

# **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

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## **Editorial Introduction**

by Major Stephen Court, Editor

Welcome to JAC103. We just finished celebrating the 100th issue (with JAC100, JAC101, JAC102!) and we're moving on boldly into whatever God directs and permits with an interesting mix of articles from contributors old and new.

We'll kick off this issue with the long-awaited (delayed by the three-part celebration!) conclusion of Major JoAnn Shade's *A Problem Like Maria* – Part 2 of 2.

Major Danielle Strickland pitches in with a parental lesson applied to personal spiritual life called, *What Really Matters*.

Major Daniel Freeman, divisional business secretary in Southern California, discusses with us, *Mission Possible*, out of Acts 1.

Captain Matt Kean in his first of two submissions in this issue, emphasizes the seriousness and importance of the Gospel in *The Gospel Must Be Presented In Full*.

Captain Gordon Taylor shares with us a dream he had he calls *The Mountain* as well as an interpretation and application.

Major Howard Webber, award-winning author in England, gives us an excerpt from his new book *NO LONGER I with A Bolt Out Of The Blue*. - Warning: It is a cliff-hanger for potential readers!

Matt Seaman connects holiness with God's creation in *Holy Living, Sustainable Living*.

Captain Pete Brookshaw asks and answers, "How Can The Salvation Army Move Forward? Discovering Simplicity in Complexity."

Captain Matt Kean tells a story of an intriguing conversation he's recently had all summed up in his title, *The Bible Is Sure*.

As usual, we're grateful to the contributors for their willingness to share what God is stirring in them. We're grateful that you read what they write. And we're hopeful that you will share widely and apply liberally the contents of JAC103.

Godspeed.

## **A Problem Like Maria - part 2 of 2**

by Major JoAnn Shade

In *A Problem Like Maria* (JAC Issue #98), I wrote about the difficulty the Salvation Army has experienced throughout its history in determining appropriate/fulfilling/effective appointments for married women officers. Until perhaps the last decade (at least in the U.S.), seldom has a married woman been placed in a leadership position outside of what Strickland has labeled “the married woman officer ghetto.” All too often, when a married couple moves beyond the shared ministry of corps officership, the wife is assigned to the open slot that matches her husband’s appointment. This “solution” has not been satisfactory for many officer women, and the difficulty was noted by Mrs. General Higgins in 1931, and acknowledged by the International Commission on Officership and General John Gowans in 2001. Fifteen years later, we as an organization still haven’t fully sorted out how to handle this. So my concluding questions in *A Problem Like Maria (part 1)* were these: What do we want and how do we get there?

What “we” [women who are married Salvation Army officers] want may not be the same, dependent on our own personality and life circumstances. As the great philosopher Yogi Berra once said, “where we stand depends on where we sit.” Sometimes, our hopes and dreams get stuck at the place of simply wanting off-black pantyhose without a run in them, praying desperately that the baby will sleep through the night or that our wandering teen might come again. Been there, done that.

Yet fussing babies and fuming teen-agers don’t define our lives forever (and do have an impact on our husbands as well). So what do we want? The Commission on Officership defined the question like this: How can Salvation Army decision-makers appropriately appoint married women officers to roles “commensurate with their gifts and abilities?”

I think we can agree that we do want appointments commensurate with our gifts and abilities. Given our current system of appointments (which vary from territory to territory as far as consultation is concerned), we want to be known well enough so that our gifts and abilities are taken into account when appointments are made. We are aware that the needs of the Army must be considered when making appointments, but when there is flexibility, we would like to be acknowledged for our strengths, not simply slotted in where there’s an opening.

What else do we want? We want to have equal consideration given to us when appointments are being made. If a single woman would be considered for a DC appointment, we as married women want to be as well. If an opening occurs on a board

or committee, don't assume that because we have a toddler at home, we wouldn't be able to do it. Ask us (and don't funnel the question through our husbands).

We do want to be heard. In the appointment process, in the policy-making that affects women officers and corporate decisions, in the prayer room, in the board room and in the pulpit, we want our voices to be recognized, we want our opinions to be honored. To quote Bill Himes' precious words, we want "all that I am, all I can be, all that I have, all that is me" to be used effectively in Salvation Army ministry.

How do we get there? I recently attended a workshop sponsored by Ashland Theological Seminary entitled "Beyond the Stained Glass Ceiling," based upon the book of the same title by Rev. Christine A. Smith. While her presentation was fascinating and helpful, the lack of self-determination within the Salvation Army appointment system does present unique challenges to the stained glass ceiling problem. But regardless of the differences in denominations, her points of response are solid. First, she suggests that we must involve the power brokers of the church, of the denomination, in the effort to create change. An increase in the dialogue around the issues is essential, and she also encourages the intentional use of women in public roles to provide a broader exposure for their skills and gifts.

I especially resonated with her suggestion for the development of the beloved community. This phrase has been used within the civil rights movement to describe a "critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence" ([www.thekingcenter.org](http://www.thekingcenter.org)). Says Smith, "While Dr. King was referring to racial integration, the concept is also appropriate for bringing about equality and integration of women into the pastoral ministry . . . Men and women in the ministry must not simply tolerate one another, but out of a common purpose they must strive to open doors of opportunity where padlocks exist" (Smith, 147-148).

So what can married women officers do to open doors for themselves? Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg reminds us of the importance of sitting at the table. We've got to be present. We need to sit at the table, not serve the lunch at advisory board meetings. We need to bring our strengths to the work we do. We've got to take ourselves seriously if we expect others to do so.

Married women officers also need to tell the truth without blame or judgment, not always easy when we have emotional attachments to the situations we face. We're doing so successfully in a couple of groups on Facebook, but we've got to find other ways to speak truthfully to what we see and what we want, modeled well in the recent push to extend compensation to married women in the United States. Let's face it: our brothers

in Salvation Army leadership have inherited a biased system from their (primarily) forefathers, and we can't blame them for that. Change, especially in a large, international movement like The Salvation Army, is not easy, and often there are implications to changes that may not be apparent to the onlooker. Kindness and gentleness are not symbolic of weakness.

I'm also a keen proponent for the personal development of each officer. When our commitment, training, experience and expertise clearly makes us the best person for an appointment, it will be harder for the decision-makers to overlook us. We need to step up, recognizing that sometimes we are dancing "backwards and in high heels."

As married women, we can get off our donkeys and ask for what we want, for what we need (see Aksah's story in Judges 1:11-15). Get to know divisional and territorial leaders. Request an official meeting, and/or initiate a casual conversation that includes a glimpse at the desires of your heart. When asked, don't hide your light under the basket; instead, answer realistically about your abilities and availability. And if you can't be available (family issues, health problems, etc.), communicate that as well.

