

JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

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Editorial Introduction

by Major Stephen Court

JAC77. It sounds a bit like a sport car. And it reads a bit like one, too. It hugs a few crazy turns in topics, looks sharp as people peek over your shoulder in the café, and goes from 0 to 60 in no time flat.

And its exotic. Where else can you find features on Xander, Ezra, and Omri, topics like extraordinary prayer, evangelism, and disco, and exhortations to be a finisher, to be exceptional (in a certain kind of way), and to turn the world upside down?

Some are saying that 2012 is The Year Of DISCO. So we start by asking the question on the tip of everyone's tongues, "Can DisCo Save The World?"

And then, moving from the ridiculous to the sublime, Lieut-Colonel Janet Munn gives us "A Short History of Fasting."

SA Global 24/7 Prayer interviews Lieutenant Xander Coleman in Prayer Beacon in the Community.

Just as evangelizing should be preceded by prayer, Lieutenant James Thompson's article "The Motivating Disaster" follows Coleman's article.

Major Danielle Strickland dips into her marathon experience to exhort, "Finish What You Started."

When is the last time you read an article on King Omri? Lieutenant Rachel Sheils fills this gap and asks the question, "How Did You Make God Laugh?"

Then we end with a trio of articles: There are two ways to be spiritually exceptional; then we wonder, "Where's Ezra?"; and finally we look at the apostle Paul and how he shaped "A World Turned Upside Down."

Read it like a sports car. Test out its power. See how it handles the issues. And then show it off to your friends.

Can DisCo Save the World

by Major Stephen Court

*"There's a party goin' on right here
A celebration to last throughout the years
So bring your good times, and your laughter too
We gonna celebrate your party with you."
Kool and the Gang, 1980*

The 70s were a little ahead of my time. The earliest Disco hit I remember was 1980 song CELEBRATION.

Disco had a massive impact on western culture.

With the monotony of routine church life, many Christians could use a splash of the party atmosphere Kool and the Gang celebrates.

When western Christianity escapes the temptations of spiritual consumerism and church buffet a different kind of DISCO can save the world.

Our DISCO stands for discipleship covenant.

These DISCO groups are sprouting in different spots in many cities around the salvosphere as soldiers and recruits join together to support each other in the salvation war. 'So bring your good times, and your laughter here.'

Covenant is a serious thing. And we don't want to tie people up unnecessarily. So DISCO participants commit for a short period of time – normally one to three months – to hold each other accountable for certain things. The novel wrinkle in this discipleship exercise is that each member of the groups determines the things for which s/he wants to be held accountable.

That is, there isn't some uniform standard imposed on everyone. So a group can contain a brand new convert and a long-time follower of Jesus, as each person is vulnerable and accountable for certain activities and practices for the committed time. Everyone advances at your own pace, from your own status quo.

So, one person might want to be held accountable to fast two days/week and do a silent retreat once a month while another member might need help to do rations every day, exercise a few times/week, and read a good book during the DISCO.

And everyone benefits. Members pray for each other, support each other, and help each other. 'We're gonna celebrate your party with you.'

DISCO works best face-to-face. But it is also proven to work online. And it normally happens with the same gender.

The thing is, a good DISCO, though it may last only 90 days, will change the lives of its participants. It's 'a celebration to last throughout the years.'

And as those participants spin off DISCO after DISCO in corps after corps and city after city and territory after territory, we can legitimately ask, Can DISCO save the world?

And I think you know our answer.

Here's a generic example:

DISCIPLESHIP COVENANT

- To align ourselves with the heart and purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ, to prepare for the plans He has, and to optimize the opportunities He is presenting us, we are committing to the following disciplines over the next month:

On a daily basis to:

- Seek His will in our decision-making and then be accountable to each other for the action based on that will;
- Make myself available to help the other fulfill God's will in his life;

On a weekly basis:

- To witness/evangelise in a continuing manner as best as I can;
- To intentionally seek evangelistic opportunities;
- To intentionally encourage others at our Corps;
- To pray for the burdens and trials each of us is experiencing in an extraordinary manner;
- To participate in worship and discipleship;
- To be able to encourage each other in a firm and loving manner, to grow in grace, and to extend our Kingdom impact;
- To encourage and keep each other accountable in living holy lives;

Bobby's specifics:

To disciple _____ (including rations; memory work; evangelism; sometimes worship).

To do _____ of rations daily.

To memorise _____ of Scripture each week.

To evangelise each week.

To exercise XX/week.

To go avoid porn sites / magazines.

To treat women like my kid sister.

To avoid being alone with a female.

To avoid being alone with someone who is still using.

To volunteer at the corps XX/week.

Signed: _____ date: _____

Bart's specifics:

To do daily family devotions.

To read XX chapters of the Bible daily.

To do daily chores.

To tithe my pay cheque to God on Sundays.

To read one Christian book this month (one we agree on).

To attend my brigade each week (and call the other members in between)

To prayerfully consider soldiership.

