

¹ Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. ² Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." ⁴ So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. ⁵ And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel." He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. ⁶ He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." ⁷ When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." ⁸ But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

⁹ So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." ¹¹ But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! ¹² Are not Abana and Parpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. ¹³ But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean?'" ¹⁴ So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

B.J. had always heard two rules from his father, as he grew up. B.J. always followed those two rules as he went through the formal educational stage of his life. B.J. always abided by those two rules as he entered into the "real world" and climbed rung by rung up the ladder of success:

1. Never explain

2. Never apologize

Oh, it was tempting on occasions, to do one or the other. He knew that there were times when people would have appreciated a word of explanation, an offer of apology. But that he believed would be a sign of weakness. And if there were one thing **Barnabas Joseph O'Reilly** learned from his father: Never let them think you are weak. Too often "kindness" would be mistaken for weakness.

1. Never explain

2. Never apologize

There would be some, B.J. knew, who thought that these rules were harsh. His wife often believed that he would be a better person if he would explain to people why he was doing something. There were certainly many a time in which he knew that she

would have really appreciated an apology – times when he let work come first, times when he let his drive for success get in the way of her notion of happiness.

But B.J. had learned from the master – his father – that if you stick to your principles, people

- might not understand,
- might not even approve,
- might even try to get in your way

– but **stick to your principles** and **SUCCEED!** That's **what it was all about – being successful.**

And B.J. was. In almost every thing he did – in the business world, at least. He never tried to appear hard, harsh, or cruel (for truth be told, he really was none of those things) but he always abided by the two rules of success:

1. Never explain

2. Never apologize

There are certain things that a man must do – even if he doesn't understand them. And winning the approval – the blessing – of his father was (although entirely unconsciously) the goal B.J. had for his life. The success was just the conduit to that blessing.

Sometimes it meant that B.J. had to cut some corners. Sometimes there just was **no way to get to the goal by going the straight and direct route. So, a little **“puffing”** here; a little **exaggeration** there. Sometimes there **needed to be some things shaved off the books to make the bottom line work**. But he **almost never got caught**. And if someone did think that he had done something wrong – even when he had occasionally been accused – two things always kept him on course:**

1. Never explain

2. Never apologize

And **usually** – **often** – **sometimes** – he was able to replace that which had been borrowed to make the bottom line what it needed to be.

But, as time passed, and **as success near the top seemed to become harder and harder to achieve** (what with the economy and all) the **usually** quickly turned into the **sometime** and ended up only **occasionally**, and finally turned into **“nobody will ever know, so what’s the big deal?”**

Finally, one day, the walls began to come tumbling down. One of the little guys below him, maybe someone B.J. had stepped on along the way up the ladder – be it jealousy or be it self-righteousness – whatever his reason, one of the little guys below him started keeping track, starting keeping records, and finally turned B.J. in.

B.J. was called into the **CEO – Max Rainier’s** office and it was all laid out – right there – clear as a bell. Anyone could see the violations; anyone could see the pattern. B.J. had been caught. He knew that he needed to own up, to make amends, and to try to regain some semblance of decency. But he had these expectations for life so deeply embedded in his psyche. All he heard was his father’s voice:

1. Never explain

2. Never apologize

And that is what he did.

Now, as good fortune would have it, B.J.’s boss – Max Rainier – had known B.J.’s dad. He had an inkling of what was going on. It **wasn’t greed**; it **wasn’t inherent dishonesty**. It was **trying to live up to those expectations of his father’s – just trying to win his father’s blessing, even though his father had been dead for 15 years** (died of a heart attack at the age of 49).