What about advocates? At the stained glass ceiling workshop, Smith's co-presenter, Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle said: "What's needed is for more men to say this – it is not fair for women to be the only ones speaking up." Yes. I've been rather surprised over the years that in particular, husbands haven't been more willing to speak up for their wives. It's time. Advocates can also be found in Salvation Army stakeholders. Men and women outside of the Army see some of the issues, and can raise their voice when appropriate and helpful.

As for Salvation Army leaders, please listen. Please hear the women who have served so faithfully for so long. Please remember us. You need us. I can't help but think of the words of the man on the cross next to Jesus: "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." Remember the work your fellow officer did when the tornado hit. Remember the conversation you shared by the fireplace at retreat one night. Remember yours sisters when you have the power to effect change.

Let me finish with a disclaimer and an observation. I don't have a horse in this race any more. This isn't about me. But I know that my younger sisters in ministry have a holy ambition to serve the Lord with all their gifts. I'm concerned that sooner or later, if the organization can't recognize that and move more seriously in this direction, we're going to lose the very people we need to take us into the next decades.

And then a final observation. I've watched over the years as Army women have been either widowed or divorced. It continues to amaze me as to how at least some of these women suddenly are qualified and chosen to be in leadership positions that previously had not been open to them. It seems like their officership IQ went up 40 points overnight. The only thing that had changed was the lack of a husband at their side. That is strong evidence that women, whether married or single, are capable. When the wedding ring is the only reason a woman is not considered for an appointment, that is blatant discrimination and it needs to be named for what it is.

It's clear that structurally, The Salvation Army is not set up for self-determined assignments. It remains to be seen how long the lack of input into appointments will continue to be effective, but that's for another article. To conclude this one, I would simply repeat: talk to us. Listen to us. We want God to "take every passion, every skill," not so they can be buried or hidden in a corner of the vineyard, but so they can be used to bring others to Jesus. It's time.

## **What Really Matters**

by Major Danielle Strickland

I've got a six and a three year old who have something wrong with them. Massive hormonal swings. I think this is the case with all kids but I'm sure it is with mine. They are prone to extensive and extreme reactions to normal decisions. Crazy ideas like 'clean up time' and 'homework before screen time' are met with wailing fits of protest. They literally rage against the injustice of it all. On the occasion when I can take a moment to look at it from a distance, it's funny. But mostly I just hold in my own hormonal responses to theirs. What I want to do is to scream and shout louder... but I don't. Because I'm an adult. I think it's rather big of me to stop the cycle.

Upon reflection of the most recent fit (this morning) I saw myself. I saw my own inner emotional reflexes to God's invitation to put the things that matter first. Homework before screen time? The nerve. I rage against the discipline, yelling out on the inside of my head, 'He never lets me have any fun!' and head to my room to sulk and turn on the screen anyway. Ha ha. That'll teach Him.

Prayer before action? I've never!! No one has time to pray – all the other kids don't have to... I want to GET SOMETHING DONE... and I rush on past the prayer closet in the hope of getting on with the 'real work' – sulking through the effort because of my Divine parents' nerve to try to steer me in what will help me get the real work done.

Making time for relationships? Are you serious – I'm swamped already. Plus, let's be honest – I'm so awesome I don't need anyone! And the inner tantrum begins.

It would appear that I'm in a perpetual state of a spiritual toddler. My initial reactions are almost always extreme ones. I guess the difference with me is that instead of it being done out loud it's an internal battle. I shout and scream and pound the floor in my own mind, heart and will.

And then I take a step back to look at my own hormonal self – raging out of control and I feel the parent in me rising. I tell myself, 'let's review'. What has God asked of me? I go over it in my mind. Why has He suggested this? I realize that if I participate in this journey it's going to lead to freedom. Much like my six year old this morning reluctant to practice his letters line by line before the screen time was released – I find the practice of prayer journaling to be both liberating and infuriating. But as he looked up and smiled at me when he was finished and said with a great sense of accomplishment, 'I did it!' I remembered how I feel when I finally relent to the instructions of God who is teaching me what really matters on a daily basis.

I'm thinking the reality of internal toddler tantrum hormonal swings may never really leave me – but I'm so glad God is patient and kind and willing to keep inviting me to put



what matters first. Maybe you need to take a moment in the midst of your own reactions to remind yourself of the incredible scriptural promise that God disciplines (instructs, enforces boundaries, gives direction) to those He loves. Then count yourself blessed for that kind of Parent and do what He asks.

Because in the end, that's what really matters.

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## **Mission Possible**

by Major Daniel Freeman

We are called to be missionaries. I know that this is a loaded statement with many cultural and historical context. Perhaps there are other words that may not carry as much baggage; however, instead of creating a new phrase or using some ambiguous term, allow me to take you on a walk through what it means to me to be a missionary.

One of the best places to begin is with the Great Commission where Jesus tells us in just a couple sentences what our job as the body of Christ is —“...be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8 NIV) It is interesting how this list of locations is a progression from the known to the unknown, from the comfortable to the uncomfortable, from the appreciated to the despised.

The first location that Jesus starts with is Jerusalem. Jerusalem can be seen as a metaphor for the people who we can connect easiest with such as our families, friends, coworkers or others we socialize with. They understand us. They know our story and perhaps they have been exposed to Christianity in a positive way so that you have a common ground.

Judea is a step away from the familiar. Perhaps in Judea you do not have as much in common. Maybe the same language, the same sports team, or the types of food you eat. But it is going to be harder to connect because you do not see things the same way and their values may be different than yours. Perhaps what they think is important, you do not and it may be that what you see as important they see as irrelevant.

It is with Judea that our work as a missionary begins. Being a missionary or being missional is about communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ across boundaries. It is about presenting the Gospel in a way that is understood by others. It is so easy to say and so hard to do.

Jesus then presents the big challenge: Samaria. A people and nation despised by the Jews. If there is one group that was hard to tolerate by the Jewish community it was the Samaritans. They were the perverters of the Jewish faith. They could be seen as the worse of the worse as they took the Jewish beliefs and twisted them for their benefit. Jesus is challenging us to reach out to the very people who we despise. Who is that person? It is different for everyone. It could be the foreigner. It could be the physically impaired, the very poor, the stinking drunk, the drug addict, followers of our religion, the homosexual, the transvestites, or perhaps the politician, the police officer, or the very wealthy.