Signed: _____ date: _____

A Short History of Fasting

by Lieut.-Colonel Janet Munn

In the Old Testament, fasting appears to be a prerequisite for revival. In Joel, chapter 2, prior to the prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh, the people of God are challenged to “declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly” (Joel 2:15). Then God promised, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people” (Joel 2:28). Is it possible that greater revival, an increase in the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit on all people, is delayed in our day, at least in part, as a result of our lack of fasting, our self-indulgence rather than our self-denial? How often do we really say “no” to ourselves, to our own appetites and cravings, for the sake of seeking the face of God through fasting and prayer?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught the disciples how they were to pray and fast; His assumption was that they would do both.

5 “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full... 16 “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face.” Matthew 6: 5, 16-17

When His disciples were criticized for their lack of dietary restraint compared to John the Baptist’s disciples, Jesus assured the critics that when He, the bridegroom, was taken from them, then they would fast.

35 “But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.” Luke 5: 35

Benefits of Fasting

In fasting, we humble ourselves, and we know from the book of James that God gives grace and favor to the humble (James 4:10). Jesus’ example reminds us of the power over temptation connected with fasting (Luke 4). Throughout the book of Acts, the early Church gathered corporately for periods of prayer and fasting in order to gain clarity and guidance regarding the will of God. This He made known to His people when they were together seeking Him in prayer and denying themselves of food as they sought Him. Imagine if we as Salvation Army leaders began to make major decisions only as we met together in fasting and prayer, rather than at meetings planned around meals!

Pioneers of Prayer and Fasting

Queen Esther called her people, the Jews, to join her in a corporate fast for their deliverance as a people. Anna served in the Temple in Jerusalem around the time of the birth of Jesus Christ, with prayer and fasting. She lived a fasting lifestyle (Luke 2:37), as did John the Baptist. It was during a period of fasting and prayer that God spoke to the Gentile Cornelius, the Roman centurion, about contacting Peter, which then led to a major shift in understanding regarding the Gospel and the Spirit offered also to the Gentiles (Acts 10:30-31). The Apostle Paul fasted for safety and deliverance

during a fierce storm (Acts 27) and Daniel fasted as a gesture of repentance on behalf of the sin of the people (Daniel 9). Jesus began His public ministry immediately following a 40-day fast.

The early church fathers, Polycarp and Tertulian, fasted, as did Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox and John Wesley. Wesley was so committed to fasting that he would not approve a candidate for ministry if he did not fast twice a week! How would that policy change our Candidates' Councils and us?

Whenever he became aware that his spiritual power or anointing was weakening, Charles Finney would immediately commence a three-day fast. Following the fast, the presence of God would radiate so powerfully through Finney that people would fall under overwhelming conviction upon his entrance into a room, a building, or even the city limits.

Jonathan Edwards and Charles Haddon Spurgeon would fast and pray in order that they would be able to preach well!

Types of Fasts

Elmer Towns outlines various types of biblical fasts and their purposes, in his book, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*. These include the Samuel fast, in which people join together to seek God's guidance for them corporately (1 Samuel 7) as well as the Ezra fast, a corporate fast for protection (Ezra 8:22). The Elijah fast is an individual fast to cry out for God's help in time of trouble and discouragement. The Disciples' fast is for spiritual power to exercise authority over the demonic (Matthew 17:21) and the Saint Paul fast is an individual fast for increased light – for an opening of the eyes of the heart (Acts 9: 17-19). God's covenant people agreed together to fast for deliverance from danger and evil in the Esther fast (Esther 4:16) and the Daniel fast is one in which the individual fasts for physical health and strength.

Lieut-Colonel Janet Munn - Secretary for Spiritual Life Development

For more on fasting...

Mike Bickle, *The Rewards of Fasting*

Mahesh Chavda, *The Hidden Power of Prayer and Fasting*

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*

Elmer L. Towns, *Fasting For Spiritual Breakthrough*

Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*.

Prayer Beacon in the Community

by Lieutenant Xander Coleman

While the *Global Call to 24-7 Prayer – a day and night cry for justice* seeks to be an ongoing prayer initiative, there are already several Salvation Army centres with a sense of vision and calling to become Houses of Prayer (SA-HOP) – places where the fire of intercession never goes out and where God makes himself at home according to Isaiah 56:7 “...my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations”.

Lieutenant Xander Coleman, Corps Officer of the Banbury Salvation Army Prayer Beacon Corps (<http://www.salvationarmybanbury.co.uk/>) (United Kingdom with the Republic of Ireland Territory) shares how the Corps has chosen to make prayer the major emphasis of its community life and mission, becoming a house of prayer in and for the local community.

Passion for Prayer

During a period when the Corps was without a commanding officer, they came face-to-face with the need to rely on God’s provision, guidance and vision. During this time they saw and received answers to prayers. On the back of what God was doing through the Roots movement, a number of key individuals in the Corps caught a passion for seeking God through prayer. This manifested in prayer becoming the heartbeat of the Corps and developed into a focus for its mission and identity.

