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Major Danielle Strickland

Editorial Introduction

by Major Stephen Court, Editor

Greetings in Jesus' name. Mercy and peace to you from God our Father. I trust the battle progresses well on your front.

Welcome to the 107th edition of Journal of Aggressive Christianity – JAC107. In the past we've occasionally devoted whole issues to the thoughts of one person (think Commissioner Wesley Harris, Captain Peter Brookshaw). We're following that irregular series this time with a feature on Major Danielle Strickland's writings.

Major Strickland is a popular book author (half a dozen titles) and article writer. We've collected a range of articles she has written over the years in different places on different topics for JAC107 as an introduction to JAC readers. Those interested in more can try daniellestrickland.com. You'll find out more about her in the following articles...

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Be A Superhero

Luck Is For Pagans

Wake Up!

That's a taste. You'll be interested in reading more, of course. She's got a few new books scheduled to be out in coming months. Save up.

We trust the content of JAC107 serves to stir up your passion for our Lord Jesus Christ and for those for whom He came and died and resurrected. Let's aim to win the world for Jesus.

One Word For 2017 - Ignite

By Major Danielle Strickland

I've got fire issues. What I mean is that I'm so urbanized and far removed from Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts training that I can't effectively light a fire. I compensate by using helpful agents to assist. Like the day we moved into a new house in northern Canada with a backyard and a fire pit.

BIG IGNITION, LITTLE REWARD

My son and his friend couldn't wait to light a fire in the new fire pit, so I obliged and we began. After several attempts to ignite a flame nothing was happening. No fire. Not even smoke. So, I did what needed to be done. I went to the garage and found a gasoline can and doused the wood with gas. I can still see the hopeful faces of my son and his friend as they lit the fire.

Boom.

That's the best way to describe what happened next. A massive blast of a flame ignited the entire fire pit at the same time. My son slowly turned to me with a blackened face and wide eyes and uttered, "That was awesome," in a very shaky voice.

Thankfully the only casualties were the eyebrows of both kids! Once the instant flame had consumed the eyebrows it quickly went out. A big flash with little sustaining effect.

THE PATIENCE OF A MASTER IGNITER

A few months later in the thick of winter our friend, Morten, from Denmark, was living with us, and he happened to be a Scout master. Not just a Scout – a master.

My son expressed a desire to light a fire and Morton's eyes light up. He let out a "Yes!" and went downstairs to get his winter clothes on and headed out to the backyard. I tried to warn him that the only wood we had was wet, but he would not be stopped. He was a master Scout after all.

He took his time creating the teepee shape with the kindling and bark around the base. He even used some wood between his hands, rolling it slowly back and forth at first and then getting faster. He was using the heat of friction as a potential lighting agent. I watched from the kitchen window. Amazed. And then bored.

See, this went on for some time and there was no sign of a flame. I opened the window and shouted out my secret ingredient to a good fire and Morten scowled in my direction and continued his slow, deliberate work.

I couldn't stand it. It was taking forever. Bored of the pace I went about some other business while Morten, undaunted, continued his work. Then I smelled it. The smoke. It led me to the kitchen window where I was amazed to see flames.

Like a sign and wonder from the heavens, flames of fire were licking the cold and warming Morten, who sat by his work with a massive wide grin. He had persevered. He had overcome. He had pushed back the winter and the wet with his purposeful consistency. Master Scout indeed.

REAL FIRES THAT IGNITE CHANGE

Those of us from an instantly gratified and constantly moving culture do not always understand the fire started by masters. This is extremely evident in fighting back the cold reality of extreme poverty around the world. We often prefer a quick relief style of change. A magic bullet.

But those fires go out as fast as they start, and can even injure folks in the process.

The real fires of change are lit by master workers who expertly, slowly and painstakingly cultivate. They perseveringly keep at it with skill, competence and commitment to the process and the result. People who refuse to quit. Those who stay at it, the long consistent master scouts of empowerment.

This is how I see the work of Compassion's local church partners. The work they do is steady, constant and persevering. They tend to the details of presence and purpose, knowing their very lives are witness to the flame of God's power in the world. They stack the kindling of children who often start off cold and wet from the realities of economic winter. But once lit, they themselves light up the darkness and push the chill of poverty back.

Many of us watch through a kitchen window of sorts – trying our best to keep our attention while the often monotonous task of tending the fires of change goes on. And this is the most amazing part. The sign and wonder of the long-term approach to releasing children from poverty through holistic child development is not in its flashy moments. It does not offer a false agent of quick change that brings a bang and is snuffed out moments later.

It offers instead, an invitation to watch and learn from master scouts who tend the fire and light a flame that warms the hearts and lives of children who then become a blaze that will never go out. It offers us a chance to watch and learn and then partner with and become part of igniting a flame not only in children but in us as well. A slow and steady burn of hope that spreads because it lasts.

One Word 2017

ONE WORD FOR 2017

John's gospel calls Jesus the light of the world, and suggests that even the darkness can never extinguish that light. This year, as I focus on the word IGNITE and the Light that overcomes darkness, these are my prayers:

I pray we will continue to invest in master scouts who tend to the long, persevering work of igniting fires that will not go out.

I pray that God will give those of us with a kitchen window view the patience to commit to igniting compassion in our families, our communities and around the world.

I pray that even if we got distracted and went about some other work we will smell the smoke, and return to the wonder of hope in Jesus, the light of the world.

Has your passion waned? Your hope snuffed out by a dark culture? Have you lost interest in the long burn to a warm future?

IGNITE your own flame by investing in a fire that will not go out no matter how dark things get. Whether you do it through your sponsorship with Compassion or in your own local community, take those first steps to light the kindling of compassion in someone.

I've traded in my quick fire-starting ways for the long, slow glow of love in action. I'm committed to tending the fires. It also helps to hear children respond to the igniting of their flame say, "That was awesome" – with their eyebrows still intact!

We've celebrated the discipline of choosing one word to define the new year for the past nine years. Be inspired by the "one words" from the past years and join us for 2017!

What word have you chosen to lead your 2017?

Thanks Be To God

By Major Danielle Strickland

I walked around my old stomping grounds downtown Toronto last week when I was visiting the city. I took this picture of the Old City Hall. In the basement of this building is a jail cell that held me while I awaited a court hearing. I was a messed up, broken, addicted young woman – so very lost. A Salvation Army officer, Lt. Col. Joyce Ellery worked at the Headquarters just down the street and she came to visit me.

She came armed with a lawyers card and a hug. She hugged me and whispered in my ear that she loved me. I did not get it. It would be very true to say I did not receive it. I was too hard, too lost, too broken, too high. But when Joyce left my cell, I was all alone and that's when He came. Jesus showed up in that cell. I can't really explain it to you. But somehow, I had an experience of a spiritual nature that felt VERY real. He showed up in my jail cell and did the exact same thing that Joyce had done. He hugged me and whispered in my ear that he loved me. That's when everything started to change. I describe it as someone turning on a light.

Now, when I say this we go all Disney in our heads. We imagine that Jesus sprinkled magic fairy dust on me and I was forever changed, transformed in an instant. This is not what happened. What happened was the false image of God I had was shattered. I thought God was mad at me (for good reason). I thought I was in trouble (I was in jail!). But Jesus came with open arms and unconditional love. He welcomed me home.