Just in case He missed anything, Jesus also adds, “to the ends of the earth.” This may seem extreme, especially after already mentioning Samaria, but wasn't that the very experience Paul had? He found himself at the ends of his earth, bound and imprisoned in the foreign land of Rome. Admittedly, Paul did have some connections to the Roman Empire as he was citizen of that nation. Yet his environment couldn't get much different

from his home Jewish community. I would categorize this as “the people who we can’t even possibly imagine exist.” It is beyond our ability to see these people who desperately want to connect with our God of love and grace. Again we may not have to travel for days by boat, plane, train or foot to find them. They may live just around the street from our home.

I believe the bigger challenge is not in knowing the Great Commission but rather in the implementation of it. I think we can all agree that history is rife with examples of the proclamation of the Gospel done wrong. Sometimes it was out of selfishness, methods of exerting power, or just plain ignorance. This is why we all need to be missionaries not in the historical context of the past (regardless of right or wrong) but rather in the Scriptural mandate to bring the Gospel across all cultural boundaries. Again, this is what being a missionary is about. Communicating the love of God and the Good News of Jesus Christ to people who we have little in common with and whose ways of thinking, habits and customs clash with ours.

Unfortunately there are no formulas to follow. There is no set of instructions or checklist. However, there are basic principles to practice. When reaching out past the Jerusalem to the Judea, Samaria and beyond, the best advice we have is to understand what Paul had to say about it. His advice can be found in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 where we are told to be all things to all people so that they may be saved.

As a word of caution, I am not contending that we give up the fundamentals of our faith. These we must never lose. Nor should we allow some synchronistic molding of beliefs for the sake of winning others. However, it is surprising how many of our perceptions of our faith are not necessarily tied to our theology but rather tied to our culture. This is what we need be ready to sacrifice for the sake of others in order to be all things.

Like the story of Pilgrim’s Progress, we are all on a spiritual journey, whether it is in our discovery of God and His boundless love or the seasoned saint continuing to be molded by God. If we are to help people on their journey, then we need to be able to walk alongside them, helping them along their way. To help with their journey, we should consider three things.

The first is dialog. We need to hear what they are saying and respond accordingly. It won’t help to go off a script. We you need to discover where they are at in their journey. We need to use the greatest self-control to stop talking and listen to what is being said. Instead of planning the “great response” in our heads, we should be listening to their words and the message behind them so that we can respond to them where they are at in their journey as opposed to where we used to responding by rote.

Second, we need to be sensitive to the moving of the Holy Spirit. Philip was led by God so that he would meet an Ethiopian on the road who was trying to understand the Scriptures (Acts 8:26-40). We need to be listening to the Spirit, for without the intervention of the Holy Spirit there is no understanding of the ways of God (1 Corinthians 2:9-16).

Third, we must love. I don't mean in words, for that is far too easy to be distrusted. I mean in our actions. We love by making little sacrifices of ourselves, of our time, our money, and our resources. We show our love by giving people our full attention. We love by our willingness to give up what seems important to ourselves for the sake of others.

Jesus stated that the harvest is ready but it is the workers that are lacking. The farmer cannot treat a crop of corn like he would potatoes. He does not expect the potato to act like corn when we wants to harvest it. Nor can we approach people with one method of presenting the Gospel and expect them to be responsive. Unfortunately, I have hardly skimmed the subject of what it means to be a missionary. I do hope this gets you thinking about your "Judea, Samaria, and ends of the earth." The world is full of people who need to hear the Gospel and need to hear it in a way that they can understand. If you challenge yourself to approach them with love, a desire to dialog, and a sensitivity to the working of the Holy Spirit, I pray that you will become all things to all people so that they can be part of the Body of Christ.

## **The Gospel Must Be Presented In Full**

by Captain Matt Kean

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a very special message. It's unlike anything else offered by literature, philosophy, and religion because it was born out of the heart of God and is the love story He wrote for the human race He created. Perhaps what makes it even more unique still is that it's true. It was true when God initiated it, it was true when Jesus brought it, and it is true when it is heard and accepted today. It's a message of Good News and hope for a world that has been severed from God by its own darkness and sin and rebellion. Simply put, the gospel presents sinful humankind with the Way to be reconciled to God their Creator – and that is very good news indeed.

However, there are prerequisite truths fixed within this message of good news which make it something that must be considered very seriously. The gospel of Christ is not one that can be received flippantly. It is a love story for sure, but it is one that insists the heart which receives it must do so with sincerity and genuineness. It upholds the truth of grace and pardon upon pillars that will not be compromised. For example, the Scriptures tell us that the physical life we live here and now is temporal, meaning that our time to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ is limited to opportunities offered us now. Equally, there are numerous warnings in the word of God that clearly tell us about the severe consequences of refusing the Good News of Jesus while we exist temporally. Another truth that undergirds the New Testament gospel, and is perhaps the more neglected in today's Christian professions, is the reality that human beings are collectively waiting for the eternal Judgment of God and nothing other than the gospel can save us from His righteous gavel. These truths all work actively to reveal to humanity our dire need for the Good News. They bore a tunnel, so to speak, into the heart by which the gospel is able to travel speedily and with precision.

Sadly, though, these pillars of truth are less and less present in the bulk of current gospel deliveries. They sound far too unpalatable and they ring the ears far too much. Yet, because these truths are not being conveyed the resulting Christianity is always weak and terribly marred by carnality. The great cost of embracing the faith of Jesus Christ is something that is never understood. There is never any realisation that being a follower of Christ will demand sacrifice and perseverance. The certainty of Christ's return which is loudly proclaimed page after page in the Bible cannot be believed with any real sobriety or urgency because it has never been stressed. On top of this, there is an inevitable apathy toward the severe lostness of other unsaved human beings simply because the gospel has been accepted as something one can regard with an attitude of nonchalance. Such a Christianity cannot contend properly for the True faith or bear witness to it because it knows only a Newspaper Headline kind of gospel that says "RELAX. JESUS LOVES YOU!" and nothing more.

For those of us within The Salvation Army, this applies to us as well. Our presentation of the gospel has in many instances become more concerned with growing churches than saving sinners. It doesn't have to be this way, but it is this way. One need only look a little more closely to see that it's true. Having said that, there are wonderful pockets

dotted throughout the army that are working hard to buck this trend, and praise the Lord, they are seeing good fruit. It's very obvious that Jesus honours the labourers that present the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It's an encouraging fact that we can all hold close to our hearts. God eagerly wants to bless His Army, but not for any reason except for the progress of His gospel and the growth of His kingdom.

