

Gehazi: Missing the Mark



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 39:4–6; 2 Kings 4; 5; 8:1–6; Jer. 9:23, 24; John 13:1–17; 1 Tim. 6:10.*

Memory Text: “It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him” (*Deuteronomy 13:4, NIV*).

Gehazi was a servant. Not just any servant but the servant of one of the greatest prophets in Israel's history: Elisha. Elisha had been called by the Lord to minister to the prophet Elijah, in preparation for Elisha's own prophetic ministry (*1 Kings 19:16*). For many years Elisha served Elijah and listened, observed, and thus understood what it meant to be a prophet. When Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind of fire (*2 Kings 2:11*), Elisha's time had come. His ministry was not as fiery and glamorous as Elijah's, but he exerted a far-reaching influence.

Thus, Gehazi had a wonderful opportunity to be closely associated with someone as blessed of God as Elisha. It's hard to imagine all that he could have learned and seen in the years that he worked with the prophet.

Yet, as we will see this week, despite so much potential and so many great opportunities, Gehazi became a miserable failure. His story serves as an example of someone who gets sidetracked and becomes unable to distinguish the important from the peripheral. How crucial it is for us to learn from his mistakes!

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 18.*

Write a brief job description of a servant, based on the following verses: *Gen. 24:2–4; 39:4–6; Luke 14:17; 17:7, 8; Acts 2:18.*

Being a servant means primarily that one puts aside one's own wants, wishes, and comfort and involves oneself totally in someone else's life. A servant is there to assist the master in carrying out the master's plans, wishes, and activities. Sometimes being a servant involves carrying messages, accompanying someone, acting for the person, and doing menial jobs that need to be done. At other times it involves managing finances and households, but always the servant acts not to further his own ends but to further his master's.

Gehazi was the servant of prophet Elisha. Being a servant to a prophet was a unique privilege. It involved more than menial labor. It was a type of apprenticeship. Elisha himself had served as Elijah's servant (*1 Kings 19:19–21*). Although the job of prophet depended on a divine call, it would seem that this special time of serving together helped the would-be prophet develop his faith and trust in God. By serving his master Elijah, Elisha would be learning to put himself aside and serve others. This would prove to be the best qualification for any future ministry. We have no record of Gehazi's calling, but we will see the opportunities that he was given.

This servant idea is by no means restricted to Old Testament times. Jesus said that the willingness to be a servant was a prerequisite for any leadership position in the church (*Mark 9:35*).

Read John 13:1–17. How does this passage show the link between leadership and servanthood?

The disciples have been with Jesus for three years. They have learned from His teachings, they have even shared in His healing ministry, and yet they are not ready to go out as God's ambassadors. They were ready to learn in theory and enjoyed the association with Jesus, but they still were not prepared to put themselves aside and humbly serve one another.

How do we get the humility and the death to self needed in order to serve others? How do we learn to serve others with an attitude of seeking nothing back for ourselves?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *2 Kings 5:26, 27*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Identify Gehazi's great opportunities to learn ministry and his failures to do so.

Feel: Sense the disappointment and loss to the cause of God when a potential leader, such as Gehazi, turns to self-seeking.

Do: Resolve to accept and improve upon every opportunity to learn ministry and serve God's people.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Chance of Many Lifetimes

A Imagine the opportunity to serve as an apprentice to the prophet Elisha. What extraordinary experiences and lessons of faith did Gehazi have in his service to Elisha? How did he fail to benefit from these opportunities?

B What was the price Gehazi paid for his selfishness? Why was this sentence fair?

II. Feel: Lost Opportunities

A Despite Elisha's examples of selfless service, Gehazi never learned to give up his own interests in order to serve God's purposes. How did Gehazi's greed detract from the lessons about God that Elisha was attempting to impress on Naaman?