So, it's true to say that I began to see things another way. I even saw my own pathetic condition. In my drugged rebellion I thought jail was kind of badass. I was excelling at it. But love opened my eyes to see the truth of the situation I was in. I woke up to who God was and who I was. I saw that I was broken and messed up and all alone and locked up. I suddenly saw things for what they truly were. Perhaps this is what Jesus means when He says the truth will set us free?

So, I began a journey. The invitation to follow Jesus started in a holding cell in that City Hall all those many years ago. It's been a long road since then. An adventurous life filled with pain and joy, success and failure, and one I wouldn't trade for anything.

Thanks be to God. May you find Him now.

As I stood outside that building I couldn't help but remember the words of Psalm 103 which I'm writing on Thanksgiving Day in Los Angeles 26 years later.

Let all that I am praise the LORD;
with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.
Let all that I am praise the LORD;
may I never forget the good things he does for me.
He forgives all my sins

and heals all my diseases.
He redeems me from death
and crowns me with love and tender mercies.
He fills my life with good things.
My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

How Life Couldn't Be Better

By Major Danielle Strickland

I spent some time today with the man I love doing what we did when we first met. Hanging out with homeless people. Or as my son Judah puts it (so much better), "visiting friends, who have no homes." One friend, Alma, is pictured above and she is rockin' the rose colored glasses. When we asked how she was she said she couldn't be better... life was amazing.

It was then that I knew she was seeing life through a different lense than me. And this matters.

During lent I've been participating in a challenge at www.infinitumlife.com to capture an image of living a boundless life, characterized by surrender, generosity and mission everyday. And it's made me pay attention to the way I see the world. The things and people I see and how I view them. It's made me wonder about my perspective on things. And how that perspective matters. Because how I see the world and its people drives my response to them – and to God.

God modelled this in the creation story. When he made the elements of his creation he 'saw that it was good'. Every time. He 'saw that it was good'. And when he made the finale – the last act – the top of the order it was humanity he made and gave breath. The scripture says 'male and female', created in the image of God. And he saw that it was VERY good. He saw. And the way he saw brought value to us. And still does.

How God sees you is not dependent on the world's lenses. He does not look at the outside, which he declares out loud (all the time) through scripture. He is not looking for fancy or rich or accomplished or cool. He is also not looking for failure, flaws, imperfections or rejection. He is simply not looking either way – he is looking past those ways with his own way of love, and value and meaning and beauty INSIDE of you. You look amazing to him. Just like he looked upon the first humans he looks at the person he created in you and says, 'you are very good'.

Often when we present the gospel story we start with sin. Sin is our human capacity to mess everything up – including ourselves. But sin is not where the story started. The story actually starts in Genesis 1 not Genesis 3. And it starts with God seeing what he had created and declaring it good. That we were good. We were created for goodness. For beauty. For truth. For freedom. And that is why when we catch glimpses of goodness, beauty, truth or freedom something stirs in us. It's the very image of God in us that is stirred. In our deepest selves it is an awakening, an invitation. A new way to view the world. A fresh way to view ourselves and really see each other.

So if ever I needed a reminder to put on some rose colored glasses it was today. Thanks Alma for the reality check that life couldn't be better.

Growing Pains

By Major Danielle Strickland

I've got a six and three year old who have something wrong with them - massive hormonal swings and extreme reactions. I think this is the case with all kids, but I'm sure it is with mine. Crazy ideas like "clean up time" and "homework before screen time" are met with wailing fits of protest. They rage against the injustice of it all.

When I'm able to look at it from a distance, it's funny. But mostly I just hold in my own hormonal response. What I want to do is 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.

As I reflected on the most recent fit, I saw myself - my own inner emotional response to God's invitation to put first things first. Prayer before action? The nerve! No one has time to pray ... all the other kids don't have to ... I want to GET SOMETHING DONE.

I rage against the discipline and rush past the prayer closet, in the hope of getting on with the "real work," sulking over my divine parent's nerve in steering me to what will help 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.

I seem to be a perpetual spiritual toddler - my initial reactions are almost always extreme. The only difference for me is that 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 and look at myself, raging out of control, and feel the parent in me rising. Let's review, I think. 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, who was reluctant to practice his letters, I find the practice of prayer journaling to be liberating and infuriating. But when he was finished, he looked up and smiled at me, and said, with a great sense of accomplishment, "I did it!" It made me remember how I feel when I finally relent to God's instructions, as he teaches me what really matters.

I may always have toddler tantrums on the inside, but I'm so glad that God is patient and kind, and willing to keep inviting me to put the things that matter first. Maybe you need to take a moment in the midst of your own emotional reactions to be reminded of God's promise to discipline (instruct, enforce boundaries, give direction) to those he loves. Then count yourself blessed to have that kind of parent, and do what he asks. Because in the end, that's what really matters.

The Long Road To Freedom

By Major Danielle Strickland

I've been thinking about freedom for a long time.

External freedom is one thing. It's essential. Anyone who has been a captive will tell you that to be externally free is of utmost importance. But captivity and oppression are not just external things. They can be internal things, too—things deep inside of us. Things we learned to survive, to help us through. Things that served us for a while, but now keep us enslaved.

So, how does freedom work? Not just the obvious freedom of a captive who finds their door unlocked. Recently, I watched the film *Hector and the Search for Happiness*, about a psychiatrist who searches the globe to find the secret of happiness. In one scene, Hector is held prisoner by African drug lords and is then released. He walks away slowly, like he's afraid someone is going to shoot him at any moment. When he realizes he's free, he begins to run and laugh and shout and dance. It's exhilarating. He writes in his happiness journal that true happiness is freedom. And he's right.

As a child, my friend Hanna was trapped in a pedophile ring, forced to do unspeakable things. That's slavery. That's a real prison. The thing is, she's been free from that captivity for years, but she still struggles with freedom. We need to be free on the outside and the inside. How do we do that?

The truth is that slavery exists in each of us.

The Israelites walked around a desert for 40 years after they were "free" from the oppression of the Egyptians, but none of them seemed to think it was much of a "freedom dance" they were doing. Commentaries suggest that the 40 years was about moving their freedom from the outside to the inside. Does it take that long?

Hanna would agree, I think, with the people of God, and with Nelson Mandela, that the road to freedom is a long walk. Those of us who want simple, shallow answers to complex truths (that's most of us) often think Mandela was free on the day he was released from prison. But that's not the case. As he says, freedom started much sooner, and took much longer than that. What does that mean?

It means that freedom is complicated. Yes, it's about our external lives. And yes, it's about our internal lives. But it's even more than that. It's about those parts of us being united together and contributing to the world around us. It's about living a different way—from the inside out.

I want to live that way, but the truth is that it's a hard way to live. The truth is that slavery exists in each of us. That freedom is elusive, difficult and complicated. That the road to

freedom is hard and long. That to be truly free means to face truth, accept it, and be authentic and vulnerable and open—and that is simply terrifying.

To be free is to abandon yourself to a greater being who knows you better than you know yourself. If that's how freedom works, then why not start today?

Not By Sight

By Major Danielle Strickland

I recently read *Learning to Walk in the Dark* by Barbara Brown Taylor. I've always been fascinated by how often God comes in the darkness ... at night ... in the mystery and struggle. From the top of Sinai, Moses received a foreboding invitation to meet with God and he entered the dark cloud in order to find him. Perhaps that's how and why Moses came to not just do great things for God but to be his friend. He was willing to go to the scary, obscure, mysterious, dark places ... willing to take the risk ... willing to journey to a place to encounter God, where his fears might not be relieved after all. Maybe after encountering and struggling with the real God we end up weaker instead of stronger, like Jacob; broken instead of solid, like Peter; or dependant on his grace, like Paul. An uncontrollable God—that's what he offers when he offers us himself.