As this vision for prayer spread like contagion through the Corps, it was felt that such an emphasis should be recognised in a formal way. Taking the values of the Boiler Room model - prayer, creativity, mercy, hospitality, mission and learning - and moulding it around the framework of a traditional-shaped Corps, the idea of a Prayer Beacon was developed. In May of 2008 Banbury became the first Salvation Army Corps in the United Kingdom to become a Salvation Army Prayer Beacon Corps.

The Prayer Room

The need for a designated, ground floor prayer room (accessible to as many people as possible) was immediately recognised.



Artistic and prayerful people within the Corps fellowship gladly took on the challenge of equipping the room. Prior to being used for the first time, the room was already soaked in prayer. The displays change on a regular basis as the Spirit guides. Initially many of the displays were teaching tools, helping people to explore the various ways of praying (e.g. praying the Bible, soaking prayer, *lectio divina*). The displays also encourage opportunities for personal, interactive and intercessory prayer.

The room is a space where people can find peace and the opportunity to sit quietly in God's presence. Many people comment on the powerful presence of God they experience in this room, and that the prayers offered there are almost tangible. The prayer room has also encouraged many of the Corps members to fellowship more regularly, and to confidently offer to pray for and with visitors during the usual weekly programme.

Answers to Prayer

The first amazing answer to prayer that the Prayer Beacon Corps experienced was God leading people to take responsibility for all the weekly program activities and developing a more loving Corps fellowship. Corps members have undergone accelerated spiritual growth and a willingness to move out of their comfort zones in order to allow God to change, grow and develop priorities. Other experiences include witnessing spiritual and physical healing, deliverance, souls being filled with the Holy Spirit and their spiritual lives being revolutionised!

More recently the Lord has been leading the Banbury Corps to 'pray big prayers', exercising their faith to see God's kingdom come in their community. One of the key prayers over the last few years is for the return of prodigals – those who have backslidden or left the fellowship. One-by-one, people have started to come back to the Corps, get saved, and become involved in the ministry of the Corps.

Ongoing Hopes

Being a 'Prayer Beacon' is an ongoing journey – the Corps is never static. God continues to open new avenues of prayer and service, and show the Corps members how passionate and effective prayer can be weaved through all of their activities. The official designation as a 'Prayer Beacon' has helped the Corps members to own the ministry of prayer. Their vision is developing around their impact not just in the local community, but as a resource for the local Church, the Division and the Territory as a prayer centre. The whole building is a 'house of prayer', not just the prayer room.

When asked about the Corps' vision for its community, Lt. Coleman replied, "We want to see prayer bring together the body of Christ in Banbury, to bring revival, to release the gifts, and to equip God's servants for their works of service. We want to see prayer drawing people into intimacy with God and see the answers to our prayers celebrated together. Ultimately, I would love to see Banbury Prayer Beacon praying non-stop: 24/7/365! We're still a long way off from that point, but we're trusting God to give us faith for greater things!".



Their desire for the Army is that prayer would become as natural to Salvationists as breathing - that around the world Salvationists would be awakened by the very Spirit of God to the need for fervent, corporate and personal prayer. It is also their prayer for more dedicated prayer centres to be birthed in the UK territory and around the world. Not every Corps is called to be a 'Prayer Beacon', but they are all called to be praying Corps. The best way to learn to pray is simply by doing it.

Dream big, start small, and go deep.

The Motivating Disaster

by Lieutenant James Thompson

A young boy is playing with a ball. The ball rolls onto a busy road, the boy follows it, grabs it and sits down on the road and starts playing with it. You walk by and see that a disaster is about to take place. A car is speeding towards him. Do you run on to the road, grab the boy, and take him to safety? Or do you worry about the politically correct thing to do? You don't know the boy, so you have a quick look. You notice that there are no parents around. Not wanting to go to prison or be sued for a misunderstanding, you ignore the problem. You go home and whinge about it to your friends and family about how parents suck these days...

What if you, a good swimmer, is swimming in the pool and you see an old lady drowning. Do you grab her and pull her to safety or do you say to yourself, "She's not my age, I won't be able to connect with her." You then wait for someone else her age to save her so that she doesn't freak out when she's being saved.

A family is asleep in a burning house unaware of the disaster that awaits them. You walk by, do you scream to tell them to wake up? Do you rush in, do what you can, call the firemen? Or do you respect the peaceful and quiet neighborhood, not wake people up from their beauty sleep and say to yourself, "I'll just come back in the morning when they're awake."

How about this. There is a virus that is affecting your nation. No one knows how to cure it, but you find a cure. Do you try to distribute it to everyone you know as quickly as you can. Or do you keep it for yourself and for your family not wanting to give it to others because they may not like the taste of it, and they're all strangers to you?

As we read the above scenarios we can easily see what the right thing to do is. If disaster is coming you need to warn people. We cross certain barriers that would normally prevent us from interacting with certain people. But at the end of the day the disaster is more dangerous than the alternatives. As we use these analogies for gospel sharing we will see that we need to Die to ourselves, Disregard Differences, Disturb the Peace and Distribute to all.

