

## I. Introduction

- A. When I lived in Chicago, I lived on a very crowded, very nice block on what we called the Northwest Side of Chicago. In fact, when we had a block party, I ran Awana games on the street, just for the kids on our block. There were almost 40 grade school kids on our block. We were a tight little community.
- B. That included a regular fixture in our neighborhood. I'm gonna call him John, and he was our mail carrier. Every day, John delivered the mail. Week after week, year after year, John delivered the mail.
- C. He was a fixture. We all knew him. We all chatted with him. We all liked him. Except my dog who liked to chase him.
- D. One day, there was a new mail-carrier. We were all a little bummed out. We liked John. We knew John. John even showed up at our block parties, even though he didn't live there. What happened to John?
- E. We found out.
- F. John was put on administrative leave—which means he was in trouble—because he wasn't delivering all our mail. Inspectors found lots of our mail stored on John's back porch. It was mainly sales circulars, but first class stuff too. So John was out.
- G. Some people might think, hey, I'd LIKE to get rid of my junk mail. And I get that, but somebody paid good money to print and deliver that mail. It was costly.
- H. John was not a good mail carrier. John broke trust with his customers, his boss, and the people on his route.
- I. Our community forgave John, and a few of us wrote letters asking for grace for him, requesting him back as our mail carrier.
- J. It worked, and he came back.
- K. Tuck that story away, because we'll come back to it.

## II. Oikonomics

- A. We are continuing our series on EveryONE because everyone matters to God. And part of that means making space for everyone God wants to fold into the community that is Neighborhood Church.
- B. So we're sitting closer, and making space. And we're building and everyone counts. You count.
- C. Today I want to speak with you on an important topic with a weird title. Today, our topic is OIKONOMICS. Not Economics. Not Freakonomics. Oikonomics.
- D. Here is our key Bible verse for today:
  1. *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10, NKJV).*
- E. In Bible days most middle and upper class households hired stewards. A steward was a household manager with two main tasks:
  1. Manage the master's resources
  2. Represent the master's values
- F. Stewards were important because they had a kind of power-of-attorney in the master's affairs. Good stewards were golden; their masters could trust them.
- G. The Greek word translated "stewards" in this verse is OIKONOMOS. Oikos means house and nomos means law. This is the law of the household. Stewardship. Oikonomics.
- H. The basic idea is this: You get God's grace, you give God's grace. Do you know you are a steward of "the manifold [multifaceted] grace of God?"
- I. For our case study, let's look at this very cool story about Naaman, the Leper. I was at a campfire with a bunch of kids, and one of them asked me to tell the story of Naaman the Leprechaun.

## III. Case Study

- 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 a leper. 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.
- B. *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." Then the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. Then he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which said, Now be advised, when this letter comes to you, that I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-6, NKJV).*
  1. When Naaman grieves over his leprosy, this unnamed girl—a captive from Israel, not a servant-girl in Syria—she speaks up. She does two things:
    - a) She managed her true Master's resources. What resources? In this case, INFORMATION. Truth. There's a God in Samaria, and he has a prophet there who displays His power.
      - (1) *Do you know that you are a steward of God's truth, a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1)?* And God has handed us His truth, His mysteries, and our job is to pass them on. To take the mystery of the Cross of Christ, and make it an open secret for every single person in Redding and as far as God allows us a voice.
      - (2) And even if you're completely messed up, and out of place, and nothing is going according to plan, you are still a steward of God's truth, just like this little girl. If she did it, you can do it.
      - (3) She managed her Master's resources.
    - b) She also represented her true Master's values. In this case, the value was COMPASSION. She doesn't just deliver information, though that's important. She wraps the information with compassion and that makes the information palatable to Naaman.