I recently met an older man when he walked into our corps looking for assistance. Of course, I helped him generously and talked with him for quite some time. The time became appropriate for me to invite the man along to our Sunday worship service and so I did. However, the gentleman's reply was startling to me. He said, "If I came to church the roof would fall in." I was caught off guard a little because I was expecting a simple "Yes, I'll come" or "No thanks." I would like to say that I answered him with some great pearl of wisdom, but the truth is that I merely chuckled along with him as he walked out the door. As soon as he went round the corner, I thought about what the man had actually said and I felt dreadfully convicted by God's Spirit. Why? Because exactly as Jesus said, his words betrayed the contents of his heart (Matt. 12:34) and he had confessed his knowledge that he was a sinful man – too sinful to even enter a church – but I let him leave thinking it was all just a few words said in jest. In that moment I was careless, and, I permitted a person to remain blissfully ignorant of the certainty of God's holy judgment and Christ's imminent return.

Here's my point: It's so easy to allow our preference to remain comfortable and our desire to avoid awkwardness to dictate the terms by which we deliver the gospel. In many cases we may not even realize it. Also, because of those same desires to remain comfortable, it is easy to find ourselves wanting to leave out the necessary warnings God gives to the unsaved throughout Scripture. The truth is that our desires to remain comfortable and our will to avoid awkwardness are often huge hindrances to the truth. They directly stand in opposition to the Holy Spirit's desire to convict. Our God of Righteousness and Salvation requires that we (myself certainly included) repent of these comfortable hindrances and speak in boldness about why a relationship with Jesus Christ is so very vital to every human being.

The real gospel of Jesus, the real Good News, must not be compromised for the sake of the one who conveys it, nor should it be blunted for the sake of the one hearing it. It is far too important! It has all the power of God unto salvation for those who believe (Rom. 1:16), just as it is presented in the New Testament. As a result of a sense of panic because of poorly attended pews, the churches of our time might be willing to entertain another, softer rendition of God's truth, but surely not The Salvation Army. God forbid! We have one mandate: to grab as many people from the flames of an eternal hell before the Day of Judgment. It's what we were raised by God to do. The gospel is our banner! We have been appointed as its faithful bearer and it was given to us so we would proudly lift it up in full.

My friends, my fellow soldiers and officers... The Gospel is a very special message. It's unlike anything else offered by literature, philosophy, and religion because it was born out of the heart of God and is the love story He wrote for the human race He created.

Perhaps what makes it even more unique still is that it's true... every last part of it, especially the prerequisite pillars upon which it sits. Let's profess it boldly. I pray that we will again!

All glory be to Christ!

## **The Mountain**

by Captain Gordon Taylor

I saw a mountain – a large mountain. I heard Jesus calling me to come to Him. But He was on the other side of the mountain. The mountain was too high to go over and too wide to go around. But I knew He was calling me to come to the other side. I had to go through the mountain. And when I really looked at the mountain instead of trying to avoid it, I found there was a tunnel going through the middle of it. I climbed up to the tunnel and started walking into it.

I was excited to answer Jesus' call and was full of energy as I began the journey. He called to me again. I continued on. But as I travelled, the layout of the tunnel began to change. It got smaller and smaller and soon I had to crouch down to walk, and then, after a while, I had to crawl. But the inspiration of the call still gave me strength to carry on. But then the floor of the tunnel opened up on one side, leaving just a narrow ledge to crawl on. The journey now was very difficult, but I remembered my call and persevered. I went on this way for some time and then saw as I looked ahead that the ledge got smaller and smaller. I knew I had been called to go through this mountain, but it was now beginning to look impossible. But I moved forward. As the ledge continued to shrink, eventually I could only continue on by hanging down from the ledge, by my fingertips, slowly, agonizingly inching forward. Finally I realized I could go no further. I had exhausted all of my resources. I stopped.

But then I heard Jesus say, "Come."

I said, "Lord, I can't go any further."

He said, "I can carry you."

And I finally realized obedience to the call was not enough. Sure, I had heard His voice and followed, but I had been trying to follow His path in my own strength. And I wasn't up to the task. And now that I couldn't go any further I faced a choice. I could turn back – or I could let go of the ledge and trust Jesus to carry me the rest of the way.

And then I woke up.

This dream - or vision - I honestly do not know which – came to me at Camp Mountainview during a worship session several years ago at a Leaders' retreat, not long before my wife and I entered the Salvation Army's College For Officer Training. As I shared this with others and prayerfully considered the message it contained it seemed to me that the message was pretty obvious. Obedience to God's call is simple in one way – say Yes! – but in another way not so simple. When it was clear to me that Jesus was calling I did all I could to respond and begin the journey He was calling me to. But obviously I wasn't equipped to make the journey. And I had definitely been trying to make the journey in my own strength. I needed to let go. I needed to stop relying on me and actually rely on Jesus. It was a lesson I had learned before in my life –



but one that I had forgotten. Now Jesus had reminded me in a very dramatic way how important it was that I always relied on Him.

But...

There was more. Jesus wasn't finished with me yet (and still isn't). Relying on Jesus didn't necessarily mean letting go of the ledge. He gives us His strength and support in many ways.

A few months later I was again at Camp Mountainview, this time for a Men's Retreat. And while I was sleeping one night, the journey continued in a dream.

I hung on that ledge for a long time, thinking I had to let go - afraid to let go - afraid to go back. And then the dream moved forward. Jesus showed me what I had to do next. I had thought I only had two choices: let go of the ledge, or go back. But Jesus revealed a third choice to me. He first pointed out that in my eagerness to answer His call and move through the mountain I had hurried in without bringing any tools with me. And now it was becoming clear to me what it was He wanted me to do. I was to move forward in the tunnel by building a path out of the rock, so that others could follow the call as well. Because the path was incomplete, many would be discouraged and turn back, so it was my task to work through the rock, leaving a safe path for others to follow. The job looked overwhelming, but He told me the size of the job was not my concern. I simply had to obey, and do my part of the job. I realized that whether or not I ever completed the job was not something I needed to worry about. I merely had to obey the call to work on the path and move forward, as long as I had breath in my body.

While I was thinking on these things my gaze drifted back along the tunnel to where I had already come. In my haste to come forward, I had neglected to notice that the path I had come on was not a natural tunnel. Now that I was looking I could see many places where extensions and bits of pathway were obviously of human construction. I had been treading a path where saints had trod! I had been reaping the benefits of the hard work others had done. Now I knew how important it was for me to move forward. Others would be coming, and the farther I could extend the path, the closer we would all be to our goal. Again, I was energized by a holy excitement!

