

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

January 2010

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

This is the 17th 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

PASTORAL LETTER SEVENTEEN

BEGINNINGS

Dear Fellow Salvationists,

Through this first Pastoral Letter of 2010 I greet you warmly in the sacred name of Jesus. In these opening weeks of the New Year I lift you up to God in prayer. May the Divine Presence be very real to each one of you at this time of new beginnings. May you sense the Lord's nearness day by day, moment by moment.

The theme of this 17th Pastoral Letter is 'Beginnings'.

Another year is a gift from God to each of us. The very newness of it causes us to pause and take stock of our lives. It is good to do this from time to time.

We can, first of all, cast a backward glance over our shoulders to review the year that has just closed. Can you see the gracious hand of the Lord in it: in the things that have happened in your life, and in the events impacting the lives of your loved ones and friends? It is a time to pause and give thanks to Almighty God for his promised presence with us through all the days of 2009. He has been there in the good and in the bad times. He has seen us through. He has been faithful.

Next we look ahead. It is a very great mercy that the future is veiled. This prompts our hearts to reach out still further to God as consciously we put our trust in him for the unknown days ahead. A time of new beginnings is a time also for new trust.

Let us find a quiet moment in which to tell the Lord that we do indeed love and trust him. It is a very great help to our souls to do this deliberately, with full intentionality. This quiet moment of rededication will become perhaps a source of great strength, of great grace, in the days ahead. Let it be a renewing of your love for God, a renewing of your devotion, a renewing of your willingness to serve him and to be seen and known by all as his disciple.

Then having placed our lives afresh before him in this manner, we can place our loved ones again into his loving care and protection.

For example, how good it is to pray for one's spouse, to speak aloud the name of a husband or a wife in prayer. The best marriages, marriages that endure, are built on such foundations. How helpful it is when a husband and wife can sit quietly together to pray aloud for each other and for the whole family circle. It is especially important to do this at a time of new beginnings and before the gentle, calm blessedness of Christmas has faded.

How good it is also to pray for one's children, naming them aloud before the Throne of Grace. God hears these prayers. They are never wasted. God's ear is inclined toward those who seek his guidance and protection for their children. Christian parents often make such prayers, as do Christian grandparents and Christian aunts and uncles. I say again: these prayers are never wasted.

This season of new beginnings allows us to place before the Lord also the hopes we have in our hearts concerning our daily work. Many of you reading this are Salvation Army officers making plans for the spiritual advancement of those you lead and those you serve in Christ's name. I say to you, 'May God bless those plans, those sacred ambitions for the souls of others.'

Many of you are local officers in the Army, holding sacred hopes that 2010 will see your service more fruitful for God than ever before. I join you in that good hope and I share the Spirit-prompted ambitions for your Kingdom-work.

I know also that many of you have influence over our young people in the Army. God bless you for that! I pray that you will be guided in all things by the Holy Spirit and that you will be given wisdom to lead many a young person into a new beginning with God.

Finally, I request that you continue to pray for me as we enter 2010. I need your prayers. Please pray for wisdom from God to be my portion, and also for physical strength to be granted day by day.

Commissioner Helen Clifton joins me in greeting you as we commend you each one to the matchless love of the Saviour.

God be with you.

Yours in Christ

Shaw Clifton
General