

JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY

JAC Online

Issue 116, August - September 2018

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Major Stephen Court

Editorial Introduction

Major Stephen Court, editor

Greetings in Jesus' name. Mercy and peace to you from God our Father. Welcome to JAC116, the 116th issue of the Journal of Aggressive Christianity. This is The HOPE Issue. It coincides with the start of the term of the new General, and in this new season, the JAC editorial unit thought it appropriate to ask Salvationists what makes them missionally hopeful and/or what they're hoping for from God through the Army during the next term.

We've got a great mix of perspectives from colonel to soldier, from New Zealand to England, from veteran JAC contributor to first-timers (a couple!).

Lieutenant Samantha Nolan Jones shares her conviction that 'Anything Is Possible' from her new appointment in Omaha USA.

Captain Jenny Collings, corps officer and community ministries director of Hamilton City Corps in New Zealand, weaves recreational, vocational, and spiritual illustrations to communicate why she is 'Missionally Hopeful'.

Lieut-Colonel Ian Barr, free from particular appointment in what General Gowans called 'reserve' (instead of 'retired'), reflects on 'The Substance Of Things Hoped For' as applied both to heaven and to The Army.

Annie Westbrook is not her real name. Keen Salvo historians will appreciate the conflation of 'Annie Shaw' and 'Emma Wesbtrook', two of the seven 'Hallelujah Lasses' who invaded USA with The Salvation Army in 1880.* And Annie answers the question, 'What Do We Have Plenty Of?', from a country with only two salvationists in it at time of writing.

Lieutenant Amanda Keene testifies, 'I'm Hopeful', from her new perch as the Territorial Christian Education Director For Discipleship in USA Central.

Lieutenant Jordan Westrupp, 'walking in the dust' around Glen Eden New Zealand and leading the Hamodava Tea Company, is looking forward to 'The Third Act'.

Captain Genevieve Peterson answers the question, 'What Makes Me Missionally Hopeful' while engaging in discipling and community capacity building east of Melbourne.

Major Rob Birks tallies 'Ten Things That Make Me Missionally Hopeful'. Rob and his wife are cultivating new missional communities north of Los Angeles.

Finally, here are 'Nine Things I'm Hoping For During This Next Term' for you to chew on in prayer and brainstorming.

You'll likely want to leverage this exercise to ask God to clarify the aspects of His promises and character and the missional mandates He's placed in front of you in which you should be investing your hope during this next term. It can be an edifying experience.

Meanwhile, you can read the previous 115 issues of JAC free in our archives on the front page. If you aim to read about 14/15 issues/ month, you'll be all read up by the time we get to JAC120, marking two decades of JAC. Be up to date. Stay tuned.

Stay close to Jesus.

* They were accompanied by, led by Commissioner George Scott Railton. In the foundational prophecy of Catherine Booth, given at the farewell meeting in 1880 of Captain Emma Westbrook, along with six soldiers – Rachel Evans, Clara Price, Mary Ann Coleman, Elizabeth Pearson, Annie Shaw, Emma Eliza Florence Morris, and Commissioner George Scott Railton to invade USA:

“The decree has gone forth that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and that He shall reign whose right it is from the River to the ends of the earth. We shall win. It is only a question of time. I believe that this movement shall inaugurate the final conquest of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Anything is Possible

Lieutenant Samantha Nolan

In June of 2008 the Boston Celtics squared up with another storied franchise, the Los Angeles Lakers, in the NBA Finals. During Game 1, Paul Pierce was injured in the third quarter and taken out by wheel chair. To lose your best player, even momentarily, makes everything pause. All of a sudden all your hopes and dreams are dashed. Worry about the future sets in. Paul Pierce would return and the Boston Celtics would go on to win the 2008 NBA Championship a few games later. In the post-game interview after they won the championship Kevin Garnett responded with one of the most memorable lines of any post-game interview, "Anything is possible. Anything is possssssssssibbbbbbllllllleeee!"

That is precisely where I find myself when it comes to where I stand with missional hopefulness and as I look forward to what God is going to do as we walk in faithful relationship with Him. There are many reasons to be disappointed and worried. The Salvation Army in my part of the world is not flourishing for the most part. There is an officer shortage, lay leaders are scarce in many corps, many churches are dying or being sustained by one or two big families. We seem to be doing well with relationships in communities and in our social service work, but the spiritual side seems to be lacking. So, like the moment Paul Pierce was taken out, there has been a collective gasp and worry about where we are headed for many. I have spoken with many people about where The Salvation Army stands today and as much as there is room to worry I am actually incredibly hopeful as I look ahead.