We seem to have this love affair with all things easy and comfortable. We want our faith to be like that, too. We want a teddy bear for a God (and by "we" I mean "me"), who gives us the desire of our hearts—and by that we often mean whatever we want or think we need. We resist wrestling with a God who will realign us to a posture of dependence, weakness and surrender. We are afraid of that kind of faith—we want easy answers for a shallow faith, just enough to make us feel better for the immediate future but not enough to change our lives.

At my small group, we've been watching a video series on the 12 steps of recovery, made popular by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Step Six ("We are entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character") is about encountering God in the dark. It has been fascinating to study this step while reading Taylor's book. It's about meeting God, not in the darkness outside you, but in the most terrifying kind of darkness—inside you. It's about accepting God's invitation to climb the mountain covered in a cloud. That cloud, with its foreboding sense of danger, may have kept you away for a long time. But on this day, you summon the courage to climb. Admitting that you are willing to risk everything, you encounter the God you can never really understand, but the God who completely understands you.

And you meet him there. In the muck and the mire of your own human condition. No hiding. No lying. No pretending. No controlling. Just you and God. And what you find is much like what Moses, Jacob, Paul, Peter and someone near you in an AA group found. God—uncontrollable, indescribable even, but full of mercy, compassion and love. Exuding forgiveness, grace and a way out. Not ignoring your condition—simply willing to change it.

For some of us, that will mean strengthening us from the inside out. For others it will mean weakening us from the outside in. Whatever it takes to change our posture from defiance and self-reliance, to dependency, humility and honesty. It will mean a clean slate, a new day, a different you. It is exactly what the angels said when they told the shepherds Jesus had come into the world in the middle of the night, and it's what the

prophets spoke about when they called him the “bright and morning star,” which is the star that shines at the darkest hour of the night to usher in the dawn.

I don’t know about you, but to encounter this kind of God, I’m willing to learn to walk in the dark.

Intentional Living

By Major Danielle Strickland

I've been discovering the deep peace that is found in being fully present. A few things have helped. I've been experimenting with an app, Headspace, that teaches mindfulness as a daily practice. It's been useful in my prayer life.

On top of that I recently read a book called "Present Over Perfect" by a friend, Shauna Neiqhiest, who found herself caught in an important, busy life. She writes that she was constantly catching up—yet always feeling behind. I resonated with the feeling. I'm sure you do as well. Our world functions at a fast pace. Keeping up is a difficult reality. The book spoke of her discovery of the true price of that kind of living, and it explored some of what motivated her to keep living that way. It was riveting. She completely changed the way she lived after edging the cliff of self-destruction.

One of the keys to this new found living was exposing the "more" lie. You know the one. The idea that everything has to keep increasing. Your workout at the gym needs to be harder, your family needs to grow, your house should expand, your work should keep increasing, you need more money for more stuff, for more...you get the idea. The "more" lie is a trap that keeps us looking more like hamsters than humans.

So how do you get off the hamster wheel?

Here are a few ideas:

1. Take time to evaluate your life. Is this the one you had hoped for? Are you proud of what you have become? This is an important exercise to do with deep honesty. The question is not about what other people think, need or say. It's not about what makes your parents proud or your spouse feel safe. It's not about what you have accumulated. Those things are important, but they come in the next step of the journey. Are you proud of who you are right now?
2. If the answer is yes, then celebrate your life. Make gratitude a daily practice. And congratulations. This is not easy to do. If the answer is no, then begin thinking, praying, dreaming and listing the things you wish were in your life. The things that give your life meaning and joy. Don't just add things that look good or feel good to other people, or something that makes someone else content. Make a list of things that really bring you great joy.
3. Now, start thinking about that list. How much of it is possible for you to start living now? And this is the important part. What can you cut out to make room? Actually, as I've seen people do this part of the exercise, the list is almost always about cutting and rarely about adding. People say, I can work less. I can do with less money if it means I can spend more time with my family. I can help those kids at the shelter once a week, if

I work from home on that day. See, no one really says a big fat “yes” to what they really want without learning to say an emphatic “no” to what they don’t.

When my son turned 13 he went on a “coming of age” trip with his father. We made a list of adult attributes that he wanted to grow into - hard-working, compassionate, responsible, creative, loving and spiritual. We made the list together, but my son determined who he wanted to be and the kind of man he wanted to grow into. The trip wasn’t super exotic but it was intentional. He interviewed friends and family members who exhibited those traits and asked them for tips on how to cultivate those things in his own life. It was significant. He went from being a boy to becoming a man.

That’s what teenage years are for - ask almost any culture but our own. In Australia, aboriginal young boys go on a “walkabout” to discover themselves and their own abilities to survive. In Africa, young men often go on quests and have challenges to overcome. In Jewish culture, there is the bar mitzvah, a celebration with family and friend of the season of manhood beginning.

In our culture, teenage years are often wasted on video games, irresponsibility and pleasures turned into a frenzy for more. It’s a wasted season, with no time for intentional cultivation of the things that really matter. It seems like we continue the way we start, letting the culture define us. But what if we took the time now? What if we sat down and made a list of who we wanted to become? We could have our coming of age party. Late perhaps, but still here. It is never too late to be the people we aspire to be.

Think Big, Start Small, Go Deep

By Major Danielle Strickland

Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators discipleship program, used a slogan to fuel his movement: Think big. Start small. Go deep. It's something I read very early in my ministry and it resonated within me. The problem I've discovered in most people's lives is not their inability to dream or to envision—we've got vision statements and dreamers aplenty. The real crunch happens when our dreams hit reality—we've got to figure out a strategy for our dreams in order to see them come to fruition.

If we are praying for God's Kingdom to be on earth as it is in Heaven, we have to take our dreams and visions (particularly the ones that Jesus spelled out for us) and actually make them happen in the here and now. We need a strategy for this side of Heaven. This is where Trotman's little slogan becomes very useful.

One of the obstacles in achieving our vision is that we often dismiss the "smallness" of starting the work required to make it happen. The Incarnation (when Jesus was born as a baby in Bethlehem) is a great example of starting small. It doesn't get much smaller than a poor family looking for shelter in a little town and bringing a baby into the world. The vision, of course, was to save the world, but the strategy began with one small child, a woman and a man who were obedient to God, and a few scraggly shepherds. If you didn't know the outcome, you would think the strategy was a failure. And, if you were to look ahead and see Jesus hanging on a cross between two thieves, you'd be tempted to think that God should have started with a different strategy.

One of the keys to God's strategies is that his Kingdom is often made up of the very things we can't see. The epistles tell us that Jesus made a spectacle of the enemy the day he offered his life as the way of salvation for the rest of us. Jesus' death was part of the divine strategy to overcome evil, break the curse and free humanity and creation from the enemy's grasp forever. Think big. Start small. Go deep.

When The Salvation Army decided to open fire in India in 1882, they announced their vision: The Salvation Army will invade India. When the Salvation Army pioneer officers showed up at the arrival pier of the dock in India, the Royal British Army was there to meet them, expecting that they were about to be invaded by armed force. But what they saw shocked them: Frederick Booth-Tucker leading a small ragtag group of mostly young women officers and soldiers, dressed in local attire and armed with Bibles and the experience of their salvation.