But then I remembered – I hadn't brought any tools! I did not have the tools for the job. But now that He had my full attention Jesus ensured that I knew what I would have to do. I prayed. I asked Jesus to show me where and how to find the tools and the skills I needed for the job. And He answered my prayer, but not as I expected, but in a far better way than I could have hoped. While still bowed in prayer I heard voices coming toward me in the tunnel. I looked up and I saw, carrying the tools, other believers – others who had also answered Jesus' call. I greeted them and together we began the task of extending the tunnel, preparing the path for those who would also answer the call and come to Jesus.

We are a body – we are the Church. As individual parts of that body, we must follow the call of our Head – Jesus. And then we together must follow Him – working together, supporting each other on the journey.

Leading up to these 2 occasions when God spoke to me through this dream/vision, I had very specifically asked Him for something – to give me a vision. I was scared to ask Him for this. I thought, “What will I do if He actually gives me one?” It’s scary. If God speaks directly to you, you’d better listen. But I asked, and I received, and now I know where to go, and how, and I know He will supply what I need when I need it.

Are you wondering what to do? Where to go? Ask Jesus! And then get to work.

John 9:4: “As long as it is day, we must do the work of Him Who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work.” - Jesus

## **A Bolt Out Of The Blue - chapter 1**

### *Book excerpt from 'No Longer I'*

by Major Howard Webber

'I have something I need to say before you go,' Miss Barrett called out as I closed the lounge door, so I opened it again and stepped back into the room. Following a brief preamble she got to the point of why she had called me back, 'I need to tell you that you are the worst officer (minister) this corps (church) has ever had!'

I felt as though I had been hit by a brick and stood there stunned, not knowing how to react to what I had heard. What she said came as such a shock, totally unexpectedly. After a moment's hesitation, I meekly thanked her, (don't ask me why?) and stepped back into the hallway. Letting myself out and shutting the door behind me, I walked down the garden path to my car in a daze. 'Had I heard right? Not one of the worst amongst lesser mortals, but *the* worst, the very least of the least, lowest of the low. How could she have come to that conclusion?' I got into my car, closed the door and put my key into the ignition, but I was unable to turn it, start the engine and drive away, for I could not restrain the tears welling up inside me. The dam burst and I broke down and wept like a baby, inconsolably, like I hadn't wept for many a long year.

When first my wife and I arrived in this North Wales village, to take charge of what was our first corps following training, we commenced visiting and getting to know everyone recorded on our rolls. Dear Miss Barrett was well into her eighties. She had very poor sight and this, together with her walking difficulties and the distance from her home to our hall, prevented her from venturing out to worship. She had outlived her peer group and gradually, over many years, her name had ascended to the top of our soldiers' (members') roll; she was our number one!

When we called on her she was delighted to see us and welcomed us into the area. Subsequently, knowing this dear old soul rarely got out of the house and did not have any close family, when I was passing by I called in to see her. It was no big effort on my part as she lived just off the main road between our village and the nearest town ten miles away.

Miss Barrett was always kind and courteous, insisting on making me tea served from a silver teapot into bone china cups, accompanied by a plate of chocolate biscuits. Concerned at her poor sight and frailty, I would offer to make the tea for her or at least carry the tray from the kitchen to the lounge, but she was emphatic, insistent that she was quite capable of doing it herself. So I would watch attentively, ready to jump to her aid as she came through the door and gingerly made her way across the lounge towards me, before bending down and placing her burden on the coffee table between our chairs.

This became the regular pattern whenever I visited her on my own or with my wife during those first two years. Then she changed. The first thing I noticed was the

absence of her cheery, 'Shall I put the kettle on Lieutenant<sup>1</sup>?' when I entered her home, as her warmth towards us was replaced by a cold indifference. Gone too was the natural flow of conversation. Something of a scowl seemed to permanently replace her smile. At first I thought she had had bad news or something had happened to her that I had not been told about. When I asked her if she was all right her reply was, 'Yes, why shouldn't I be?'

There was a decisive moment when her mood changed, and I knew that something had happened to upset her, but she would not open up and tell me what it was. It never occurred to me that it had anything to do with me, as I only saw her when I visited her. The only other contact I had with her was by phone when I would ring her to check that she was keeping well. Initially, I thought it was a temporary thing and that things would be back to normal the next time I visited. They weren't. In fact, they were never the same again. A definite feeling began to grow within me that I had said something or done something to upset her, though I had no idea what on earth it could be.

Whilst the visits were no longer pleasant and I no longer looked forward to them, I continued to call there every few weeks just the same. Often I would ask her, 'Have I said anything to upset you? Have I done anything?' to which her reply was always the same, 'No, what could you have said or done to upset me?' I tried apologising for whatever it was that I may have been responsible for, but this was just met with silence. Though I now dreaded these visits, I still felt sorry for this lonely old soul, but I also wondered what good my visits were doing her. They were definitely not doing me any good! Sitting with her in her lounge as she looked out of the window, refusing to say much, placed me in an uncomfortable spot for sure.

About a year after this awkwardness began, I was making my final visit before being moved to a new appointment<sup>2</sup>. I told her what was happening and where we were going, but she showed no interest. I asked her questions about herself and got minimal replies. At the end of my ordeal, I prayed with her and for her. As I stretched out my hand to shake hers, thanking her for her kindness to me, (for she had been kind during those first two years), she responded by flopping her limp hand into mine like a piece of mackerel, without holding or gripping my hand in response.

'Obviously, I won't be seeing you again, but I do wish you well and God's blessing upon you. I'll see myself out.' It was as I was closing the lounge door behind me that she suddenly called me back into the room.

'Lieutenant, I have something I need to say before you go.'

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<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant is a probationary title/rank given to newly commissioned Salvation Army Officers, which they have for their first five years of ministry.

<sup>2</sup> In The Salvation Army officers do not choose where they go or apply for posts or positions, but are appointed to what is considered by senior leaders to be where God would have them be. These days, in addition to prayer, such decisions are not made without consulting the officer and considering their personal circumstances as well their particular gifting.

In my naivety I thought to myself, 'Thank goodness for that,' as I stepped back into the room, 'this is no way for two Christians to part,' and I then just stood and waited for her to gather her thoughts before she continued.

'As you know, my parents were among the group of pioneers who walked all the way from Wrexham to the village to start The Salvation Army there.' She had told me this several times since first I met her. In fact I learnt much from her about the corps' history. 'And so between my parents and I,' she continued, 'we have known every officer that has ever been stationed here.' That was true, and in the early years officers never stayed more than one year. Many only stayed a few months. In fact, the previous year had been the corps' centenary year and I had researched the corps' history and found that there had been an unbelievable ninety-two officers or officer couples before my wife and I were appointed. I had no idea where all this was leading or the brick of a statement that she was about to unleash on my unprepared ears, something that would fly around inside my head like an unstoppable squash ball bouncing between the walls of a squash court. 'I need to tell you that you are the worst officer this corps has ever had!'