God has been stirring people up and giving them a holy discontent with the status quo. Many of his followers are voicing their absolute thirst for a Spirit filled Army that is courageously proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ and being participants in God's work among our neighbors as we live out the Kingdom of God here. This begins with the work inside of us which I have also seen a greater thirst for. I do not just want God to have His way with the world, I want Him to have His way with me. I have no desire to be stuck on an endless track of disappointment and failure. I want the power that raised Jesus from the dead to be alive in me, refining me to maturity in Christ as I live in relationship with Him, my neighbors, and His creation. It fills me with hope and excitement that many are feeling God stir in them that same excitement to dig in deeply with Him and also boldly step out for Him.

All throughout Scripture my very favorite stories are ones where a person is in a situation that looks impossible and the God does His thing.

* Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery and he was taken to Egypt (Genesis 37). And even though the Lord was with Him and he succeeded in everything, Joseph still ended up in prison (Genesis 39). But the Lord was with Him there as well and the prison warden was kind to him and showed him favor. Then the dream interpretations of Joseph were proved true and the baker lost his life, but the cupbearer was restored. However, the cupbearer did not remember Joseph

and so he remained in prison (Genesis 40). It is here in these spaces when people of God start to worry and ask questions. Joseph, even though the Lord was with him, has shared a good deal of trouble and unwanted circumstances. And at this point things look pretty discouraging. When Pharaoh begins having his own dreams, Joseph is eventually brought and gives the interpretation of his dreams that the Lord gave to him. Pharaoh then appoints Joseph in charge of his palace, as well as the whole land of Egypt (Genesis 41). Talk about escalating quickly! As my cousin AJ says, "Look at God." You wouldn't have suspected Joseph would be in charge of the palace, and the land of Egypt if you had met him as a slave or prisoner.

* Jehoshaphat had a vast army coming against him (2 Chronicles 20). All the people of Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel and he stood in the assembly and told them all to not be afraid or discouraged, that they would not have to fight the battle, but stand firm and see the Lord's deliverance. ARE YOU PUMPED?! I am because I know the end of the story! If I was one of those people, I think I would be the kind of "scared pumped" I feel in ministry pretty regularly. We would not need faith if the life we are called to was easy and without risk. It is scary sometimes, but the super exciting thing is that God, the living, true, all powerful God is not just with us but WITHIN us! All of the people of Judah fell to their faces and worshiped the Lord. The next day they set out to where God told them to go singing praises to God. As they began to sing, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir. By the time Judah reached the place they were told the vast army lay before them dead. The fear of God came upon the surrounding kingdoms and Judah was given a time of peace.

And so, I am ultimately missionally hopeful because of God. Even when the deck seems stacked against us, even when we face situations that seem to spell out disaster (like Joseph and Jehoshaphat) God is God. I believe God raised The Salvation Army up for a purpose and I believe He could ruin us, but I have seen throughout Scripture and in my own life that God loves to redeem, to restore, and to bring back life. And we are not dead yet anyway! The current situation may seem discouraging, but I hear God calling us back to the foundations. I feel the fire. I believe God still has work for us to do, some "standing in the gap" work, some "love the unloveable" work, some "take cupcakes to brothels" work. It makes me smile to think of all the weird and unique ways The Salvation Army can do mission and bring honor and glory to God. I am blessed to be a soldier in this Army and am so excited to be a part of what God will do next in and with it. God can do things far "outside the box" as Kevin Garnett said, "ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!"

Deuteronomy 10:14-22 says, 14 Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. 15 Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. 16 So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. 17 For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the

mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. 18 He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. 19 So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. 20 You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name. 21 He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen. 22 Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

Amen.

Missionally Hopeful page

Captain Jenny Collins

What Makes Me Missionally Hopeful?

By Captain Jenny Collins

*Corps Officer and Director of Community Ministries,
Hamilton City Salvation Army, New Zealand*



I recently broke out of my comfort zone in a big way. I completed a 6km mud run with my husband Marcus. We trudged through mud pits and commando crawled under barbed wire and electrical fencing. We climbed up slippery hills on our hands and knees, clutching to the gnarly roots of trees to pull ourselves up and we waded our way through an icy cold river full of sludge.



Having been Salvation Army Officers for 12 years, it is true to say that the two experiences are not dissimilar. We signed up, we trained, we dressed for the occasion and we showed up at the start line. Not long into it, we realised that it was going to be much harder than we had anticipated to endure and to complete. So, what keeps us going? What keeps me hopeful that the mission we have committed our lives to is still worth it all?