III. Do: Resolution to Serve

A We have more opportunities and models to learn servant leadership now than at any other time in earth's history. How can we improve upon the opportunities we've been given, especially considering our apprenticeship to Christ Himself, the greatest of teachers and role models?

B How can faith help us meet the temptation to be self-serving?

► **Summary:** Gehazi had many opportunities to witness selfless service and learn to minister; yet, he chose to serve his own interests.

Learning Firsthand

A good teacher teaches by example and gives plenty of opportunities for the student to apply what he or she is learning. Elisha was this type of teacher.

Read 2 Kings 4:8–17. What is Gehazi’s role in the narration? What opportunities is Elisha giving Gehazi?

The story of the woman of Shunem follows another miracle involving a woman. In 2 Kings 4:1–7, Elisha helps a widow clear her debts and keep her two sons from being sold into slavery. And now Elisha is on his way to Shunem. Given the general status of women in biblical times, it is strange that the narrator gives a married woman such status. Her husband’s name is not given. All we know is that he is consulted about the building of the guest room and that he is old, even though he still seems to be fit enough to supervise the harvesting of his fields. In the first part of the story Elisha actively involves Gehazi. He sends him to call the woman and includes Gehazi in his expression of thanks. He asks Gehazi’s opinion and acts on Gehazi’s suggestion. Gehazi rises to the occasion by being observant and showing sensitivity to the woman’s real needs. Elisha gives Gehazi the opportunity to initiate a miracle. Within a year the miracle child is born.

Read 2 Kings 4:18–31. What change in attitude do we see here in Gehazi as compared to what we saw in the previous story?

The miracle child is now a young boy. Gehazi is still Elisha’s servant, but something of the sensitivity he once had seems to be gone. When the woman arrives and brushes past him to grab hold of the feet of Elisha, Gehazi tries to push her away. He sees only the “rudeness” of the Shunammite woman, who oversteps any type of social convention in her action (*vss.* 25–27). He does not seem to be able to see her deep distress as does Elisha.

It sometimes is easy to be so self-centered and self-absorbed that we become insensitive to the feelings and needs of others. Who hasn’t been on both ends of that equation? How can you learn to be more sensitive to the feelings and needs of others? Also, how can you learn to bear gracefully the insensitivity of others toward you?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God calls us to be servants guided not by earthly enticements but by spiritual commitment to God and others.

Rabbinic tradition suggests that the lepers at the gate of Samaria who discovered the mysterious rout of Ben-hadad (*see 2 Kings 7:3–8*) were Gehazi and his sons. Even if inaccurate, the tradition illustrates the spiritual descent of Gehazi. Leprosy was understood as judgment from God, spiritual or physical punishment for moral failure. While Gehazi's story begins favorably, with his being portrayed as Elisha's faithful associate and somewhat overzealous protector (*2 Kings 4:27*), avarice overtakes him, rendering him a symbol of greed for succeeding generations. One simple character flaw destroyed what appeared to be unlimited future promise. What might have been? Elisha faithfully served Elijah, eventually succeeding him with decades of his own prophetic ministry. Might Gehazi, if faithful, have become Elisha's successor? Might the prophetic mantle have fallen on his shoulders? History records not mere speculations but what actually happened. Instead, Gehazi is remembered only for deceit, moneygrubbing, and receiving the curse of Naaman's leprosy. Opportunities for Christian servanthood are still being compromised today. If anything, materialism has strengthened, not weakened. What opportunities might we forfeit for the attraction of earthly enticements? Which embellishments are we embracing while sacrificing spiritual values?

Opening Activity: Many states have banned the use of cellular phones by motorists while driving because of safety considerations. What philosophy undergirds these restrictions? Discuss how driving distractions compromise safety, endangering pedestrians and other motorists. Make a spiritual application of your discussion. Analyze aspects of contemporary culture. Which ones interfere with our spiritual vision? Which serve as distractions to our divine assignments? Which distort our spiritual focus on service? How can Christians keep earthly enticements from sidetracking their spiritual development and servant focus? What consequences result from failing to serve?