This was the invasion? This was the strategy? Yes. And it followed the incarnational pattern of our Saviour's ministry.

They wanted to win India for Jesus (think big). They started with a small team of willing soldiers and officers (start small). And they gave their whole lives, health and futures to the cause (go deep). The strategy was blessed by God as every "boom march" (open-

air proclamation of the gospel) led to whole towns and villages coming to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, thousands of Indian Salvationists were raised up to lead the charge to win the world for God. Today, India is one of the strongest countries in the Salvation Army world and the vision continues.

I'm not sure if you have a strategy for your vision, but I'd like to suggest one. On Facebook and other social media networks, a number of Salvationists have recently engaged in DISCO. No, it's not a dance, although that's not a bad metaphor for discipleship. DISCO is short for discipleship covenant—when a small group of Christians connect with each other for accountability and intentional discipleship.

There is no set curriculum. Every person determines their own goals and intentions and shares with the group about their progress and struggles every week. Each of the members take turns sharing and dreaming and talking about how they are making that a daily reality in their lives. They pray together and offer their support. It's a game changer.

Seems small, doesn't it? But imagine if all of God's people thought big (had a vision for changing the whole world), started small (began focusing on their daily habits and practices) and went deep (showed a willingness to be accountable to others). I think DISCO could really change the world.

So, connect with a friend or two on Facebook, by e-mail or in person and covenant together for a period of one to three months to support and hold each other accountable.

Free To Pray

By Major Danielle Strickland

On January 1st, 2011 (this was written mid-2012) our small community of believers in a marginalized and economically deprived area of Edmonton decided to pray. This was not just a determined or renewed effort in our own prayer life but a communal decision to make our community a place of prayer. We set apart a place (it used to be the leader's office) and opened a 24/7 'war room'. The Salvation Army launched a global call to prayer for justice and when we heard the call we responded. What else can we do? Well, if we are honest we could do a host of things. I'm an action-oriented person. I've been known to think that prayer is a waste of time and echo the song of U2 when they sang, 'Please, get off your knees now' in a call to move the church from their huddled holy prayer clubs and into social justice. But I've learned that this dismissal of prayer is a tragic misconception. Some things I've learned along the way:

Only God builds the house. If I'm honest I have a thousand of my own ideas of how to grow a church community, or how to get people saved, or how to reform the neighbourhood I'm in. But most of the time my ideas never work. I lack resources and the ability to make those ideas into real action. But when God opens the door, when He declares the time – things happen that can't happen any other way. The door can't be shut. Favour comes. Salvation comes. Resources come. I find it hard to keep up with what God is doing when we are actively asking for His direction and help. Prayer is what made Jesus say those beautiful words of perfect surrender (after a night of prayer), 'not my will but yours be done'.

Prayer is a habit that challenges hell and changes us. I've always thought of prayer as passive. But a better understanding of Jesus and our call to intercession has changed my mind. Prayer is one of the most aggressive parts of our warfare. Committed and passionate prayer has been the marker of God's moving on the earth. I remember a prayer warrior I know telling me, 'be careful what you pray. Most likely by the end of your prayer you'll be the answer!' And it's true. Prayer doesn't just challenge hell (although it does that... ever wonder why the compulsion against praying is so hard to overcome?) it changes us. It transforms my will to desire and love God's will. I know of many people who wish they were more like Christian giants and heroes of the past yet, most of the time the only difference between them and us is the time we spend with God. You've got to pray. Jay Leno once said, 'I'd do anything for the perfect body: except diet and exercise'. Many of us say the same things about our lack of prayer.

Everyone can pray. Some of the best prayer warriors I know are not 'super gifted' people in the eyes of the world. They are surrendered and beautiful, but their gifts are not always the public kind. They might be excluded from communal gifts like music or leadership or organizational things – but when it comes to prayer, they are faithful and they are effective. Prayer is something that levels the ground of community. In our little prayer room in Edmonton, a beautiful woman who hasn't had an easy life, takes the

morning shift for three hours, six days a week! If you were to judge her by 'worldly standards' you'd think she was homeless, or destitute or at least very lonely.

You would be wrong. She is part of a fired-up team of prayer warriors who together are changing the atmosphere of our city and nation – crying out for justice day and night. She prays three hours every morning six days a week!! And who better to cry for justice than someone who has been dishd out loads of injustice? When Jesus states his mission statement in Luke 4 (the spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me to release the captives...) he's quoting the prophet Isaiah who goes on to say in chapter 61 and verse 4 "they will rebuild the ancient cities, the cities that have been devastated for generations – they will repair." The 'they' he is talking about are the ones who are set free. What better way to start the prophetic process of rebuilding than through praying together for a better world?

Prayer sustains. One of the most popular questions I answer from people around the world is 'how do you keep on going?' Now the next point is going to address this as well – but you can be assured that one of the things prayer does is sustain us. It's a weird thing to try and explain but our Spirits need food. It's that simple. Jesus said that a blessing was attached to just being hungry and thirsty for righteousness/justice (same root word in Hebrew). Have you ever wondered how Jesus did all nights of prayer and kept on his healing/deliverance/evangelism/justice ministry all the next day? Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Are you weary? Need sustenance? Pray. Honestly. Pray. Regularly. Pray. Aggressively. You'll find the blessing is yours. The secret is out.

Presence of God. (Sabbath rest is not about watching more TV). The Sabbath is all the rage these days. It's been a fascinating 'new' discovery for a generation with over-developed, toxically busy lives. The trouble is that we work the Sabbath into our own lives instead of working our lives into the Sabbath. Let me explain. The Sabbath is about intentional time to honour God with our attention, devotion, time and energy. It's about coming as family, community, and ourselves, before our maker – as we are. It's about leaving the watch and the phone at home and wasting time with our Creator and each other – reminding ourselves that ultimately we aren't in charge and we weren't born to be slaves. We are free. This all happens to me in the prayer room. I shut off my phone (most times with the odd exception). I lock the door – I put on some worship music – really loud and dance, lie down or roll around if I want to. I write, laugh, read – poems, sometimes I even try my hand at some art (which I would never do otherwise). I waste my time (much needed time it seems to me) with God. And I remind myself that I'm not in charge. I'm not a slave. I'm free. This kind of Sabbath to the person who hasn't been part of a prayer room would seem like 'work'. But for real rest, a deep breath of God's life into my very being – well, let's just say, it's way better than a movie.

Seismic Shift Required

By Major Danielle Strickland

Have you ever been in a situation where you think you've got it, but you don't? You did everything right, according to plan, the way you've always done it. It has always worked—but this time, it doesn't. Now what?

I've discovered that these moments offer us an incredible opportunity. When an outcome is different than our expectations, it forces us to stop and ask some important questions: What are we doing? Why are we doing it?

Recently, I've been asking a lot of questions about worship. How we can live out the kind of worship the Lord says he requires from us in Isaiah 58? How can we shift from a posture of "receiving" to a posture of "giving" while we worship? After I preach, I've been asking people for a tangible response—to consider giving financially to help children escape extreme poverty, through child sponsorship.

In my line of work, I've come to realize that we need to reach children or we have no hope of slowing the violent trajectory of poverty that leads to systemic injustice, such as human trafficking (the world's fastest-growing crime). Sending a girl to school reduces her chances of being trafficked by 80 percent.