Disaster

In the above we read of disasters that cause us to do more than what we would normally do. We sum up in our minds, whether their fate is more important than the consequences of our involvement. We would have no problem protecting a child, rescuing a lady, yelling at a house, calling the fire brigade, or shamelessly promoting a product if it meant lives were saved.

In the same way we need to realise that our evangelistic efforts are of extreme importance. The disaster that awaits those who do not know Christ are horrific. Hell is not a place we should want anyone to go to. But hell is real and we would do well to realise that the disaster of hell is a lot worse than any excuse...

Die to self

The dilemma in the first analogy is the potential hazard of doing, being seen or being charged with doing something politically incorrect. In gospel sharing we can do this too. Instead of proclaiming the grace and truth of Jesus we can water it down not wanting to say anything to anyone that would make them blush. Instead we choose to cover our backsides. The disaster we are more afraid of is the disaster that could harm ourselves. To put it simply, we choose our own safety over others. Hardly a Christlike character.

What is needed is for men and women, boys and girls to die to themselves. To give their lives up for other peoples safety. Are you willing to make other peoples eternal safety more important than your temporal safety? Jesus did, and I think we should too.

Disregard Differences

The swimmer who would not save the elderly person was worried about the age difference. This too is common in evangelism. We decide not to preach the gospel of love and salvation to certain people because they are different to us. We don't mix with those sorts of people, or even the more "holy" cop out, "They're not like us, they wouldn't want to talk about Jesus!"

The problem here is that we fail to realise that all people are bound for hell unless they call upon the Savior. We are all the same. We need to disregard our differences, we need to focus on the similarities, we need to major on the major points. That is, that Jesus Christ loves them and wants to save them.

Disturb the Peace

No one wants to disturb a peaceful and quiet neighborhood. People have their own lives, they are going about their everyday business. "We shouldn't disturb them." We don't want to get up in their face and change the subject. We don't want to be rude. We will wait for them... That's a very common modern evangelism approach. We wait for them. We are more worried about keeping the peace, the status quo so to speak than other peoples salvation.

However, this does not take into account the impending danger. The disaster that awaits us is more than a good enough reason to disturb people, for if we don't they will be a lot more disturbed in an eternal hell than what they are in the present. For the unsaved this is as close to heaven as they will ever experience and the furthest from hell they will ever be. We must disturb the peace, peoples eternity is at stake!

Distribute to All

Have you ever thought about Christ's words to go into all the world and preach the gospel and make disciples? It sounds like a big job doesn't it? Maybe what He meant was go into your little cocoon of a world and tell only your friends and family the good news of Jesus. Jesus said what He meant. We have the cure for the worlds problems, His name is Jesus! And all people need Him!

This means that every single person in the world needs Jesus, and so we must not only go to those we now and love, we must go to all peoples, all nations, all places! The need is greater than our tiny sphere of influence. We need to go bigger! We need strategies to get the most amount of people saved and sent out to do the same in the shortest amount of time! We cannot pick and choose who should hear the gospel, all people should hear the gospel!

Wrapping Up

It would be too easy to say that we simply share the gospel exactly the same in every context though. In each of the above analogies the method of saving was different. The same can be said for evangelism, different people will respond to different things in different ways. However, we must never fall into the self serving traps of political correctness, allowing differences to hinder, wanting peace and quiet instead of heaven, or preferring relationship over the mandate for all the world. The impending disaster must take precedent over our petty excuses! We must be ready to die to ourselves, disregard differences, disturb the peace and distribute the gospel to all people!

Finish What You Started

by Major Danielle Strickland

I'm not sure what your New Year's resolution was – but the statistics are not very encouraging. Apparently only 20% of new year's resolutions make it past this mark in the year. We really just don't know how to finish what we start.

Years ago, I started running simply to work off the calories needed for me to eat what I wanted. But eventually, I began to be inspired by the running itself. I ran a marathon in San Diego called 'The Rock 'N Roll Marathon'. It was an incredibly fun event. Every five miles through the course is a massive Rock concert. The rock star is always telling the crowd to cheer for the runners and as you weave through the crowd you really do begin to feel like a rock star yourself. You don't even notice the distance for the first half of the marathon. As soon as the music fades from your ears behind you, the next rock band is faintly heard ahead of you – beckoning you forward. It was such fun.

The trouble is, no matter how great the course is everyone still hits 'the wall' at the last 10 km of the 42km race. This is the part of the race that is hardest to finish. Your entire body is trying to convince you that running this last leg of the race is not worth it. People call it 'the wall' because it feels like you've literally hit a wall. Not a happy feeling for sure. The organisers of this race had done something quite profound to deal with the last ten km of painful running. They had lined the course with the Marine Corps. In their fatigues and armed with sponges and buckets they 'cheered us on'. Well, more accurately, they yelled us on. Dipping their sponges in the cool water they would throw them at us and yell Marine slogans really loud. 'No pain – no gain' one would say. 'Finish what you started' said another. 'Suck it up, buttercup' one said with a huge smile as I labored forward. There was no way to stop. I mean would you stop with 10 km of marine corps soldiers yelling you forward?? It was incredible and I finished the race with a sore body but a soaring spirit. I wasn't just a starter – I was a finisher.