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A Question of Faith

Read 2 Kings 5:1–19 and answer the following questions:

• Why did the king of Israel react as he did? Was his reaction reasonable or unreasonable? What did he really fear was going on?

• Why did Naaman react as he did to Elisha’s command to him? What good reasons did he have for his reaction? In what ways did his reaction reflect the king of Israel’s toward the letter?

• Read verse 12. What kind of logic is the captain using there? What mistake is he making?

• How does Naaman refer to himself before Elisha after the miracle happened? What does that say about him?

• Why do you think Elisha refused to take any money from the captain? Why would it be important that he not take any?

• Read carefully verses 17–19. What is going on here? How do we understand Naaman’s request and Elisha’s response to it?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary****I. Learning Firsthand** (*Review 2 Kings 4:8–31 with your class.*)

Gehazi was uniquely privileged as Elisha’s prophetic associate. Very few individuals, according to the scriptural record, experienced resurrections firsthand. Gehazi, as Elisha’s trusted assistant, was one who personally witnessed divine resurrection power. Strange that he could experience divine authority in such close proximity but later commit the crimes he did. Common sense should have told Gehazi that the all-powerful God who conquered the grave was likewise all-knowing regarding his deceitfulness. Nevertheless, we must recognize Gehazi’s admirable qualities. He seems sensitive about the woman’s needs, and Elisha treats him as a trusted consultant.

However, later in the narrative, his attitude undergoes a subtle shift. His insensitivity toward the same woman, now distressed by her child’s death, is perhaps the initial sign of Gehazi’s self-centered nature.

Consider This: Which admirable qualities does Gehazi exhibit? How does self-centeredness usher in insensitivity?

II. Gehazi’s Fall (*Review 2 Kings 5:20–27 with your class.*)

Gehazi’s thoughts may be paraphrased, *This wealthy heathen felt obligated, and Elisha foolishly refused payment. A bright fellow like me shouldn’t allow golden opportunities to escape. There’s still time to catch Naaman, concoct a story that explains “Elisha’s change of heart,” and cash in.* Following his wicked instincts, Gehazi pursues Naaman’s party. Naaman’s heart still overflows with gratitude, and his generosity doubles Gehazi’s greedy request! The gift is large enough to require two servants to transport it. Fearing discovery, Gehazi immediately hides his ill-gotten gain. Hiding from the Lord proves futile. Elisha exposes the fraud, and Gehazi’s punishment is immediate.

Consider This: How does greed and financial gain influence the church and its membership today? What dangers are inherent in the belief that divine blessings and powers can be purchased with money? (Note also the story of Simon in Acts 8:12–24.) How may trusting our financial investments dilute

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Gehazi's Fall

It's hard, at least from our perspective today, to understand why characters in the Bible did what they did at times, especially in the face of so many miraculous events. The incredible healing of Naaman happened right before Gehazi. He saw not only the power of God but the actions of his master, who refused to take any money from the captain. One would think that would have been more than enough to humble him before God and man, but apparently it didn't.

Read 2 Kings 5:20–27. How did Gehazi, at least at first, rationalize his actions? What little bit of nationalism, or ethnic prejudice, is hinted at in Gehazi's thoughts?

The Bible is full of warnings against the love of money and the dangers of earthly possessions. These warnings are directed not only toward the wealthy. It is not the amount of material possessions that we have that is the problem but rather our attitude toward what we have. The battle against greed requires constant attention. We continually have to adjust our thoughts toward our possessions and surrender them to God. We can keep our perspective by consistently giving not only material possessions but also time. The love of material things blinds us to our true mission and purpose in life and in the end can cause our eternal ruin if we are not careful.

It is strange that Gehazi swears to himself by the living God and then goes off to deceive. Does he think that the living God does not see him? What a powerful testimony to the power of our own corrupt hearts to deceive us!

