in her homeland.

Secondly, I'm sure it was a bit disarming to Naaman to hear a message of hope in his situation from a place that was so unexpected. Had she been someone who always had a solution to everyone's problems (you know those well-meaning friends who most of the time are clueless), he may have dismissed it. Instead, she wasn't someone who had authority and might be trying to look helpful while positioning themselves to replace Naaman upon his demise. She really didn't have much skin in the game at all, yet she spoke her conviction. And she didn't even have any credibility. Yes, she was a servant, and even at that, she was a girl. She wouldn't have had any formal education, and her value was as property, not as one to even have an opinion, let alone one to be considered by men - especially men of authority.

So much of my life, I have waited for things to be right for me to speak up. I would get intimidated if I were surrounded by people with more education or experience than I had. I have compared and discounted my discernment and personal experience or even what God was speaking to me in the moment. I would not say anything rather than be embarrassed or have someone think that I was speaking out of turn. But in those circumstances, it is not others' opinions of me that limit what God can do; it is my thinking too much of myself. The internal dialogue that I have with myself is that I haven't done enough or proven myself to people for them to take my words to heart. How arrogant. That isn't my job or concern. My focus should be consistently living a life that demonstrates my faith and being obedient when He tells me to do something. The impact is not my responsibility. I just need to trust that God has gone before me to prepare the way in the hearts and minds of people with whom I will be speaking or who will be observing me live out what I believe. That is where my confidence should be placed.

Recently, a friend of mine spoke about Jesus' charge to us in the Sermon on the Mount to be salt to the world. (Matthew 5:13 NLT):

*"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless."*

This analogy is packed full of rich truths about the impact that we are supposed to have as believers. The line that stuck out to me the most was when my friend said salt has to be mined and distributed to be effective. It got me thinking a lot about salt and how it is something that I take for granted. I looked into salt a little more and at the context in which Jesus used it.

The Hebrews had been known to use salt for seasoning, but also to disinfect wounds. During the Roman Empire, salt was a highly valued commodity. Roman soldiers were often paid in salt, thus the phrase "worth their salt." When sitting at a properly set Roman feast, one knew how the host regarded them given their position in relation to the placement of the salt. If one was sat "above the salt," or between the salt and the head of the table, you were regarded higher than one who sat "below the salt."

Jesus' audience would have understood the significance of the reference. He was calling His followers to understand their importance and impact on the world around them.

The phrase that my friend used about salt referred to the fact that it needs to be mined. Salt is formed in the earth, but has to be extracted from it. There are several methods to do this, but

they all involved pulling it out of its surroundings and allowing it to be isolated so that it can be effective. Similarly, we as believers need to be *pulled out of the influence of the world and* established in our faith as we are surrounded by those who can teach and pour into us. We need to spend time growing in the Word and our relationship with God, making sure that we are well rooted in our relationship and understanding. However, just like this valued seasoning, if we are only mined but never distributed elsewhere, we will be ineffective.

Also, think of the many uses of salt and how they correlate to what Jesus was saying. Salt has the ability to change things. Have you ever had a meal that totally changed when you added some salt to it? It is like it unleashes a whole new flavor. Also, salt can preserve by drawing the water out of a food and drying it out. Nothing can grow in the absence of water, therefore, bacteria that may cause food poisoning cannot grow. It preserves food for future use. That is the same principle found in disinfecting wounds, as it dries out the bacteria that can cause infection.

So how does that relate to us as we are called to be the salt of the earth? We are called to change things around us: to have an impact. Our presence speaks volumes so that when we do have something to say, people take notice and give it value. We also are called to preserve the things that are godly in our communities and spheres of influence. That may be making a stand that you and your family will not participate in activities, such as watching certain movies or allowing certain video games or YouTube channels to be in your home to preserve your hearts and minds, keeping them focused on things of God (Phil. 4:8 lovely, pure, noble, true). It may be by standing up for life vocally and with your voting power. It might be asking to be removed from a project at work because you do not support or agree with the end product. It may be turning down work that would compromise your testimony.

Jesus also knew that if we just sit in our piousness, never engaging with the world and the people around us, we would only be judging them. That is not the impact that Jesus has called us to have. If people feel as though we don't empathize or try to understand them, not condoning, but reaching out to them in love rather than from a critical vantage point, our words and actions are ineffective at best and harmful at worst.

And here is the thing that Jesus points out: if we haven't lived in a manner that reflects our faith in Him, our words and actions will not change the atmosphere or circumstances around us. We will be viewed as part of the situation. If we always chime in on or even instigate, the complaint sessions at work, how can we be seen as an agent to change the atmosphere? Why would our boss listen to us when we think we can change the morale at work, especially if we have been a contributor to it being bad in the first place?

This is our reputation, the way people view us. Once our reputation is tarnished, it takes a lot to change it. Have you ever heard someone's name in conversation, and you immediately think of a negative memory involving him? No matter what is being said about him, your view of him is still viewed through the lens of your previous experience. Salt is very stable and rarely loses its saltiness; but the experience of saltiness can be altered by a physiological change in the person who is consuming it. What does that mean for us? If an experience or on going experiences condition people to think of us in a certain way (judgmental, crowd pleaser, arrogant), that is who we will be to them, and it will be hard, if not nearly impossible, to change their perception.

Looking back at my little friend in Naaman's house, she lived centuries before Jesus laid this out for us, yet she lived out being salt in her sphere of influence. She had to have had a good reputation, even if it was never spoken about, but rather just perceived by those she served and did life with every day. Her faith had to have given her a hope that transcended her situation. It must have spoken to those around her. The collective of who she was, her reputation gave her the chance to start something in motion. Her small thing was to be consistent and speak words of life when the opportunity was presented. God used her obedience to move the heart of a wife, a warrior, and kings. It was never her responsibility to manipulate what Naaman did with the information she gave him.

Salt is a small thing. If you look at a single grain, it doesn't seem like it can accomplish much. We don't use a single grain of salt at a time. In the same way, one small thing that we do will not have a huge impact. However, the consistency of our actions, the demonstration of our faith, and the hope that we have, at times, combined with the influence of others with similar actions, can impact those in our sphere of influence. That is what our responsibility is: to be salt; grain by grain, action by action, word by word. In so doing, we allow God to use us to change the lives of those we encounter for the Kingdom. It is our responsibility to be obedient in the consistency of our lives, shared with those around us who do not have the same hope that we do. It is not our responsibility to manipulate an outcome. Trust God to use the collective grains of your life, the small things, to have a huge impact in the lives of others for His glory.