But getting people to respond has been harder than I expected. I'm used to asking people to respond to what I preach, but it's almost always to receive something. The difference with this kind of preaching is that it requires something of the people listening. Few of us are used to being asked to give something in worship.

I fear we have come to believe that worship is a receiving act, a place we come to draw near to God. And that's true, but not the whole truth. Worship is more like breathing than shopping. The rhythm of God's coming kingdom is receiving and giving—freely we receive, freely we give, Jesus said. So I've been shocked at how hard it is to do the asking. To be truthful, I've also been confused about the smallness of the giving.

Worship is more like breathing than shopping

Now, don't get me wrong. I'm thrilled that more children in need are going to receive support. I know many people are already giving sacrificially to other worthy places, people and organizations (at least that's what I tell myself to get to sleep at night) and it's hard to contribute to another "good cause." But I'm wondering about the cost to all of us when we worship only to receive. And how it might be robbing the church of the opportunity to encounter the God of the Bible.

Isaiah 58 is about God telling his people why they weren't feeling his presence in their lives. He says that his answers to their prayers are held back by their refusal to respond to injustice and the poor. He says that offering elaborate displays of worship while

refusing to engage with the needs of our fellow humans is unfaithfulness. It means we've somehow disengaged our hearts from the pain of the poor, and, in so doing, have moved far from him.

No matter how high we raise our hands, or how amazing the singing, or how high-tech the lighting, the Spirit of the Lord is far from us because we are far from the poor.

I know that seems harsh, maybe even judgmental. Take it up with Isaiah, or Amos, or Jesus, for that matter. Or the early church, or the epistles of Paul or James, or Revelation. The fact that it's awkward to talk about the God of the Bible linking our worship of him with our care for the poor suggests that we are guilty of missing it. Why else would it be awkward? Why else would it be a difficult part of the meeting? Why else would you be secretly rooting for me to back down and change my tone? What's the deal?

Here are a few things that I believe need a seismic shift as we learn to worship the God of the Bible:

From self-focused worship to a radical act of surrender. We shouldn't come to worship for ourselves, for our needs or preferences. We should come to offer ourselves to God (see Romans 12). Worship realigns our posture—from focusing on ourselves to focusing on the sovereignty of God.

From receiving a blessing to blessing God. This is the crux of the problem. Too often, we come to worship to receive a blessing, when worship is supposed to be about us blessing God. The question we should be asking in worship is not, "How will God bless me?" but, "How can I bless God?" In the history of God's people, the best examples of worship were always accompanied by extravagant giving.

From emotional responses to responsive obedience to God's Word. We've been fed a steady self-help diet that says the primary aim of our lives should be to feel good. But the peculiar truth never seems to dawn on us—that when our feelings are the driving force of our lives, when we have an insatiable thirst for self-fulfilment, we feel less and less gratitude and compassion, and more and more emptiness. The Bible equates our love not with warm fuzzies, but with radical obedience to God. That's what it says. Obedience equals love.

Here's the part where I remind you that God loves you no matter what and will be with you no matter what. God's love is pure and holy and available, but I'm afraid that what we've taken as God's love is just an imitation of it. A self-focused, materialistic and fickle love that comes and goes with the quality of the performer.

I know—it's hard. But what if it's true?

I'm asking God to shift my posture. To realign my life according to his values. To respond with obedience. To draw near to bless him, instead of demanding a blessing for

myself. To pray for his presence to help me stay fully engaged with the pain and injustice of the world, so that I can help, somehow. That's the worship he's been waiting for.

How Freedom Works. Some Thoughts On Slavery

By Major Danielle Strickland

I've been thinking about freedom for a long time.

External freedom is one thing. It's important. For anyone who has ever been a captive will understand that to be externally free is of utmost importance. The thing is though, that captivity and oppression are not just about external things. There are internal things that happen: things that shift places deep inside of us. Things we learn to survive and to help us through that served us for a while but now keep us enslaved.

So, how does freedom work exactly? Not just the obvious freedom of a captive whose door gets unlocked and they can simply leave. Recently I watched Hector's pursuit of happiness where he is help a prisoner by African drug lords and then gets released. The scene is him slowly walking away, like he's afraid any moment someone is going to shoot him dead, to him realizing he's been released and he begins to run and laugh and shout and dance and run and it's all just so flipping exhilarating. He writes in his happiness journal that true happiness is freedom. And he's right.

My friend Hanna told me about being trapped in a pedophile ring for her childhood. Being forced to do unmentionable things – all. The. Time. That's called slavery. That's a real prison. The thing is she's been free from that captivity for years and years and years but she still struggles with freedom. Being free on the outside has to be matched with being free on the inside. And how do we do that exactly?

The Israelites walked around a desert for forty years after they were 'free' from the oppression of the Egyptians but none of them seemed to think it was much of a 'freedom dance' they were doing. Commentaries suggest that the forty years was about getting freedom from the outside to the inside of them. Does it take that long?

Hanna would agree, I think, with Nelson Mandela, and the people of God that the road to freedom is a long walk. Those of us who want simple, shallow answers to complex truths (like almost everyone born) seem to think that the day Mandela was released from jail is what made him free. But you'd be wrong about that. By his own admission freedom started much sooner than that and also took much longer. What does that mean?

It means that freedom is much more complicated. It's about our external lives, for sure. It's about our internal lives for sure. But it's even more than that. It's about these parts of us being united together and contributing to the world around us. It's about living a different way – from the inside out.

I want to live that way. But the truth is that it's a hard way to live. The truth is that slavery exists in each of us. That freedom is elusive and difficult, and complicated. That

the road to freedom is hard and long. That to be truly free means to face truth and accept it and to be authentic and vulnerable and open – and that is just simply terrifying.

To be free is to abandon yourself to a greater being who knows you better than you know yourself. If that's how freedom works then why not start today?

We Don't Lie Down In The Valley

By Major Danielle Strickland

I was praying with a friend the other day who struggles with what I and most of the people I know also struggle with: procrastination. (This could explain why I'm leaving this article to a late night encounter... but back to the point.) While praying through the classic Psalm 23 (the Lord is my shepherd), it struck us that while one of the verses talks about the valley of the shadow of death, the context of the verse is actually movement—passing through, moving through, getting through, etc. The movement of the Psalm suggests that we move too, through even our darkest times. We don't lie down in the valley. No, we get up and keep walking.

Another verse I often use for comfort, Psalm 91:1, says that we can rest in the shadow of the Almighty, the One who is leading us. In the scorching heat of the desert (context of the verse) lies shade we can rest in, follow, and remain in to find relief in the midst of the journey. Again, God is leading us and we are following Him. Through that process, we can exchange our worry for His rest, peace, and presence.

My husband shared at an event we spoke at a few weeks ago, speaking on the classic invitation that Jesus gives in Matthew: "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." To my surprise, instead of landing there, he focused on the verse that follows: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Wait. What does a yoke (think oxen working in a field) have to do with rest? How can they be related?

Then these things flooded my mind:

The people of God had to fight for their rest. (The Promised Land had to be conquered.) When the people of God finally got to the Promised Land—the land of rest—they had to do something for the first time in a generation: they had to grow their own food. Rest involved movement.

When Jesus felt overwhelmed, He added to His schedule. (All night of prayer anyone?) Salvation, and the way it is talked about in the Bible, always involves movement. It is a way to walk, a place to enter, a new way to live.