Naaman, meanwhile, is very generous about giving Gehazi the gifts, but he probably goes away with some questions, especially when his two servants return and report Gehazi's strange behavior. Gehazi has let his greed interfere with the witness that Elisha wants to give to this new convert.

Of course, in the end the same God who performed miracles revealed the truth to Elisha about what Gehazi did, and, just like that, his ministry and life were ruined.

It's very easy to underestimate the incredible hold that the love of money (*1 Tim. 6:10*) can have on us. What examples, from either biblical or nonbiblical history, can you think of in which money led to someone's ruin? How can we learn to protect ourselves from what can be a very dangerous temptation?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

our need to trust God? Why do some Christians today believe that they can keep their actions hidden from God?

III. Living on Leftovers *(Review 2 Kings 8:1–6 with your class.)*

Years have passed since Gehazi served the prophet Elisha. Remarkably, we find him conversing with the king. Apparently, Gehazi was not badly disfigured, or this audience with the royal court likely would not have occurred. His storytelling reaches back to the resurrection narrative involving the Shunammite woman's deceased son. This final encounter with Gehazi leaves a bittersweet taste. Happily, he remembers those life-transforming experiences that shaped the religious foundation of Israel. Sadly, he must also have remembered the grand opportunity he forfeited, all for the dubious increase of earthly riches.

Consider This: How valuable will earthly wealth seem during our twilight years if opportunities for faithful service have slipped through our fingers? What should we do daily to fortify ourselves against the temptation to exchange eternal principles for temporal advantages, or birthrights for porridge?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Within every heart, battles are waged between self-centeredness and spiritual commitment. Whenever commitment vanquishes that selfishness, the natural result is selfless service. Neither religious piety nor charismatic fervor makes an adequate substitute for Christian servanthood.

Activity: Read the following Jewish tale and discuss the connection between spirituality and service.

“In a small Jewish town in Russia, there is a rabbi who disappears each Friday morning for several hours. His devoted disciples boast that during those hours their rabbi goes up to heaven and talks to God.

“A stranger moves into town, and he's skeptical about all this, so he decides to check things out. He hides and watches. The rabbi gets up in the morning, says his prayers, and then dresses in peasant clothes. He grabs an axe, goes off into the woods, and cuts some firewood, which he then hauls to a shack on the outskirts of the village. There an old

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Living on Leftovers

We last hear of Gehazi in 2 Kings 8:1–6. What do we find the ex-servant of Elisha doing?

Many years have passed since the great miracle of the raising of the Shunammite's son. Gehazi's skin disease must not be too disfiguring, for we now find him in the royal court. Gehazi, Elisha's "ex-servant," is talking about what has been. He is bragging about Elisha and his miracles, and in doing so he is most likely reflecting on his own importance by his connection to Elisha.

We never may have heard of this storytelling session had it not been for the timing of this event. The biblical author tells us that at the precise time that Gehazi was telling about the miracle of the Shunammite's son being brought back to life, the Shunammite appears before the king. God in His providence uses Gehazi's bragging to help the woman of Shunem. The woman of Shunem is by now most probably a widow, as no mention is made of her husband, and it is unusual that a woman would appear before the king on such business instead of her husband. She is most likely in charge of her family until her son becomes of age. She has been out of the country for seven years during a severe drought. Having the right relationships and knowing the right people may be important and seen as advantageous from a human point of view, but God views things differently.

What relationship really counts, and why? *See Jer. 9:23, 24.*

And so Gehazi fades from history. The sad part of the story is the fact that Gehazi could have been doing God's work. He could have learned from Elisha. He could have been the next major prophet or perhaps a leader and teacher in the schools of the prophets. Now all he can do is speak about the good old days when he worked with the prophet. Gehazi could have been making history; now all he can do is live in the past.