So B.J.’s boss, Max Rainier asked everyone else to leave the room. It was just him and B.J. Then B.J.’s C.E.O. said to him, ***“Barnabas Joseph, I’m going to tell you something. And I don’t want you to answer me. I don’t want you to say a word. I’m going to tell you something and then I want you to leave this office and close***

the door behind you. You have been caught. And there will be no explanations nor apologies accepted by me. There are only two choices that you have:

- A. “You may go downstairs and clean out your office and turn in your letter of resignation by 4:00 p.m. today. I don’t know if there will be criminal prosecution or not. That’s up to others to decide. Or*
- B. “You may go down to your office and call the person at the phone number on this card. If you pick option B, you will report to this person for 2 hours every night – six nights a week. How long will you do this? Until I tell you that you may stop. No explanations. No apologies. With this option – if you show up every day as I have ordered, you will keep your job. You will continue in your position. But you will never do this again.*

“The choice is simple. You have three hours to decide. Now leave here, and do not say a word.”

Well, time is short, so I must fast forward this story. B.J. took option B. The name and phone number were for a home where special children and adults lived. B.J. was given the task of attending to Randy – a profoundly retarded 13 year old. Randy was able to do very little for himself.

- B.J. had to sit with him,
- read to him words that B.J. knew the boy could not understand.
- B.J. had to take care of any personal needs that Randy had during that 2 hours that he was there – from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. every day. **ANY** and **ALL** personal needs.

The assignment went on and on. Weeks turned into months turned into years. His assignment only ended when Randy succumbed to illness and death at the age of 22. In those 9 years, B.J. had occasionally attempted to talk to his boss, Mr. Rainier, about the assignment. B.J. did not understand. If he had gone to prison, he would have been out

sooner than this. But Max Rainier never explained, never apologized, never waived.

But, after a while, B.J. quit asking. He just showed up. Randy did something that no one had ever done to B.J. before. Somehow – and B.J. could not explain it -- Randy taught B.J. **how to be loved**. And **eventually**, B.J. **learned from this how to love**.

At Randy's funeral, B.J. stood up and gave his testimony of how much good this profoundly retarded child of God had done in his life.

In today's scripture lesson, we have a tendency to villify Namaan. We growl at his great expectations for how he should be treated and how this situation should have been handled. But we don't know how Namaan got to the point he did. No one really knows what goes on behind closed doors. And God used Namaan's life not just as a bad example. God also used his life as a sign of how healing can occur.

Namaan learned – what B.J. learned. If you are really hurting in life, you will be willing to listen to almost anything that someone offers and to try almost anything that someone tells you will work. We all are like that – if we are hurting enough.

Namaan learned that while God may indeed provide healing, it was **his responsibility to do what God told him to do** – even if it didn't seem to make sense. Even if it didn't live up to HIS (Namaan's) expectations.

God is not in the business of trying to live up to Namaan's or our expectations.

God is in the business of teaching us to live life with expectancy – awaiting the surprises God has in store, while believing that in all things God works for good for those who love him and who do what they are told.

Indeed, Namaan illustrated what B.J. also came to learn about his life: some people are **more interested in feeling good than interested in feeling God**.

In her **not meant for publication “tell all” journals** – published after her death -- Mother Teresa demonstrated that not even saints get to feel good, or even feel the

Presence of God, as a prerequisite for being part of God's Kingdom. Sometimes you just SHOW UP.

What does our PRESENCE mean at a Baptism? What does our PRESENCE mean at a funeral? We don't have to say anything (oh, well, we do have a spoken response in the midst of the Baptism liturgy) in order for our JUST BEING THERE to make a difference. We are the body of Christ. We embrace and nurture just by being there.

Think of those people you have known down through the years who have inspired you as they JUST SHOW UP at worship – whether they are feeling good or feeling ill, whether they are “in the mood” or not. They are faithful in their PRESENCE, because they understand that part of membership is about JUST SHOWING UP. It's not all about ME.

JUST SHOWING UP as we pledge in our membership vows is – like in prayer – an expression of TRUST. We trust that life does not have to be about our expectations at all.

God is in the business of teaching us to live life with expectancy – awaiting the surprises God has in store, while believing that in all things God works for good for those who love him and who do what they are told.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.