It was quite some time before I was able to compose myself to make my way home. I was relieved that no-one came near my car to observe me while I sat there booing. Several times during that journey home I stopped to check in my mirror to see if the redness of my eyes and all signs of my tears were gone, as my wife had enough on her plate without having to be concerned about me. The children greeted me as I opened the front door, and much noise and chatter followed, but other than Judy commenting on the fact that I was a little subdued, nothing else was said.

We were without a corps secretary so each week I assisted the treasurer in completing the corps accounts and preparing the banking. We did this in the front room of our home. The hall was some distance away and would have needed to be heated before we got there so it was convenient for us both. As we sat opposite one another with the cash and cheques and books between us, the treasurer asked me, 'Is everything all right Leff?' Initially I assured him that everything was all right, but I was quieter than normal and he persisted in his concern for me.

He was a reliable leader and much respected, just a few years older than myself. I knew that I could confide in him. Other than bringing it to the Lord, I had not wanted to share what had been said with anyone else, but I conceded to his persistence. When I finished conveying the story of my relationship over the past twelve months and its culmination, he smiled, 'Leff, ignore her. What does she know about you and what you have done? I know it's not her fault, but she never ever gets to the hall. She's unable to come near the corps. All she knows is what she picks up from the phone calls she gets, and we all know who it is that rings round and upsets folks with their distortion of the facts. Forget it.'

I wanted to forget it. The treasurer was right. What did she know about me or the corps? But I couldn't get it out of my mind. In the days, and indeed weeks and months, that

followed I went over and over the last three years of our stay there with a fine tooth comb, analysing, comparing, justifying, and putting together a defence of myself as though I was going to court. 'How could anyone think, let alone say, that I am *the* worst officer they have ever had?'

## **Holy Living, Sustainable Living**

by Matt Seaman

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Holiness and sustainability – are they unrelated matters, or are they closely intertwined? Consider the multitude of issues faced in today's world, issues such as social and ecological injustices like poverty, pollution and over-consumption.

In our current context, simplicity, self-control, living within limits and considerate consumption can be understood and integrated into our own lives from both perspectives of holy living and sustainable living.

The Salvation Army traces its spiritual heritage through John Wesley and the subsequent holiness movement. Two Salvationists who are well known for writing on the theme of holiness are Samuel Logan Brengle and Frederick Coutts. Brengle's descriptions of holy living include: "Holiness is ... pure love", and "holiness, then, is conformity to the nature of God. It is likeness to God as He is revealed in Jesus." Likewise, Coutts describes "holiness [as] the unfolding of Christ's own character in the life of the individual believer".

Combined with the biblical call towards holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7, for example), the journey towards holy living can, therefore, be considered an integral part of our Salvationist "DNA".

### **Holy connections**

Sustainability, on the other hand, may seem like a new buzzword in our society. However, it is certainly not a new idea. Understanding the significant benefits of sustainable practices has been a natural outcome of knowing and appreciating the interconnectedness that is intrinsic to life on Earth.

Over human history, lessons and skills have been learned about the benefits of being mindful of and planning for the long-term future of the natural resources on which life depends. For example, understanding the long-term agricultural benefits of rotating crops and allowing "rest" periods for the land; and keeping water, soil and air clean for the health and well-being of humanity and our earthly home.

In the biblical narrative, we read of the harmonious relationships God originally intended for life on Earth, and the tightly linked connections between God, people and creation. For example, God considered every thing he created very good (Genesis 1:31); humanity is placed on earth to cultivate it and to care for it (Genesis 2:15); and Genesis 2:18 provides background for the importance of community and togetherness.

Various principles within the Old Testament link holy living and sustainable living, and speak of keeping healthy and whole relationships between God, God's creation, and people as part of God's creation.

Think of the scriptural calls to respect the "Year of Restoration", giving the land time for rest and restoration for one year every seven years (Leviticus 25:2-6, 20-22); and the "Year of Jubilee" where land ownership and property rights were to be recalibrated every 50 years, keeping in mind the fact that all things are from and belong to God (Leviticus 25:8-14).

Biblical passages emphasise the links between living holy, God-centered lives in community and living in safety and abundance in the land (Leviticus 25:17-19). It is interesting to consider that issues and problems arise in the scriptures when people ignore or do not consider their connection with God, with other people, and with the land. This fact is still of great significance to us today.

In Matthew 22:36-39, Jesus states the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul and mind. The second commandment Jesus affirms is that we are also to love others.

Hence, John Wesley can say with conviction that "the gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness."

### **Minimising impact**

If we as Salvationists are called to live holy, spirit-filled lives, growing and developing Christ's character in our own lives (Coutts), and living out pure love (Brengele) for God and all God's creation, it then follows that living in sustainable ways that minimise negative impacts on fellow humanity and the rest of God's loved creation is an integral part of holiness.

As a holy and a listening people, we must not only be open to the cries of suffering people, but also to the groans of creation around us. This means not just recycling and other "green" actions, but taking a bigger picture view like evaluating the liveability and sustainability of our homes, our church, our local area.

As followers of Christ, as Salvationists, as contributors to the healing of people and place, we should then be aware of the conditions of life and death, of health and disease that surround us.

Nick Spencer and Robert White offer a number of principles for sustainable living from a Christian perspective in their book chapter "A vision of sustainable living today". These principles include:

- Valuing and protecting creation, seeing this as a joy rather than a burden;
- Reflecting on the close bond between society and environment in our decisions;
- Pursuing justice for the vulnerable and marginalised;



- Not confusing wealth and value: our goal should be relational health (social, spiritual and ecological) rather than just having more money or more personal freedom to do whatever we want;
- Participating in the local community and environment and favouring local solutions;
- Responding to God's call to partner to heal social and ecological issues with determination and hope.

May we as Salvationists affirm with the farmer and writer Wendell Berry that we can take "literally the statement in the Gospel of John that God loves the world ... [and] believe that divine love, incarnate and indwelling in the world, summons the world always towards wholeness, which ultimately is reconciliation and atonement with God."

## **How Can The Salvation Army Move Forward? Discovering Simplicity in Complexity**

by Captain Pete Brookshaw

Do we trust each other?

You may wonder why I start this article with such a vague, seemingly innocuous question. Though, think about it for a moment... do we trust each other?