Trouble comes when we make salvation a static thing, and when we believe the world is about how to solve our fatigue.

Culture says, "Feeling tired? Try doing nothing today. Watch some TV and hang around."

This might be my own issue, but have you ever felt better after one of those days? Now, don't get me wrong. Having a day off is a fine idea, especially if it involves soul refreshing time. The Sabbath was meant to create a rhythm of refreshment and was

always a part of the promised life, but we often embrace a life of entertainment, mindless activities, and lazy postures, buying the lie that those things will give us rest.

And. They. Don't.

Feed laziness and you breed more. Feed lonely bitterness and you get even more lonely. We reap what we sow.

So, what am I saying? Stand up. Get up. Right now. Do something. Write. Dream. Play. Go for a long walk in a beautiful place. Take your kids on a wagon ride. Go to the gym. Read your Bible. Pray. (Try praying on your knees just for fun).

Don't lie down. Don't do it. The Bible says to be prepared because the enemy roars around looking for someone to devour. Be prepared for a battle, and fight for your rest. Real rest—the spiritually-filled kind. Add a whole night of prayer to your already packed schedule. I dare you. Find a posture that commits to changing the world. I'm literally humming the classic, "I get knocked down, but I get up again, and nothing's gonna keep me down" as I write this.

Many of us have had our hits. And the enemy hits hard. But this is a battle. We are in a war, and we have got to keep moving. Salvation isn't a prayer I put in my pocket and hope it works when I'm in trouble. It's a new way to live. So, let's live it. Walk out what you already know. Live what you've already learned. Stop learning more until you've actually implemented what you already know.

Stand up. Get ready. Let's go.

A Spiritual Guide For The Suburbs

By Major Danielle Strickland

I've made a life choosing to posture myself with people in the margins.

I did this to model the life Jesus lived. Completely on purpose, Jesus hung out with people who were not of the "mainstream." People who made "normal" people uncomfortable. People who don't know their place in society—or who just don't care.

I remember a good picture of this in my life when I took two of my friends from the margins of Downtown Eastside Vancouver to Missions Fest Vancouver. Although it was just down the street—it was a lifetime away in social status. Once we were seated, my friend Annie thought it a good time to spread out her collected "butts," spreading them out on the carpeted floor so she could roll a few nice new smokes while everyone was busy singing hymns. My other friend Stephanie was so bored that she simply kept looking around at everyone and asking, "How do people sit through this?" which I think was less a ruse and more a genuine question coming from her.

What I now realize is that the poor don't need me. People in the margins don't really need charity or mercy from people in the status quo—because they don't get their affirmation or their value from people in the mainstream. They never have. That's why they live in the margins. They have chosen a different value system, a different way of life—and the things they measure and the way they live is so completely different, it's like we grew up on different planets.

And we mostly did.

They don't need me, but I need them. I need a life that is free from the facade of lukewarm vanilla living. I need to measure something other than the length of the grass on my lawn and the shade of paint on the walls of my suburban home. I need to measure my life in things that actually matter. I need to un-Martha Stewart myself until I can actually feel again. Until I can admit my own weakness and laugh at my need for control. Until I can see others for who they really are and stop judging them on what they are wearing or their latest highlights.

I need them.

What the margins have taught me is that there are different ways to live. I can see why Jesus chose to hang out there every chance he got.

These days I live in suburbia. I didn't choose it—I was sent. And I've spent three years raging against the warm glow of comfort that threatens to put me in a spiritual slumber. This week I was talking to a great friend who has discovered the same truth: The margins don't need us—we need them.

And so I long for the discomforting presence of people who defy the status quo. I find myself hoping for some caramel flavour in a vanilla world where even my own appetite bores me. I realise just how toxic the mainstream becomes without a prophetic voice to wake us out of our spiritual slumber. There must be better things to invest in than Costco? For this longing, even an eggnog latte will not suffice.

So, we have decided to create a spiritual survivor guide for the suburbs. A shocking idea.

Chapter one: Wake Up.

Wake up to your desperate need of awakening. Wake up from the slow, thick fog of wealth and ease.

Wake up from everything neat and tidy and details of minutia that will cause us all to die a death of a thousand paper cuts. Wake up and head to the margins ... even if just to visit.

Because a prophet, dressed in the most inappropriate clothing, using the most inappropriate language and hanging out in the most inappropriate places is waiting for you. The prophets always lived in the margins, living out the very word of God in the world.

Awake to the reality and words of a living God.

I need this godly prophetic place. I need the margins to wake me up on the inside.

Our Best Hope For A Better World. Girl Rant

By Major Danielle Strickland

Who runs the world? Well, Beyonce would tell us it's girls but those of us who know the statistics realize a grimmer reality. Girls around the world face the harsh reality of inequality every single day. They are less likely to go to school and more likely to be married against their wills and WAY BEFORE they should and without their consent. Read more about this global situation [here](#).

The public outcry regarding Donald Trump's recent remarks of 'casual' sexual assault and the virtual dismissal by men in our own western culture as 'locker room banter' re-emphasizes just how deep this issue goes. 1 in 6 girls face sexual assault in America – and I've a hunch that number is much lower than it should be. Many of those assaults go unreported because of shame and fear. The global stats are 1 in 3 women who have experienced sexual assault. Those statistics should awaken us to the reality of what girls face growing up in a world that continues to remain inequitable.

And let me be clear about it – THIS WILL NOT DO.

This will not do if we want a better world. It has been proven in countries all around the world that when girls and women are given equal opportunities it benefits the entire community. EVERYONE gets better when girls are given better opportunities. Mohammad Yunis (Nobel peace prize recipient and founder of the grammeen bank) will only lend to women because of the incredible return on investment, not just to the bank but to the whole community. He believes empowering girls and women is the secret to defeating extreme poverty.

This will not do if we call ourselves Christians. One of the most reprehensible things I hear are Christians who consider that inequality is a God-like characteristic. This could not be farther than the truth. Women were created by God in His image. They were charged to 'co-steward' the earth as leaders of an emerging world. They were created with every Divine intention of representing God on the earth – not through fear or control, but through creative empowerment, through sustaining life in all its fullness. Sin brought a curse that resulted in the domination of women and the breaking of the original intention God had for the entire created order. But thanks be to God for Jesus, who by His suffering and death, broke the curse and brought freedom for anyone who was captive to its power. We are FREE, in Christ, to be all that God had originally intended us to be. Christians should be SHOUTING the news that equality is part of God's intended plan. Get more informed at this site if you need to catch up!

This will not do if we are HUMAN. To be human is to be free. We were literally woven together with equality in our fabric. Our freedom was so important to the one who created us that even though it cost Him everything when we used our freedom against His plans, He still made us free. We were not born to be slaves. None of us. No one – not even from a different culture, color, racial heritage, different religion or another

gender – no one was born to be a slave. We were made equal. It was by design. And if you want to live YOUR BEST LIFE... the version of yourself that was dreamt about. It will not be achieved through bullying, sexism, dominating, raping, shaming, or fear. True humanity is celebrated through EQUALITY.

So, what will do? Equality. Let's start with a celebration of all that God has dreamt for GIRLS all over the world. Let's let them know, by the way we speak, talk, campaign, dream, and fight for them that they were created to be free. Equality is in their blood. Tell a girl she is strong, capable, powerful, able, smart, and incredibly important to the world. We need all our girls to have a future. If you are a dreamer of a better world – then this is something you will need to get involved with. Even if you just begin by confronting the power of inequality in your own community, family, relationships, and churches – let's get this done... it's our best hope for a better world.