Paul likens our faith to a race. And he mentions finishing. Actually, in Hebrews 12 we see a picture very much like the San Diego marathon – "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses (the Marine Corps of believers? Abraham, Moses, Catherine, William....) let us press on to take hold of the prize. Let us not become weary – but fix our eyes on Jesus who for the joy before him, endured the Cross, scorning it's shame and SAT DOWN at the right hand of the father." Sitting down at the end of the race is the fun bit. I usually try to find a hot-tub to sit in. And it's ok to revel in a job well done. In a race finished. I think in many ways this is what God had in mind when he instructed the Israelites to remember the things in their lives that they had done and to celebrate them. I was reading recently that to cross the red sea, if all the Israelites marched 10 abreast in a line would have taken 27 days to cross. It's no wonder that God told them to take the time to set up an altar and to celebrate that they had made it. They walked a marathon together out of Egypt and then began another kind of race as they prepared for the promise land. It's important in our current faith to really learn not just how to start but how to finish. Celebration is part of it. Encouragement is another. Affirmation is key. Shame only motivates for a small time. Yelling at yourself

inside of your head to 'suck it up' only works for a short time. But affirmation, celebration and encouragement has power to move us forward – for the long haul. We can actually do this thing - together. You should try it. Why not join the race as a participant and a contributor?

As you fix your eyes on Jesus, follow His lead and be part of pointing others to His amazing example. Be an encourager to those who are trying to run, celebrate what God has already done in you and the pace at which you are moving and affirm the people around you who are giving it their best. I think Hebrews 12 is a beautiful picture of the community of God's people in action – not just starting things – but finishing them with style! Suck it up buttercup and finish what you started.

How Do You Make God Laugh?

by Lieutenant Rachel Sheils

In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned twelve years, six of them in Tirzah. He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver and built a city on the hill, calling it Samaria... But Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD and sinned more than all those before him... As for the other events of Omri's reign, what he did and the things he achieved, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel? Omri rested with his ancestors and was buried in Samaria. And Ahab his son succeeded him as king. (1 Kings 16:21-28)

Q: Do you know how to make God laugh? A: Make plans

Q: Do you know how to make people laugh? A: Follow God's plans?

That sums up today's article – Do you follow your plans or God's plans.

You may wonder, "How do these Bible verses relate at all?" Well, sadly King Omri followed his own plans and not God's plans. The Bible only dedicates seven verses to king Omri. If this is all the information we had on King Omri – we wouldn't know much. The main thing the Bible pointed out is that he did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He caused Israel to sin. He doesn't seem like he was that important of a king.

Interestingly, we have other ancient data on King Omri. History tells us that he was one of the most powerful kings of Israel:

- He is the 1st king of Israel who is mentioned by historical sources other than the Bible.
- Omri's reign brought peace – He ended almost 50 years of civil war.
- With this peace, he brought economic prosperity.
- The Bible notes that Omri built Samaria. That was no small feat; He built a new capital for Israel.
 - Archaeology discovered that the walls were 1.6 meters wide (about 4 ½ ft).
 - Archaeologists also note that it is one of the finest examples of this type of construction in Palestine
 - Samaria was so strongly fortified that it endured several sieges before its downfall.
- Omri's reign was established enough that he could name his son as his heir and thus begin a new dynasty of rulers.
- Omri was so well known among other nations that Israel was called the "land of The House of Omri."
- Some archaeologists believe that Omri and his descendants, rather than David or Solomon, "established the first fully developed monarchy in Israel."

The Bible does not highlight any of these facts that history has recorded! Some archaeologists believe that the Bible truly minimizes his accomplishments; he only gets seven verses!!

Why is that? In the grand scheme of eternity, the Bible doesn't remember his great deeds. All he strived for, all his toil, all his hard-work, all his late night planning and worrying about events seems futile because it was not for God. It was all worthless in the end. What mankind sees as an important kingdom was insignificant in God's kingdom.

- Verse 25 states: *Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him.* (He was the morally worst king yet!)
- Verse 26 explains: *He walked in all the ways of Jeroboam.*

Solomon's son had become corrupt and God didn't want him to be king anymore. God sent a prophet to tell Jeroboam and others that God picked Jeroboam to be the new king. *Jeroboam* was picked by God to lead Israel!! When he became king a big split happened in the kingdom that divided Israel and Judah into two nations. Jeroboam became king of Israel (ten tribes) and another king ruled Judah (only two tribes). BUT Judah had the chosen, holy city of Jerusalem. Jeroboam was afraid that the people would want to reunite with Judah since *the temple* of God was in Jerusalem so he set up altars to golden calves in two other cities so the people could worship in his nation. Jeroboam forgot that God directed his paths and that he was an instrument for God. Jeroboam did *not* trust in the Lord. Jeroboam *first sinned* when he forgot who placed him as king. This led him to continue to sin and actual lead others to sin. He led the people astray by worshipping other gods. That was the sin of Jeroboam. Omri made similar sins.