I'm about to dig deep into the heart of organizational life, so brace yourself. If I push a few buttons, please forgive me.

Without trust organizations cut themselves off at the knees. Decisions take far too long to make. Leaders in authority hold on to power for fear of what delegating would mean. People on the frontline skip around the edges and produce mediocrity (Though they produce great mediocrity. They are not mediocre in their mediocrity). An organizational system can perpetuate distrust with over-regulation and policies and procedures that produce a great strain on a movement.

Let me delve straight into what I am about to ask.

In The Salvation Army do we trust each other? Do we trust Divisional Commanders with their financial budgets? Do we trust corps officers to do their job well? Do we trust employees to make the right decision? Do we trust soldiers in our corps to lead the ministry with skill, passion and integrity?

If the question is yes on all accounts, then read no further. This article is useless and deserves being discarded.

Are you still reading?

When a movement becomes a bureaucracy it is difficult to become a movement again. Rules and regulations become the norm and dynamic, vibrant, apostolic ministry fades into the distance as a mere memory in a movement's history. Now, transitioning from a movement to a machine is never an intentional desire of those within the movement. The push towards regulation and control is seemingly what happens. Look at the movement John Wesley first began. Look at the first three hundred years of rapid Christian growth, followed by the official establishment of the church in the early 4<sup>th</sup> Century.

Most of this is not intentional. Remember when The Salvation Army began? Ministry on the streets. The drunkard being converted. The prostitute redeemed. The word 'church' was not used. We were a 'mission'. A new denomination was never on the cards.

But then someone donated some money, and someone had to decide where it got banked.

Then someone asked a Salvation Army Officer to officiate their wedding, but the Officer was not officially ordained.

Then someone donated food, and a leader had to find somewhere to store it. How would the food stay fresh? Who will ensure the food won't make people sick?

Then Elijah Cadman started wearing uniforms. Others began wearing uniforms. Someone said, 'Why don't we create uniforms across the board? Wait a minute who will design the uniforms? How will we pay for them? What distribution channels will we use? Maybe if we buy in bulk we could save?

The shift from momentum to machine is very rarely intentional. It is what happens over time. We witness the clericalisation of clergy and the establishment of structure. Decision-making now has process, and leaders are held firmly to particular expectations, not just on character, but on systematic processes related to the organization.

Here's where trust comes in. Let me make the following assumption:

*Movements implicitly trust people.*

*An organizational machine implicitly distrusts people.*

There is a lever where trust shifts from unconditional confidence to conditional confidence. Apostolic ministry when it is dynamic, risk-taking, faith-filled and passionately bold empowers people to 'try' and 'give it a shot.' Leaders have unconditional confidence in the capacity of its people and there is excitement and faith amongst those serving. When the lever shifts to conditional confidence, for good or bad reasons, the faith wanes, the excitement is hard to produce and the results show it. The apostolic ministry in the midst of conditional confidence is hard work. One can only makes decisions based on certain criteria, they can only spend certain amounts of their budget and they cannot do certain things because of safety, risk, legalities, finance, personnel and authority. The dynamism is lost in the midst of well-founded concerns of administrative process.

When we move from a movement to a machine, we move from trust to a lack of trust. That's what it seems to me. It may not be intentional. It may not be 'on purpose'. It is what happens in bureaucracies. Systems are put in place to support the organization, but become such that they fundamentally suppress that which they attempt to support.

How do move forward?

We cannot compromise on safety. We cannot compromise on certain legalities around our work in the world in today's context. Some of you wanted to hear that. Here's the challenge... what drives you? Are you driven by a desire to tick the Workplace, Health and Safety Box for the sake of compliance, or is it a means to an end, in order that we

could help facilitate innovative, creative, dynamic communities of faith that make a global difference?

We must push to move from a machine to a movement. It is happening in places. Absolutely. Praise the Lord. We pull The Salvation Army towards recapturing a movement mindset by doing the following:

- Making systems lean and not over-regulated
- Give Officers and employees greater freedom in financial matters, while safeguarding against corruption/abuse of finance
- Push against a silo mentality that seeks to establish successful departments, but rather seek a successful overall organization
- Put money where the mission is
- Give greater authority down the chain, with a fundamental trust that leaders are capable to do their job and do it well
- Flatten the global structure of the Army, without losing the essence of para-militaristic foundations
- Stay focused on mission
- Narrow the focus of the organization to what really matters
- Create one-touch decision making. (I talk to John Smith and he says yes or no on whether I can proceed).
- Give prayer a greater emphasis.

There is always more to be said, though let me finish with this. When Jesus was confronted by the religious leaders of his day, they challenged him to recall to them the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus' answer was surely a breath of fresh air to an over-regulated Jewish establishment that had learnt to make rules and regulations their lifestyle. He responded by effectively saying to 'Love God' and 'Love others.' This is crucial. Even with understanding the importance of the Mosaic law, Jesus brought simplicity out of complexity. He narrowed the focus and communicated what was of utmost importance.

May God give wisdom to The Salvation Army in these years ahead, so that we can discern how to create simplicity from complexity, in ways that produce Godly outcomes in an organization yearning to be a dynamic movement that transforms the world. We can certainly do this.

## **The Bible Is Sure** by Captain Matt Kean

Not too long ago I was approached by a young woman with a question. She had been bouncing around different churches her whole life and her faith was the result of a wide mix of teaching, which is not uncommon to find amongst younger Christians. Basically, she was calling herself a Christian without really believing much of the New Testament's account of Christ. Also, it seemed to me that her understanding of worship and church was quite narrow, but to her credit her interest was real nonetheless.

"So what's your question?" I asked her. "What do you think of gay people?" She asked bluntly. I found her tactlessness to be somewhat refreshing. Before I could reply, she proceeded to explain how she thought I should answer her question, and for quite a long time I simply let her speak. Eventually though she allowed me to give an answer to her question. "I love gay people!" I said proudly, "And I want more of them in my congregation!" I added. She was immediately impressed. You see, this woman had already made known to me that she was a lesbian and my response met her approval quickly. However, she wasn't really satisfied enough to let my answer rest there, so she continued to prod me further.