1. A personal commitment to completion and a sense of camaraderie¹: On the mud run, I had to dig deep and keep putting one foot in front of the other. I had to keep thinking about the finish line and how good it would feel to complete the race. It helped that everyone around me was moving in the same direction. We were all moving forwards. We ran at differing paces, but together we had momentum and a sense of comradery. It's the same way with the mission of The Salvation Army. When I see others moving forwards with God and alongside us, I am encouraged and inspired to keep going myself. I was recently a delegate at the International College for Officers and came away inspired by the personal commitments not only of Officers, but of Salvationists all over the globe to keep working and moving towards the finish line. In the internationalism of The Salvation Army there is an opportunity to gain a greater sense of momentum and comradery, thereby inspiring missional hope.



International College for Officers Session 236

2. Experiencing and celebrating wins along the way²: I discovered on the mud run that I am not a great runner, but I can commando crawl like a boss! It is true to say that I found at least eighty percent of the race to be downright gruelling and arduous. The other twenty percent was exhilarating and I surprised myself at what I was able to accomplish. In living out the mission, there is a good eighty percent that is downright gruelling and arduous. I am kept hopeful by the twenty percent which is made up of the good surprises that God has in store for me along the way! One example of this is that, through Officership, I have discovered a purpose and passion for re-integrating social and spiritual mission. I have been delighted and surprised in each of our appointments as ministries have converged and the mission has advanced. In our current appointment, 11 Salvationists (including a Pacific Islander, a South African and a Zimbabwean), 3 retired Officers (2 Colonels and a Major) and 6 Christians (including a Kiwi/Papua New Guinean, 2 South Africans and 1 Botswanan) from other denominations have followed God's call to join our staff team to work in an integrated spiritual and social service context. Their "yes" to Gods call to sacrificial service keeps me hopeful that we are still called and empowered to be "Te Ope Whakaora" (Maori for The Salvation Army) which, when translated, means "The Army that brings life".

3. Race Marshalls to guide and cheer us on! At regular intervals on the mud run there were Marshalls to watch over us. They made sure that we followed the course laid out for us and shouted out words of encouragement to spur us on. I am kept missionally hopeful by leaders who do this for us. The Lord has strategically placed people in my life for a season to help me face particular challenges and get over hurdles safely. There are times when I've felt like I was going it alone, but just around the corner was another race Marshall waiting, ready to call out words of encouragement and motivate

me to press on! I thank God for all the people over the years who have fulfilled that function in my life. They are ambassadors of hope!

4. The promise of relief and refreshment at the end of the race³: Before we set off, the announcer declared that there would be sports drinks, protein bars and showers ready and waiting for us at the end. Let me tell you, we needed the hope of that promise to keep us going when we were in the thick of it! When it comes to missional hope, there is no greater hope than the hope of heaven to keep us going. It is the promise of eternal relief and refreshment at the end of the race that I need to keep at the forefront of my mind when I find myself out of my comfort zone and having to dig deep.

Towards the end of the race, Marcus and I waded out of the icy river and climbed up the last hill towards the finish line. At the top of the verge, a crowd was gathered on either side of the ropes cheering us on. The announcer was there with his hand held out to high five us. He called out our names into the microphone congratulating us on our achievement. Exhilarated, we high fived the announcer and crossed the finish line holding hands, held up high in the sky, with a mutual sense of accomplishment, exhaustion and relief. It was worth it all!

Ultimately, what keeps me missionally hopeful is my belief that I will see Jesus at the finish line and He will be calling out my name saying well done Jen! I have an enduring conviction that it's truly going to be worth it all!

The Mission Statement of The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory:

The Salvation Army is an international movement and an evangelical branch of the Christian Church, which expresses its ministry through a balance of spiritual and social programmes. In its founding it was mobilised by God, and in its continuance is totally dependent on God for the power to fulfil its calling. Everything it does is as an offering to the glory of God and for the worship and adoration of God's name.

¹ Hebrews 12:1-3 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (NIV)

² The mission of The Salvation Army in New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga is:

- Caring for people: Salvationists follow the example of Jesus by identifying with the needy, standing alongside them and caring for people in all situations.

- Transforming lives: Salvationists believe that God can transform people and that the resulting wholeness is experienced through belief in Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. This transformation is evidenced in discipleship and commitment.
- Reforming society: Salvationists seek to express the love and power of God in the community. This calls for the challenging of manifestations of evil, injustice and oppression, and for steps aimed at their elimination.