We need to recount and remember God's dealing with us in the past. But at the same time, we need to be careful about dwelling on what happened in the past, at the expense of living correctly in the present. How do we strike a right balance here? How can dwelling too much on the past negatively influence our walk with the Lord today?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

woman and her sick son live. He leaves them the wood, enough for a week, and then sneaks back home.

“Having observed the rabbi’s actions, the newcomer stays on in the village and becomes his disciple. And whenever he hears one of the villagers say, ‘On Friday morning our rabbi ascends all the way to heaven,’ the newcomer quietly adds, ‘If not higher.’”—*Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002), p. 249.

Questions: Why does the newcomer not expose the fallacy of the “heavenly journey”? What attracted him to discipleship? What can we learn from the secrecy of the rabbi’s service? What were the rabbi’s followers trying to communicate through the boast that their rabbi spoke directly with God? How does serving others place us in intimate fellowship with our Redeemer? How does the figure of peasant’s clothing illustrate the servanthood of Christ? (*Hint: Compare Phil. 2:1–8.*) What does Matthew 25:31–46 say to those who desire the intimate fellowship with God illustrated in the parable of the rabbi?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Whether or not Gehazi would have been called into prophetic office is subject to speculation. Nevertheless, there was clearly a call to servanthood. This calling itself, apart from the specific prophetic calling, offered multiple opportunities for intimacy with God. Those opportunities remain open for Christians today who, likewise, have been called into spiritual service. Perhaps we have not witnessed bodily resurrections or experienced miracles that match Elisha’s; nevertheless, there exists abundant evidence for divine power in the daily sunrise, children’s laughter, the expansive universe, and discoveries through microscope and telescope. Gehazi witnessed firsthand miraculous wonders, including a bodily resurrection, but exchanged intimate fellowship with God for silver and clothing. How ridiculous these enticements appear when we remember that God Himself creates wealth and clothes the fields!

Activity 1: Read Matthew 6:24–34 together. Invite class members to provide illustrations from nature that reinforce the concept of a loving Eternal Provider. Discuss how fellowship with God resolves human worries regarding daily necessities.

Activity 2: Using the divine provision of manna as another talking point, connect God’s daily watchcare for Israel with the object lessons from nature, suggested by the class. Considering these things together, ask the class how we can learn to trust in God to provide for us, no matter how difficult our circumstances might be.

Further Study: “Solemn are the lessons taught by this experience of one to whom had been given high and holy privileges. The course of Gehazi was such as to place a stumbling block in the pathway of Naaman, upon whose mind had broken a wonderful light, and who was favorably disposed toward the service of the living God. For the deception practiced by Gehazi there could be pleaded no excuse. To the day of his death he remained a leper, cursed of God and shunned by his fellow men.

“ ‘A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.’ Proverbs 19:5. Men may think to hide their evil deeds from human eyes, but they cannot deceive God. ‘All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.’ Heb. 4:13. Gehazi thought to deceive Elisha, but God revealed to His prophet the words that Gehazi had spoken to Naaman, and every detail of the scene between the two men.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 252.

Discussion Questions:

① What are some of the warning signs that money or the pursuit of it is taking the place of God in our lives? How can we learn to use money and not let it use us? What role do tithing and giving offerings play in connection with the whole question of the influence and power of money over our lives?

② As a class, go over your response to the last question in Thursday’s study. What are the things that really matter in life, and why is it so easy to lose track of what really matters?

③ What reasons might have led Gehazi to think that he could get away with his deception? He knew God existed; he had seen miracles take place, some quite incredible, in fact. Yet, despite all this, he tried to deceive his master. Perhaps he had done similar things before and gotten away with it. Perhaps in his own mind he truly rationalized his actions. We don’t know. What we do know, however, is that it’s not that hard to deceive ourselves. What are ways we can learn to protect ourselves from falling into the same self-deception?

④ Go back to 2 Kings 5:17–19. What lessons should or should we not draw from Naaman’s request to Elisha about bowing down in the house of Rimmon?

⑤ What are some practical ways you can serve others?