Omri's name in Hebrew meant "The Lord is my Life" – yet even with this reminder in his name, his very actions denied God's place in his life. Omri did not inquire of God. He did not do what was right. He even led others astray in his sin. Ultimately, all the *seemingly great* things he did in human history are *worthless* in eternity!! Afterall, "*what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul.*" (Matt. 16:26)

What we can learn from Omri's sins? No matter how great we are in the world's eyes, no matter what we accomplish, no matter how much money or electronic toys we have, no matter how nice our house or car is, no matter how trendy our clothes, hair or make-up – it is all worthless in the light of eternity if they are not for God.

Do you rush into making plans without asking the Creator of Life *His plans* for you? Do you toil, sweat and worry about things that God does not even want you to do? Do you waste time, energy or money on plans that aren't in-line with God's plan? *Do you truly seek first the kingdom of God* (Matt. 6:33)? If we do not inquire of God then we probably are not trying to do His will because we don't even know what it is! We often make our own plans and later ask God to bless them? Wouldn't it be better to ask God to direct our paths and expect His blessing will follow by doing His will?

It is easy in life to forget to inquire of the Lord

- We may just start doing a task that is good to do or routine
- We may get busy in our work and forget

- We may be so far along in our own plans to stop and ask if they are even God's will

Embarrassingly, Matt and I started picking songs one Sunday and had a couple selected before we realized we hadn't prayed first. We stopped and said sorry and then asked for God's Holy Spirit to guide us.

One of the best-selling books apart from the Bible is called, *In His Steps*. It was written 1896 by Charles Sheldon. It is a great novel – I recommend you reading the book. The main character is the Rev. Henry Maxwell, a pastor of a church in the USA, who challenges his congregation to not do anything for a whole year without first asking: "What Would Jesus Do?" This is where the phrase, WWJD came from. It has become so popularized today that I think it has lost some of its deep meaning.

The book follows the characters in the book as they focus or pretend to focus on the question WWJD. There is one woman, Rachel Winslow, who is a talented singer. She decides *not* to use her talent to become popular and make money but instead she gets involved in tent revivals. She uses her beautiful voice to calm down the rowdy crowds so their hearts are prepared to hear the gospel message. Another character is a landlord who owns tons of apartments. He realizes the state of his apartments are very poor– even though that is the norm in the 1900's. He decides to provide better housing for the less fortunate. He decides not to get rich off the backs of the poor.

The result? The town they live in is transformed and surrounding towns are affected too; all because they inquired of the Lord by asking "What Would Jesus Do." If we put God first in our plans, then details fall into place! *"Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed."* Proverbs 16:3

What if you did the same thing? Commit for one year to ask – What Would Jesus Do -- When wondering about employment, moving, making a big purchase, using your free time, SHARING THE GOSPEL and more. If we all ask God I believe He will direct our paths in the ways He wants us to go.

You may ask how God reveals his plans for you once you ask.

First, in order to know the answer you need to know *What Jesus Did*. We need to read the Bible which is our "Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth". Don't paint Jesus the way you want Him to look, but read your Bible and *know* his teachings. Jesus did not come to *only* say that God loves you – He came to warn people to repent. Those are his *first* words to people in the books of Matthew and Mark!! As his disciples, we should be spreading his message. The Bible speaks on many other topics as well so we know what is right and good.

Another way to determine God's will is to seek advice from mature Christians. Proverbs 15:22 proclaims, *"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."* It is good to seek godly advice.

Thirdly, God also reveals his will in situations working out. If you ask God to, He will probably close the door you are not supposed to walk through. Someone told me once – Instead of sitting back and waiting for God to open a door – *we should be active and going through the door. If it is not the right one, God will close it.*

When death is at the door, would your life only get seven sentences to summarize your life in eternity like King Omri? Or would God welcome you into His kingdom and say, *“Well done – good and faithful servant.”* May we all strive to hear these blessed words!

JAC TRILOGY – Where's Ezra?

'We were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.' As apposite as these words are to the primitive salvationists, they were originally spoken by the Jews returning from exile to their beloved Jerusalem (Psalm 126:1,2). Surely our early forebears were characterized as joyful, happy dreamers! They had rediscovered the heart of God. They were returning to Jerusalem (1). God had beautiful plans and dreams for His people.

Those were manifest by the quick building of the wall (2). Despite much opposition from Sanballat and Tobiah (Nehemiah 2:10ff), we set to the important task and built a wall that stretched to 125 countries (at last count). God blessed our ingenuity, persistence, faith, and integrity.