NOTES:

I've written a book called *The Liberating Truth: How Jesus Empowers Women* if you'd like to read more... you can find the link on this website.

Also, we've recently started a campaign called BRAVE for girls in foster care... if you'd like more info contact me and I'll send you some material to get started.

Small Is Beautiful

By Major Danielle Strickland

I have a friend who spent years battling an eating disorder because her father called her fat. Another friend dropped out of school because a teacher said he was stupid. And still another who can't receive or give love because their mother withheld it from them as a young child. Just one sexual abuse episode can send us hurtling into dark places that we revisit time and time again into our adulthood, affecting every area of our lives.

Small things matter.

In recovery circles, the small things matter in sobriety. One man told me how he makes his bed every morning, as a commitment to his own recovery. He does it on purpose, even when he stays in a hotel. It's like a prophetic act that strengthens his resolve to live his life on purpose too. I can picture him smoothing the wrinkles out of his ego and tucking in the corners of his pride. Another woman told me she changed the direction she drove home after work. That small change meant her evening was a sober one. Another mentioned they added 10 minutes of prayer and reflection to their life before going to bed. It changed their sleeping habits. They even have a slogan for it—"first things first."

Small things matter.

Those of us familiar with our Bibles know this. It's God's specialty to take something insignificant and turn it into a brilliant strategy to change the world. The Israelites were a little tribe in the desert, used to bring blessing to the entire earth. Many leaders God chose seemed specialists in unqualified smallness. Almost every weapon God chose to use seems small. A small stone to fell a giant, a wooden staff to overthrow a superpower, a little lunch to feed a multitude, a virgin girl to usher in the Saviour, a rural rabbi dying on a wooden cross to forgive the sins of the world.

Small things matter.

The letters to the Christians are also full of this stuff. James said your whole life can be shipwrecked by your tongue. Think on that: your whole life ruined by your words. Paul said it was in the small things that God would shape our character. Test our faith. And grow fruit. He told us that our simple thoughts are what give birth to the desires that lead to sin and end in destruction. Whoa. Destruction starts with a thought. New life starts with a prayer.

Small things matter.

So as you navigate living through the temptation of "big" in a shiny and show-off culture, please remember how God's kingdom works. God's kingdom has always, and will

always, come like a seed. The smallest of seeds, Jesus suggested. It will come and it will die. But it will live again. And it will grow. Because small things matter.

I remember walking through an inner city at the beginning of planting a new church. It seemed too hard. I felt insignificant and foolish even thinking about the smallness of the plan. That's when I saw it—a little flower, growing through concrete. All the concrete around the flower had broken so this small and strong life could emerge. God began to whisper this kingdom truth to me again: small things matter.

“After that, the Word of God came to me: ‘Zerubbabel started rebuilding this Temple and he will complete it. That will be your confirmation that God-of-the-Angel-Armies sent me to you. Does anyone dare despise this day of small beginnings?’ ” (Zechariah 4:8-10 MSG).

Her Voice Will Be Heard

By Major Danielle Strickland

I was singing and praying and walking the other day. Actually I was doing that every day for ten days straight, traveling 180 km total as I led 25 women on a walk from Montreal to Ottawa in a campaign called Back To Life Canada. Every one of the women who walked has a story. And a story is a powerful thing. Their stories are about women and babies.

Now this is where everything gets a bit tricky. When the abortion debate comes up, it can conjure up images of heated arguments, or sensational and controversial media events. Needless to say, the conversation tends to be off the table. Which brings me back to our campaign. The campaign is made up of women from all different backgrounds and socio-economic groups, but they all have one thing in common: they want to value life.

In justice circles, human rights is a central theme. I'd venture to guess that there isn't a justice issue on the planet that doesn't have at its root the devaluing of human life. I remember hearing Pope John Paul II say that "the greatest threat to the next generation is excessive capitalism and the death of persons not yet born." Those threats, we now understand, are related.

Here's how justice works: the valuing of people becomes the priority over the right to make money. Excessive capitalism is the reverse: this is when people become products. Human trafficking thrives in the world because life has become a commodity. Prostitution happens because, tragically, people can be bought and sold in our world right now. Abortion is similar. Babies become expendable or inconveniences.

Most of the women I walked with have post-abortive stories. My friend KC was a product of rape and her mother decided to give birth to her anyway, and then give her up for adoption. She was adopted by an amazing family and then was able to reconnect with her birth mother years later, and she is full of joy as she shares about how happy she is to be alive!

My friend Lisa was bullied into an abortion. Her boyfriend tried to stop the process after hearing her cries in the surgery room, and was denied entry. The abortion was completed, and she now tells her story of healing with many tears and much regret.

All of the women I walk with have their own stories, and their own reasons for walking. And each of them understands something critical to justice: human life—however small, however fragile, however broken—must be valued. It must be loved and embraced and declared good. So, we walk on.

Life matters. How we deal with life matters. How we value life matters. How we protect the weakest and most fragile among us matters.

But the voices of these women go even farther than that. They go on to say that even in the midst of life devalued, all is not lost. Healing still flows. Forgiveness and hope for the future still exist. The voices of these women are far from angry, mob-like judgment and much more like a diverse choir—a beautiful sound of life. A sound of love. A sound of women marching together to value one another and to listen to the sound of life emerging, even the smallest, tiny, unheard cry of a baby in the womb. Her voice will be heard indeed.

– You can read more of the women’s stories on [Back to Life Canada](#).

Be A Superhero

By Major Danielle Strickland



Graphic taken from the cover of the May 28, 1921, issue of the Canadian 'War Cry'.

When my eldest son was four, he was interested in superheroes. So, when we saw an old War Cry that featured an image of a Salvation Army soldier armed with a sword fighting an evil dragon, we used it to explain to him how Salvation Soldier was the best superhero of all. However, my son was quick to point out that the Salvation Soldier image was in black and white and must be very old. "There is no more Salvation Soldier," he declared.

"But I'm Salvation Soldier!" responded my husband.

"You're not Salvation Soldier," said my son. "You just dress like him."

A few years ago, I ministered on the streets of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, which is Canada's poorest postal code. With its display of drug use, prostitution, violence and poverty, it was an affront to our sense of a clean and safe Canada. Just being in the presence of that kind of darkness seemed unsafe. But God had unmistakably called us to be present in the darkness as a witness to the power of his light. We were to dispel the dark fear that permeated the area.

Fear of the dark seems to keep many of God's people from working in that neighbourhood and communities like it across the globe. Instead, believers huddle in safe cathedrals or comfortable meeting places and pray that God will protect them and their children from the darkness.

The problem with this comes as we wrestle with God's Word throughout history. What does the Incarnation of Jesus in the form of a baby during one of Israel's darkest moments mean for us today? What does it mean for our own calling and sense of mission as an Army of salvation that is meant to go for souls and go for the worst? To find darkness and banish it from the earth?

The Salvation Army wasn't created to respond to need; it was founded to aggressively seek it out. To find the lost and broken. To find the darkness and dispel it by being present with light, hope and power to break the bonds of wickedness and the chains of injustice.

I remember one particular walk in which we were accompanied by some senior and experienced officers who wanted to see what the Army was doing in our area. One of them asked, "What is your safety plan?"

