

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

February 2011

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

This is the 23rd 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.

Shaw Clifton
General

PASTORAL LETTER TWENTY-THREE

CHOICES

Dear Fellow Salvationists,

This is my penultimate Pastoral Letter and it is sent to you together with my esteem in Christ and my constant prayers for you. Commissioner Helen Clifton joins me in thanking you for your many and faithful prayers for us. We are richer in grace because of your prayers.

The theme of my Letter is 'Choices'.

As I compile this message to you the 2011 High Council has recently concluded its sacred business of choosing, by election, my successor. Gathered at Sunbury Court near London, the 109 officer-members of the High Council (57 women and 52 men) have chosen Commissioner Linda Bond to be the 19th General of The Salvation Army. She will take office on 2 April 2011. We surround her with our love in Christ and our prayers.

I know you will intercede for her constantly, as you have for me. God bless the General-Elect! She has been chosen in an atmosphere of prayerfulness and of waiting upon God. Yes, she has been chosen by human election, but we believe she has also been called by God to serve faithfully and to lead us all into a future that will be victorious for the cause of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

Now this prompts me to say that we who follow Jesus have all been called and chosen to be his instruments. The Bible tells us so. We have been chosen by a loving Saviour. In John 15:19 (I am using the *Contemporary English Version - CEV* - in this Letter) Jesus tells his disciples: 'You don't belong to the world. I have chosen you to leave the world behind.' Being chosen by Christ, because first we have chosen to follow him as our Saviour, means that the world no longer has any hold on us.

No longer do we take heed of the worldly voices that surround us so constantly. This is because we have chosen to listen to the Lord. He speaks, and we are helped and guided. Sometimes, however, we seem to be so busy that the voice of the Lord gets crowded out. I think of Martha and Mary in Bethany. Martha was active and busy, doing the many things that indeed needed to be done, but Mary took time to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him speaking. 'Mary has chosen what is best,' said Jesus (Luke 10:42).

What is your habit in choosing how to use your time? Are you constantly busy? Does it seem as though the things you need to do never come to an end? I urge you not to crowd out your personal time with the Lord. Take time to slow down and to sit at his feet like Mary did, to listen, and to take in what he has for you. In doing so, you will grow to be like him more and more.

In Psalm 65:4 David prays to the Lord and says: 'You bless your chosen ones, and you invite them to live near you.' Here again we see the clear connection between being chosen by God and being close to him.

I pray that you will grow nearer and nearer to the One who has chosen you to be his own. May you sense his love surrounding and filling you. May others grow aware that you are close to him, making them want that closeness too.

I pray also that the peace of Christ will fill you day by day, moment by moment.

I pray that the whole Army will experience a fresh infilling of heavenly grace. I know you will seek that for yourself, and I rely on you to ask Almighty God to grant the same in glorious abundance to the General-Elect.

God be with you each one.

Sincerely in him,

Shaw Clifton
General