

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

February 2008

PASTORAL LETTERS **FROM THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL** **TO SALVATIONISTS ACROSS THE WORLD**

This is the twelfth in a series of Pastoral Letters from the General to every Salvationist across the world.

The Pastoral Letters are intended to be distributed unchanged and entire to all Salvationists and may be shared also with others interested in the sacred purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army.

INTRODUCTION

Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ.

This comes to all Salvationists with my strong, ongoing affection in Christ for you, and with my prayers for your effectiveness in the sacred calling that God, in his supreme wisdom, has placed upon the peoples known as Salvationists.

It has been laid upon my heart that I am to take a step of obedience under God by reaching out to you all through Pastoral Letters written from time to time. I write therefore in order to obey the One who has created us all, and with a longing that what is written will affirm, encourage and inspire you.

The themes for these occasional Pastoral Letters continue to be the themes God reveals. His holy will is made known in many ways. I pledge myself to be mindful that his will is often revealed through interaction with members of the Body and not only or always in the seclusion of the place of prayer.

It is my deep hope that each Pastoral Letter will be read wherever Salvationists are to be found, whether in private or in public settings. The chosen themes may prompt discussion, prayer and – as appropriate – action.

All Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise stated.

Shaw Clifton
General

MIRACLES

Dear Fellow Salvationists,

Greetings in Christ from London!

As this is the first Pastoral Letter of the New Year, Commissioner Helen Clifton joins me in wishing you all a very happy and blessed 2009. May it be a year when God draws very near to you, and you to him.

Do you believe in miracles? I most definitely do. Miracles take place all the time, but often we miss them or fail to recognise them. Recently I held a new born child. His name was Oscar and he was perfectly formed. He felt soft, tiny, and vulnerable. He was a miracle of new life. Everyone around him grew softer in their spirits and even in their body language - another everyday miracle.

At Christmas we met in person our youngest grandchild, Lincoln, in New Zealand. He had never met us during his 16 months of life. His first smile to us was a miracle of beauty. It communicated things to us no words can convey. It touched us deep within ourselves in ways that cannot be explained – another miracle.

At the other end of life there are miracles too. When my father was promoted to Glory in 2006 we witnessed the miracle of ‘dying grace’ as the Lord ministered to him in his final hours. Just a week ago a good family friend and fellow Salvationist related to us the evidence of the same ‘dying grace’ that fell upon her dear husband at the end. Miracles of grace!

We need never wrestle with the accounts in Scripture of miracles. We need never doubt the truth of what is recorded for us about the actions of Jesus. Once we know who Jesus is, instead of doubting the miracles we ought to be positively expecting them! It is just the same today. We know who he is, and we ought to expect miracles as an everyday thing.

Every coming to faith in Jesus Christ is a miracle of grace. Transforming a rebel against God into a prayerful, loving child of God is a miracle beyond compare. Then there are the continuous miracles of growing in grace: letting go of anger and embracing peace; rejecting the temptations of the world and preferring purity; dethroning self and living for others; replacing old, worn out ambitions with the perfect will of God for our lives.

Let me share with you what General Bramwell Booth once wrote about the miracle of a changed life:

The change of nature or character, which we undoubtedly see in some of God's people, is a true miracle. Here is one of the permanent wonders of God's dealing with us. We are not only made correct in outward acts, but changed in tastes, in desire, in preference – that is, in our very nature. When we see those who have from their youth up been accustomed to do and be evil, changed to do and love what is good, we are

*compelled to exclaim: 'This is none other than the work of the Holy Spirit! Behold,
God is here!'*

Exactly so – God is here – and therefore miracles are present too.

A prayer we can all use:

'Loving Heavenly Father, you have come among us in the person of Jesus Christ, your Son. Please stay with us. Do not abandon us to the world. Reveal yourself in love among us. Graciously indwell us by your Holy Spirit. Open our eyes to see you constantly at work. Help us to recognise the miraculous amid the everyday. Father God, please go on working your miracles of grace in me, using me more and more to your glory. Let me be one of your miracles of grace, and please do not ever cease to work in me to change me more and more into all you want me to be, so that one day I will be made ready to live with you in Heaven and to hear you say, "Well done!" Amen.'

I commend you all to the perfect love of Christ.

God bless and keep you.

Shaw Clifton
General

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