But the next few generations saw much more opposition, not all of it from without. The returned exiles grew comfortable with the new freedom and the standard of living they had built for themselves. They grew content with the wall, even though the Temple lay in ruins for many more years (Ezra 4:24). They succumbed to the political coercion over the years to drop the urgent pursuit of their 'religious' agenda and eventually compromised spiritually.

Where's Ezra?

In the old days, Ezra showed up, about 80 years after they started building the wall, and about 450 years before Jesus was born. More recently, the political coercion, the mission contentedness, and the spiritual compromise are awaiting another Ezra.

'Ezra knew how to get things done. He had the political savvy to win a Persian king's support for the trip back to Jerusalem, the salesmanship to convince Jewish family leaders to go along, and the organizational know-how to mount the long, complicated, and dangerous expedition' (3).

But Ezra had much more than that.

As a follower of God, Ezra was complete - he went from convert, to disciple, to discipler (Ezra 7:10). He devoted himself to the study of the law. He devoted himself to the observance of the law. And then he devoted himself to teaching its decrees in Israel.

He was committed - he fasted regularly and prayed (Ezra 8:21,23; 9:6-15), even presaging the primitive salvationists by confessing, weeping, and throwing himself down before the house of the Lord (Ezra 10:1) (4). He took the historic step from teacher and priest (Ezra 7:12) to leader.

He was conscientious, with integrity insisting on God's standard of righteousness in the face of generational sin. He did not care that the ramifications of repentance and restitution were literally enormous. Neither was Ezra content to salute the past victories.

He recognized that, 'when an army settles down to an acceptance of a code and is content to stitch its trophies on its banners, that army is lost' (General Orsborn).

And finally, he was covered; the hand of the Lord was on him (5). This last factor is essential to Ezra's success through every difficult stage of his mission. The covering of God enabled him, granted him favour in the eyes of everyone from king to compatriot, and provided him with the guidance he needed to reach his goal. God worked through governments, lobbyists, enemies, loyalists, homesick Jews, unemployed priests, and kept His hand on visionary leaders to accomplish His ends. But it seems that He needed a visionary leader. He might have asked, "Where's Ezra?"

Where's Ezra, the complete, committed, conscientious, covered Christian who will confront the comfortable, contented, coerced compromising of The Salvation Army 80+ years later?

For Ezra, the intermarriage was symbolic of spiritual compromise. Today our spiritual compromise takes different forms, including government restrictions applied through social service contracts, highly questionable alliance with cultic groups and secret societies such as free masonry (6), and a widespread inattention to our heritage holiness doctrine. Our intermarriage with the world's values and lusts and interests has weakened our flanks and blunted our attacks.

And yet, God has beautiful plans and dreams for His people. "Because the Lord was overseeing the entire situation," (Ezra 5:5 LB) the story can still have something much more exciting than a fairy tale ending. And just as the people of Israel established a righteous standard in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, we, a new people of God (7), with a similar standard, can accelerate His return. Where is the soldier or officer who will call us to account and bring us to repentance? Where's Ezra?

(We expect that there are hundreds)

1. There are several hypotheses about the sequence of events in Ezra and Nehemiah. There is no intention to be dogmatic about the one assumed here. Major themes such as cooperation and God's sovereignty are under-emphasized as a result.
2. Colonel John Dean pleaded that we consider The Salvation Army our Jerusalem. cited in M. Carpenter, JOHN DEAN. No date. London: The Salvation Army. p74.
3. Philip Yancey and Tim Stafford, 1992. EZRA, A MAN OF THE HEART. In The Student Bible. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. P437.
4. Ezra shared with primitive salvationists a lack of concern for dignity or decorum in his encounters with God (Huxley labeled primitive salvationism 'Corybantic Christianity').
5. This is similar to the judges and some kings in the Old Testament, and the Acts 1:8 promise, and is sometimes referred to as the anointing ('The hand of the Lord his God was on him' Ezra 7:6; 8:18; 8:22; 8:31).
6. Besides the local lease agreements of Masonic Temples by corps, one THQ has a property contract with the Masons.
7. To use Major Rhemick's phrase from his book, A NEW PEOPLE OF GOD.

JAC TRILOGY – Exceptional?

Nearly three quarters of Americans move every five years (wiki.answers).

What's your goal where you are today? Are you aiming to leave the front on which you are fighting better than when you came? Are you wanting to make sure that people will think kindly of you after your departure?

Is that all?

You see, I'm sick of the kind of epitaph like David got in 1 Kings 15:5; "For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's commands all the days of his life - except in the case of Uriah the Hittite." A wonderful bit of praise is followed by a sad exception. And too many times the exception is the rule. 'He is a happy-go-lucky-guy but as shallow as a puddle.' 'She is good in public but she never visits.' 'She prays like Jackie Pullinger but she couldn't find Malachi in the Bible if her life depended on it.' Sad exceptions to a basically good life appear to be the rule. This is not a new phenomenon.