"When did you become so accepting of gay people in the Church?" She asked. Without hesitating I answered, "After experiencing Jesus within my own heart, and coming to know Him personally, I quickly realised that His desire for every person, regardless of who or what they are, is for them to come to Him for salvation and avoid the coming wrath of God. Because it's His desire for every person to hear the truth, it's my desire too." She looked at me a bit oddly, but seemed okay with my response. Still somewhat curious, she continued with the unofficial interview. This time though, her questioning took a different direction. She began to ask specifically about my personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

"When you say that you experienced Jesus within your heart, what do you mean?" She asked. Let me say at this point that this is my favourite question to be asked, and nearly every conversation I have, I try to steer it to this. I love telling people about the wonder and power of having the Spirit of God dwell in my life through submission to Christ. I've come to see that a personal testimony of the transforming ability of the gospel is more effective than a thousand sermons or a million arguments. The heart of every individual longs to know that the God of the universe is true and personal, and hearing another person tell of it affirms their longing. Nothing is more effective for the growth of Christ's kingdom than born-again believers who are filled with the love of God witnessing that it is all true and very possible.

And that's what I did. To answer her question I simply told her my testimony. I told her how I became a disciple of Jesus Christ when I was in my early twenties, enslaved to a life of drug abuse, dishonest wealth, and sexual promiscuity. I told her how I was so dreadfully lost and how my entire outlook on life was empty and hopeless. Many of my friends had gone to prison or died and due to my relentless pursuit of selfish gain and

ambition, I was headed in one of those directions too. With everything that was going wrong in my life, deep down inside me I somehow knew that God alone could fix it. To make a long story short, I told her how I surrendered my whole life and being to the Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ, repented earnestly and sincerely for the sins in my life that God condemns, invited His Spirit to possess all of me for His glory, and at that exact moment I began the process of dying to self and living for my Saviour.

“So that’s what I mean when I say I’ve experienced Jesus within my heart.” I said. She was very quiet. For the first time in our lengthy conversation I could see that she was truly reflecting on her own life and faith. I could see that she wanted to say something, but struggled to find the words. I tried to help her.

“Are you okay?” I asked. No response. I began to doubt that she had even heard what I’d said. But then she spoke. “I don’t have that kind of certainty in my faith. I’m just not sure of it all.” She began to explain to me that her experience of Christ was an experience of churches. She attended several different denominations, with several different styles of leadership, and several different theologies and doctrines, some very traditional and liturgical, some very open and unstructured, but her faith was not founded on the gospel of the New Testament Christ. It was founded on things other people told her about Christ. She was confused by the hundreds of voices that whirl around the community of ‘faith’ and she had never actually experienced the gentle but life-shaking voice of the living God.

I encouraged her to pick up a Bible and read it... but I emphatically told her to begin with the New Testament, explaining that at this stage of her faith, reading about the history that preceded Jesus was less important than His actual life and teaching. Sadly, her response to my suggestion was predictable. “I don’t really enjoy reading the Bible!” She said. In my experience, these are usually the words of a person who has never read the Bible looking for the life and truth of Christ. “Try again.” I urged her. “But this time, when you read it, don’t argue with what you’re reading. Ask God’s Spirit to speak to you. Let the words challenge you at a deep and personal level so that only your pursuit of God’s heart is your guide.” She agreed to take my advice, but not easily. As if by some inner compulsion, she confessed that she was afraid to read the Bible at face value. Needless to say, this disturbed me, but again, it didn’t surprise me.

You see, in her case, her hang up with the Bible came full circle back to her homosexuality. It was the reason she asked me in the first place what I thought of gay people. It was also the reason she was so unsettled in various churches. Whether she was a part of a congregation that condoned same-sex relationships, or sitting in a church where the subject was altogether avoided, or sitting in a pew while a preacher outright condemned it, the only answer her heart longed to hear was the one that came from God. However, she was afraid to read the Bible without searching Google for articles and opinions of other people, or checking out different discussion groups on Facebook, because she would have to wrestle and strive with God by herself to get answers from Him. She would have to listen, and that frightened her. She would have to be sincere, and that set her on edge. I encouraged her to humbly present her fear to

God and simply be honest about what His word actually says. I gave her no more counsel than that. I didn't need to.

I'm convinced that above all else this is the greatest problem within today's Christian church: People will not let God's word speak freely. We set all kinds of parameters for it and hinder the Lord's voice from shaping and forming our faith and life. No doubt, the Bible (and the New Testament especially) will be problematic for any person who wants to keep who they are and live according to their own ideals and preferences. If I desire a living and productive relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God simply will not allow me to remain as the king of my own life and the Bible profoundly asserts this.

However, it is in the pages of Scripture that we find the very essence of who God is. His love and mercy and grace, along with His justice, holiness, and non-negotiable higher standard for humanity are clearly presented by the voice of His Spirit within the pages of the Bible. And, as unpalatable as it may be for us, it insists that we wrestle with who we truly are before Almighty God, while equally showing us who we must accept Him to be. This young woman, in a way that seems intrinsic to human beings, preferred her faith of confusion and obscurity rather than the clarity of God's holy voice.

"Can I pray with you?" I asked. Hesitantly she said yes. My prayer was simple. I asked God to open her ears and her heart so that she would hear Him speak. As I prayed, I was aware that she was crying. The presence of God had already touched her heart because perhaps for the first time she was willing to listen to Him. I gave her a hug, told her that she was always welcomed at my corps if she ever wanted to come, and we parted ways. I was confident that her promise to read the Bible for herself would be followed through and I am absolutely certain that the Spirit of God will convince her heart of what is right and true.

Since that time I have become more and more dependent on God's word in my ministry. Regardless of the individual, the issue, or the circumstances, I believe in the divine power of the Bible to speak to the core of a person with a profound relevance. Too often I think we try to stuff the Bible into a box with all kinds of fancy labels. We forget, or ignore, the fact that the Bible has grown and governed the Church of God globally for thousands of years. Basically, when the word of God is put in the hands of individuals who have really surrendered themselves to Christ, faith and spiritual success follow them. They become sure of Him and His will.

In the affluent and luxurious West, where the Bible is being dissected and re-interpreted, even painfully limited to historical context, we are seeing churches becoming empty and bleeding people out their back-door. However, in countries like China, Iran, and North Korea, where Christianity is persecuted but the Bible is being read and trusted by believers, the Church is growing at an immeasurable rate. The Bible has proven itself to be dependable for increasing and nourishing God's kingdom and this is just another example of it. Sadly though, in places like Australia, as was

shown by the young woman I talked with, too many Christians are not letting the word of God be the voice of God.

I want to encourage all my Salvationist brothers and sisters to let the Bible speak to you and to the people around you. When its words conflict with what you think or believe, be quiet. Let God's voice speak freely into the center of your being. Trust that the Scriptures which Jesus embodies are able to guide us through this dark and sin-sick world. The Church is defined by God's word, not the other way round. It will ensure our success, but its light must be allowed to shine.

After all, "Thy word, O LORD, is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."