As I floundered for an answer, my divisional commander stepped in. "It's the same plan as the fire department's," he said. "We are rescuing people, so when we see something on fire we do exactly what professional firefighters do—we charge in! We get in as fast as we can and rescue as many as we can from the fires of hell, injustice, poverty, prostitution, rape, violence and despair."

Everything got a bit quiet. The visitor then asked, "But isn't this dangerous? Isn't this unsafe?"

The answer, of course, is yes. And that's awkward, unless you believe the gospel. Jesus never calls us to a safe salvation. In fact, it's the opposite. Following Jesus in the Early Church often meant suffering, persecution and death by violent and dark means. Fear should have motivated the early Christians to stay quiet, lock their doors and pray that God would protect them. Instead, faith drove them out into the darkness and has ever since as the Holy Spirit inspires and empowers believers to let the light shine out of their lives and into the world. This is the calling of Christ.

Perhaps it's time to rescue our salvation message from safety. Embracing risk with faith is how the gospel is made flesh in our day. It's how our witness stays true to form and how people see God's love with skin on. We should live the words of C.T. Studd as he charged with his whole life into global missions: "Some wish to live within the sound of church and chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell."

May God inspire us to seek the salvation of the world. Let's do more than dress like Salvation Soldier and be the heroes of God's Kingdom.

Luck Is For Pagans

By Major Danielle Strickland

There is a saying in my family, “Luck is for pagans.” My nine-year-old son grew up saying it and we find it hilarious most of the time—awkward at others. The most striking thing about his response is realizing how much we use the term. It seems superstition laced with fatalism is running rampant in the world—even in the Christian community.

While speaking with a Christian woman the other day about a trying circumstance, she responded, “Oh well, whatever will be, will be.” Really, I thought? That’s the best we’ve got?

The other familiar string of fatalism is the idea that God wants us to go through every difficult situation for some cosmic reckoning. I know a recovering drug addict who has been horribly abused by nearly every male figure in her life. She recently told me that she knows God allowed it all to happen for a reason.

But what reason would God have to allow one of his children to be abused? Now, don’t get me wrong, I believe with my whole heart that God can and will use absolutely everything and redeem it all for his glory. But God never allows horrible things to happen for some kind of divine reason. Horrible things happen to us for many reasons. Among them are sin, death, evil, the enemy who seeks to kill, steal and destroy. Life isn’t fair, but that is never how God intended it to be.

I’m getting tired of fatalism, superstition and flawed theology influencing our Christian faith. So, I want to state some things bluntly, just to set the record straight.

1. Luck is for pagans.

Pagans are simply people who worship things other than the one true living God. Paganism is when people put all their faith in things to save them. It’s hoping a rabbit’s foot will bring you luck, throwing salt over your shoulder to protect your family or having your baby christened so he or she will go to Heaven. It has nothing to do with a living faith in a living God who directs our path.

2. “Whatever will be” is not a Christian philosophy; it’s not even a good song.

One of the most exciting things about the Christian faith is the idea that God invites us into a partnership. This is what keeps me going when times are difficult. God invites me to partner with him in bringing redemption to the whole earth. That’s my calling and my job, to co-operate with God in bringing about his Kingdom. Fatalism is not a luxury we can afford. And by “we” I mean the entire human race. Women and children enslaved through human trafficking cannot wait on the whim of fatalism. Nor can those who have not yet heard about the abundant life found in God.

3. Grace breaks through.

In U2's *Grace*, there is a line that says, "she's outside of karma." It's a small line but a big idea, in which the circle of payback that goes round and round and fills the world with a fatalism that prevents any change (let alone justice) from going anywhere is broken by a thing called grace. Now the most radical notion of karma is in the caste system in India, but the reality is that the caste system is alive and well in every country—it runs through every human heart as a deep temptation to resist grace's call.

I'm amazed how often we agree with the world that change is impossible and people are inevitably stuck in cycles of abuse and violence. God stopped the cycle of sin and invites us to be sin-stoppers as well. I don't need to wait to see what God might do, I need to jump in and do my best to co-operate with what I know to be his will.

I've decided that's not a bad way to spend my life. Offering the good news of radical redemption to people trapped by fatalism and superstition in a luckless world. Care to join me?

Wake Up!

By Major Danielle Strickland

I remember when I woke up for the very first time. I was in prison for being a car thief and a drug addict – I was really messing up my life. A Salvation Army lady came to visit me, refusing to give up on me. She put her arms around me and whispered, ‘I love you.’ I was so dead on the inside, so asleep to real life, I didn’t even hug her back. As she left my cell, I remember shouting after her, ‘You didn’t even bring me a smoke, man?’ But later, alone in that cell in Toronto, Jesus himself visited me. I can’t fully explain it to this day, but he did exactly the same as the Salvation Army lady did. He put his arms around me and said, ‘I love you.’

Lights On

That moment, it was as if somebody turned on a light and I woke up. Suddenly I realised I was in jail and that I should never have been there. I understood the mess I was in. It was a long journey after that – detox, probation, getting out of jail. But Jesus had woken me up to his dream for my life. Love wakes people up on the inside.

That’s exactly what he intends for everyone – to awaken everyone to the reality of where they’re at and the reality of where they should be. There’s a plan God has for you – a purpose he has for you. He dreams of what you could do in the world. And it’s bigger than you. He longs to wake up the church, a generation, whole nations to his presence.

Spiders

I never really wanted to serve God in a Western nation because what I’ve come to understand is how hard it is to serve Jesus in wealth. Wealth is so sleepy, so comfortable.

One night I had a dream where I was bitten by a spider. Suddenly I got so tired. I lay down, and my body became paralysed. Then from out of all four corners of the room, thousands of tiny spiders came and began to devour my entire body.

At first I wanted to rebuke this dream, but as I prayed about it, God gave me this interpretation: I’d been bitten by this culture of spiritual sleepiness – paralysis, even. It’s a death-like state. If you give in to this spirit, you will die.

But you won’t die a glorious death. You won’t die for the gospel, for the lost, for anything meaningful. You’ll die of meaningless things. Tiny little spider bites, one at a time. You’ll die from things that don’t even matter – what size your house is. Where you live. Who likes you. Who thinks you’re cool. What salary you’re going to make. You’re going to die from things which do not matter in the light of eternity. You’ll be consumed by a death of smallness.

I don’t want to die like that – do you?

Whatever It Takes

What we need is to be woken up. I remember a time I was working a night shift at a women's hostel, meaning I had to drive home at night through freezing Canada, sometimes minus-35 degrees. Once I felt myself starting to fall asleep at the wheel. Trying to keep myself awake, I blasted the radio really loud. Then I pinched myself and gave myself a couple of slaps. Eventually, I resorted to something you should never do – I opened the window and stuck my head out! Finally, I was awake!

Do that. Do whatever it takes. Pinch yourself. Turn up the music. Rage against the spirit of sleepiness that would cause you to die an insignificant death.

Begin to stir yourself up. Embrace some discomfort. Witness to someone who makes you uncomfortable. Go without some food for a bit. If you can stir yourself awake, you don't have to die an insignificant death.

We wake up so that Christ can shine on us. And if Christ shines on you, you'd better believe he will draw everyone to himself! He can save to the uttermost. We serve a God who can who can raise the dead. He raised me. And we serve a God who can wake up sleepers: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.'