2. The first steward in our story is a girl who's gone without a name for over 3,000 years of history. Her name has vanished away, but the effects of her stewardship have not.
  3. And I'm telling you, long after God builds this new building through us, people will forget our names but they will not forget our labor of love in building them a home.
  4. So Naaman shows up on the king's front porch with a letter. What happens?
- C. *And it happened, when the king of Israel read the letter, that he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy? Therefore please consider, and see how he seeks a quarrel with me" (2 Kings 5:7, NKJV).*
1. Loser.
  2. Have you ever noticed the times in the Bible when God hands an impossible opportunity to one of His people, and they freak out and shrink back and miss an adventure?
    - a) One time, Jesus was speaking to a crowd of over 5,000 people, and they were hungry. The disciples told Jesus to send them away to buy food. What did Jesus say? He said, **YOU FEED THEM** (honest: Matt 4:16). They freaked out, so Jesus did it himself. Losers, beloved of God. They had a golden opportunity to be part of a miracle, but they shrank back.
    - b) Another time, God brought His people to the Promised Land. He told them to go take the land. But it looked too hard. It looked too scary. It looked impossible. They freaked out, and God had to work around their unbelief. Losers. They had a golden opportunity to be part of a miracle, but they shrank back.
    - c) Good stewards don't shrink back.
  3. This king had a golden opportunity. He was a king. He had a great God. He knew he had God's own resources in his hand. What if he had just prayed for Naaman or what if he had simply redirected Naaman to Elisha the prophet? He didn't. He freaked out. He should have been a steward, but he shrank back.
  4. Bad Oikonomics. You get God's grace, you give God's grace. Good stewards don't shrink back. The Master would rather see us risk and lose than freak out and cocoon ourselves in self-protective cautiousness.
    - a) God has given us 48,000 square feet to use for His glory. We use it and reuse it. God has given us 17 acres for a base of operations for the gospel of grace.
    - b) And now God puts an impossible situation in front of us, and says: **MAKE ROOM FOR WHAT I WANT TO DO.**
    - c) What will we do?
    - d) What will you do?
    - e) We get God's grace, we give God's grace. Stewardship. Oikonomics.
  5. But the king freaks out, and the prophet Elisha hears of it.
- D. *So it was, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Please let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (2 Kings 5:8, NKJV).*
- E. *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. I want to point out that Elisha did not deal with Naaman face to face. He sent a messenger.
  2. This Hebrew word is Malak (ma-lawk). Malak can mean a messenger. It can mean an ambassador. It can even mean an angel. In this context, it's a steward. He sent His steward.
  3. And this is exactly how God works with us.
  4. Do you believe God loves the people of Redding? Does he love your neighbor? Your spouse? The kids in your kids' classroom?
  5. How will He get His love to them?
  6. He doesn't deal with people face to face. He sends His malak, and His malak is you. Why do you think God put you where He put you?
  7. You are in your subdivision, your classroom, your workplace, your family tree exactly for this reason. You get God's grace, you give God's grace. You deliver God's mail.
  8. The king carried God's mail—did he deliver it? No. He hid it away on the back porch.
  9. Elisha carried God's mail—did he deliver it? Yes. He said, "Go wash 7 times in the Jordan river and you will be healed.
  10. Either you are a free-flowing channel of grace, or you are a stopper in the divine pipeline. What are you?
  11. So what happened?
- F. *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. A super important response: Naaman gets angry. Furious, it says. This doesn't make sense. His pride is wounded. His logic is confused. Seriously? I had to tramp across the desert to get here, and all I get is a messenger? I don't even get the main guy? Just his steward?

2. And, are you kidding, the Jordan River? We have much nicer rivers. Clean, clear, beautiful rivers, back at home.
  3. This doesn't make sense!
  4. That was his reaction.
  5. And I want to prepare you: when you deliver the mail of God's grace, you will not always get warm fuzzies in return.
  6. When I planted a church in Chicago, we kept outgrowing our homes. WE started in a coffee house. We moved to a banquet hall. Then we moved into an office complex. And some of our neighbors complained. The only reason we got in is that the owner was a Christian.
  7. Then we got a new owner, a new landlord. And the first thing our new landlord did was to evict us. You know, as a pastor, it's a bad day when you get a thick packet of certified mail—nothing good in there.
  8. It ended up good, because the judge sided with us and made them honor our lease.
  9. You can deliver God's grace, and still have people mad at you.
  10. We are building for one reason: people. We are building to carry the mail between God's grace and people's needs. We're not building to create a dynasty, or to create a name for ourselves or for me. We don't advertise. We don't run conferences. We don't bribe people into our doors.
  11. But you all come. Why? I believe God is doing it.
  12. And when you come, we want you to have a seat at the table—all prepared. All ready. No last minute scrambling. Church, we want to embrace every person God sends us.
  13. God was blessing Naaman, but Naaman sneered at it, and decided to go back home.
- G. *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'?" 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 5:13, 14, NKJV).*
1. Naaman had leprosy. When he goes and washes in the Jordan River as an expression of his faith. And when God heals him—what do you call that?
  2. GRACE. God healed him. Did he earn it? Did he deserve it? Did he help God out?
  3. No. He humbled himself.
  4. He believed.
  5. He followed the instructions.
  6. And God healed him. THAT'S GRACE.
  7. But when God not only heals him, but makes his flesh like the flesh of a little child, that's not just grace, what is it?
  8. It's AMAZING GRACE.
  9. I got this really nice Facebook message earlier this week. This is from a man in our church, in the construction trades, who moved to Rocklin to find work. His name is Kenny, and he gave me permission to share this with you.
    - a) "New house, new town, new business, new office and all with this "scary faith" that you have spoken about. Everything has fallen into place for us since we have moved to Rocklin and our faith has kept us going these past 3 months as they have been a true test. Starting again from scratch is always a challenge, but God has provided as a true reward of our faith in Him. A house to live in, schools for my children and wife, clients for my construction business, employees who do great work and the list goes on.
    - b) "We are truly blessed and praise God for all He has given us. I know you made a similar move years ago and gave up everything that was dear to you (Chicago hot dogs) in order to pastor at Neighborhood Church. If you hadn't done that, I can honestly say that I wouldn't have been saved, been baptized or have enjoyed my current journey with God because you have been the catalyst as well as the channel between me and the Lord."
  10. By the way, Kenny points to me, but I point to all of you. I did what I do, and you did what you did, and God's grace got delivered to this man who is now a brother in Christ. Oikonomics: Stewardship of God's amazing grace.
  11. Why do we ask for your prayer? Your service? Your money? Your help?
  12. Because God wants to multiply Kenny's story ten thousand times over till Jesus returns. Are you in? All in?
- H. *And he returned to the man of God, he and all his aides, and came and stood before him; and he said, "Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; now therefore, please take a gift from your servant." But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive nothing." And he urged him to take it, but he refused.*
- I. *So Naaman said, "Then, if not, please let your servant be given two mule-loads of earth; for your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. "Yet in this thing may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD please pardon your servant in this thing." Then he said to him, "Go in peace." So he departed from him a short distance (2 Kings 5:15-19, NKJV).*
1. Look, it's grace. In fact, not only does Naaman NOT pay for his healing, he goes back with more than he came with. He has a donkey-load of dirt.
  2. Grace, grace, grace. You give nothing. You get everything. Even the dirt is free. God gives, Elisha gives, Naaman receives. That's Oikonomics. Spending for the sake of the family. Spending for the community of people God is weaving together at Neighborhood Church.
  3. The story, however, does NOT have a happy ending. And this is the warning to us:
- J. *But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him." So Gehazi*

pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?" And he said, "All is well..."

- K. *...My master has sent me, saying, 'Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.' So Naaman said, 'Please, take two talents.' And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and handed them to two of his servants; and they carried them on ahead of him. When he came to the citadel, he took them from their hand, and stored them away in the house; then he let the men go, and they departed (2 Kings 5:20-24, NKJV).*
1. Uhhhh.... loser.
  2. God had just orchestrated a beautiful picture of free grace, and Gehazi rushes in to spoil the whole thing. He does NOT represent his master's values. He does not manage his Master's resources.
  3. There are people who follow Jesus who have incredible knack at trampling the spirit of God's amazing grace.
  4. Most of the time they don't even realize it. Selfish. Greedy. Acquisitive. They drag people down instead of lifting people up. They discourage. They judge. They criticize. Takers.
  5. Here is a painful example:
    - a) I received a phone call from a trusted friend on Friday. He has worked hard to get his young cousin and her girlfriend to come to Neighborhood Church, and to be part of our Junior High youth group.
    - b) She came. She is not saved. She has no background with Jesus. We are all sure she knows of Jesus. She doesn't have a dad. She lives in a tiny trailer park with a mom who hardly cares. She was brought to our youth group.
    - c) And I really want to make this clear: this was NOT our leadership—we have a fantastic leader in Chris, and if you knew his heart you'd be blown away at how gracious and accepting he is, so, don't let this reflect on him—let it reflect on the infection of legalism that we all carry.
    - d) Some adult woman took this girl aside and told her she couldn't stay because she was dressed too sexy.
  6. God mailed the grace.
  7. Did it get delivered?
  8. And I don't want to embarrass anybody—okay, maybe I do. But I can't point fingers. I've done my own version of the same thing, and so have you.
  9. Can we all be clear, and all be together on this: we welcome with open arms every single person God sends our way, even if they're dressed too sexy, or don't look right, or smell funny. You are welcome. What we have isn't ours anyway. It is God's. We're just his delivery team.
  10. That's exactly what our Jr. High Pastor, Chris Matos, told me and he was really bothered by this story (we're not even totally sure it's true.)
  11. We represent our Master's values: and He values grace for the unworthy. He values salvation for the sinner. He values love for the unlovely. He values healing for the broken. He values forgiveness for the guilty. He values people, young and old.
  12. Do you believe?
  13. One more story, before we wrap it up.
  14. Last Sunday, there were so many babies in our infant nursery that we weren't able to handle any more kids. Parents and their babies were lovingly turned away. We have to stay safe.
  15. Here's my question: what's the difference between sending a girl away because she dresses too sexy and sending a family away because we didn't make room for them?
  16. Obviously, one is active, and mean. It's a sin of commission.
  17. The other is passive, and almost invisible. It's a sin of omission.
  18. But the way it feels is pretty much the same—either way, you weren't welcomed with open arms at the family table.
  19. You get God's grace, you receive God's grace. And I have to ask, has not God's grace deposited enough resources into this huge congregation to make room for every person who wants to come into these doors?
- L. *Now he went in and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, "Where did you go, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant did not go anywhere." Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go with you when the man turned back from his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever." And he went out from his presence leprous, as white as snow (2 Kings 5:25-27, NKJV).*
1. He kept God's mail.
  2. Enough said.