You read through 2 Kings and run into a bunch more exceptions. Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. However, the high places were not removed (see 12:3,4 NIV). Amaziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord... The high places, however, were not removed (see 14:3,4). Azariah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord... The high places, however, were not removed (see 15:3,4 - yes, I copied and pasted). These guys were all seen as good men of God. If they were officers today, they would have left with the corps bigger than when they came. If there were soldiers, they'd have left their Sunday School class healthy and a financial gap from the departure of their cartridge. They'd be popular, well thought of, and missed. Yet, none of them dealt with the high places.

Are you willing to settle for the reports on Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah? Are willing to go into a place, do a 'good' job, leave the place better than when you arrived, do your duty, but not deal with the high places? That's what is going on far too frequently among the 3/4 of us who move every five years...

That is definitely the temptation. Today, we don't deal with the same high places. Chemosh and Baal have been discarded along with their asherahs and matstsebahs. Yet, high places remain. Our battle remains, not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the spiritual forces of evil, "in the high places" (Ephesians 6:12 KJV). We do our fancy church growth shuffle, tap dance a bit to work up a crowd, and all the time, the spiritual forces of evil in the high places, sit by laughing at us, because we are no better than Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah.

We must tear down the high places. We must if we are ever going to fulfil the mission of winning the world for Jesus. How can we allow the high places to remain if we are trying to crown Jesus as King?

There are different high places in different regions. In one of the cities we lived in - one of our 'five year' stints - spirits of racial hate rule. In another the 'almighty buck' and its pursuit was idolatrous. In The Salvation Army worship of tradition is a high place we must tear down. I am told of a congregation in which sexual promiscuity kept popping up in each generation, because the spirit of promiscuity was not kicked out. In our own lives there may be high places which must be ruined through repentance. General Paul Rader says, "The Salvation Army has been part of a great army of prayer warriors... challenging the strongholds of Satan" ('Call to Prayer'). We need to engage in combat.

Exceptions need not be the rule. And exceptional people and characteristics need not be all negative.

Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord... not turning aside to the right or the left (see 22:2). Josiah renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord - to follow the Lord and keep His commands... with all his heart and all his soul... He removed all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem... He did away with the pagan priests... He took the Asherah pole... and burned it... He ground it to powder... He pulled down the altars... He desecrated the high places... (see 23:3-25). He had it together spiritually, personally and in his area of authority. He had no exceptions. God did have all his heart and all his soul. That's the remedy for negative exceptions. If Jesus rules in our lives and corps, we won't be exceptional in a negative way.

More than likely there are high places, spiritual forces of evil, which are wreaking spiritual havoc in your midst. Seek them out. Pray them down. Desecrate them. Enthroned King Jesus in their place. Let's be exceptional like Josiah.

JAC TRILOGY – A World Turned Upside Down **Acts 19**

These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Acts 17:6. NKJ

Paul wrestled against principalities and powers throughout the Roman Empire, spirits stirred from their comfortable, unchallenged rein in their own regions. His dynamic Gospel stole the hearts of demonically captive people through the introduction and impartation of the Holy Spirit, the steady teaching of the Way, and the demonstration of extraordinary miracles. The demonic counter attack against the seven sons of Sceva, during which the would-be devil-kickers were administered, “such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding,” succeeded instead in seizing the Ephesian populace with fear!

The name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour.

Many of those who dabbled and indulged in sorcery generated a great public bonfire by burning their scrolls.

Practically the whole province of Asia was turning to God!

The ex-sorcereres were not alone. They were joined by massive crowds of ex-idolaters who gave up their idols. This literally overturned the regional economy. As the centre of the god Artemis, Ephesus was the home to a complex system of tradesmen and craftsmen involved in the creation of little shrines and related objects. Another significant portion of the population was involved in the tourist trade, as pilgrims trekked to Ephesus to express worship at the Temple of Artemis. It was as if Disney World was closed down in Orlando!

Social unrest was close behind. Riots sought the lives of the ringleaders of the Way.

But as significant portions of the economy were redeployed from wickedness to godliness the city was changed. Millions of dollars that were invested in demonic interests, in sorcery, in witchcraft, in the occult, were now transferred to the coffers of the Kingdom.

So instead of propping up an impotent goddess and the evil behind her wealth was invested in providing for the widow, the orphan, the alien, the poor, and the needy. And funds were poured out into the lives of Gospel revolutionists, warriors of the Lord Jesus Christ, to replicate these results.

Some commentators figure the 50,000 drachma up in smoke to be roughly equivalent to £2-3 million sterling. One drachma was the daily wage of an agricultural worker. The Canadian average worker now earns \$31,000 a year. That works out to about \$11.2 million (CDN).

Granted, that money went up in smoke. It wasn't invested directly into the Kingdom. But much more than that amount, the future disposable income and prospects of these revolutionists, was targeted for the Kingdom.

What was the bottom line? The enemies of the Way admitted that it was winning the province of Asia. Some even figured that it had turned the whole world upside down. "The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power." Just keep in mind what we've in front of us.