³ Rita Springer inspires this posture... 'Worth It All' by Rita Springer:

"I don't understand Your ways
Oh but I will give You my song
Give You all of my praise
You hold on to all my pain
With it You are pulling me closer
And pulling me into Your ways

Now around every corner
And up every mountain
I'm not looking for crowns
Or the water from fountains
I'm desperate in seeking, frantic believing
That the sight of Your face
Is all that I need
I will say to You

It's gonna be worth it
It's gonna be worth it
It's gonna be worth it all
I believe this

You're gonna be worth it
You're gonna be worth it
You're gonna be worth it all
I believe this"

The Substance of Things Hoped For

Lieut.-Colonel Ian Barr

Visitors to Woolsthorpe Manor, Isaac Newton's childhood home in middle England, are often shown a large tree in the garden. This is the "very tree" from which the famous apple allegedly fell and from which Newton reportedly formed his theory of gravitation.

I say it is the "very tree" but is it? A long time ago the actual tree fell, but another tree has grown from it and every autumn it produces the same kind of apples that Newton would have known. A couple of years ago I was conducting a party of school children round Westminster Abbey. When we stopped at the grave of Isaac Newton I was able to show them an apple I had picked up from the "very tree." Since apples are perishable goods, I gave the apple from the "very tree" to a child who was first to answer a question about Newton.

At the time, I confess I was unaware of a biblical connection.

"At least there is hope for a tree:

If it is cut down it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail.

Its roots may grow old in the ground

And its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud

And put forth shoots like a plant."

(Job 14: 7-10)

Job then goes on to contrast the rebirth of the tree with the hopelessness of the human condition.

"But a man dies and is laid low;

He breathes his last and is no more."

The scene is set for a redeemer, a bringer of life who will engender hope that sees beyond the grave.

It would be less than certain to suggest that Job was hoping for what is sometimes called an after-life. His hope was very much grounded in encounter with God in this life.

"I know that my redeemer lives,

And that in the end he will stand on the earth.

And after my skin has been destroyed,

Yet in my flesh will I see God."

(Job 19:25 – 26)

The more established doctrine of the hope of heaven comes much later in the Bible.

I do not discount the hope of everlasting life in heaven with Christ, it is an important theme in Christian teaching. However, when the issue of life after death is reduced to questions of reward and retribution, or the resumption of earthly relationships in the form of family reunions in Heaven, or the threat of hell hanging over folk we disapprove of, we do a disservice to our faith and to the world God has given us for today. Worse still, is the terrible idea that this life is merely a rehearsal for the next.

Job's vision is not for another world; it is that he will catch the vision of God in this world and that he, Job, would see God "in my flesh"

Given that I am not far short of my three-score-years-and –ten it is only natural to think about what happens to me when I die. To be honest, apart from the funeral plan I have already paid for, I really do not know and I am not much concerned.

After a series of seemingly unconnected illnesses I found myself in hospital last year. The diagnosis was pneumonia. After a process of trial and error the doctors concluded that I did not have either of the types of disease they thought I might have. In a word, I was getting worse. One night three nurses arrived in my room to carry me off to the intensive care unit. A young lady doctor asked me a number of seemingly innocuous questions: my age, my full name, my religious affiliation, things I like to eat. This was all by way of a preamble to the big question: did I want to be resuscitated if I were to go into cardiac arrest? She was so nice about it all, I immediately said yes.

Faced with the possibility of imminent death I was curious rather than full of faith or full of fear: just curious. What would it be like to die? St John tells us that "Jesus knew that he came from God and that he went to God" and this apparently informed his decision to take a basin and towel to wash his disciples' feet. I knew that I would return to God when my earthly life was over, so before I went to sleep I uttered the simple prayer "Into thy hands do I commend my spirit." Depending on how you read this prayer of Jesus it can be an expression of faith, or hope or even just resignation. In my case it was all three.

The lesson I draw from Job's testimony, Jesus' knowledge of where he came from and where he was going, and my personal experience, is that we can leave Heaven to God, and that he expects us to live out our faith and set our hopes in the present world. When we die we leave all we have been and done to God and allow him to bring something new and fruitful to life from the fallen tree of our own generation.

So, these signs of hope for the world in which I find myself today, the small world of The Salvation Army.

The first source of hope for me is found in a simple mantra. 'The Army belongs to God.' I claim no originality in this, St Cyprian of Carthage said it first, "The Church belongs to God." That is not to say we are not stewards of what God has entrusted to us, rather that we need not be febrile in our thinking and planning about the future. It is not for us to worry about the future of the Army, God has it in hand, albeit the human element may at times seek to confound God's best plans and purposes. The question is not "How will the Army survive?" or even "How will the Army manage without me?" The solid ground of our hope is Jesus Christ, saviour, redeemer and leader.

My second cause for hope is the quality of our people, especially our younger officers. (By "younger" I mean anyone who is younger than me.) From observation, I have seen a change in the expectations and approach to Christian leadership.

The majority of officers I know are able to distinguish between “leader” and “administrator.” Most are free of any ambition to advance through the administrative ranks or acquire legislative power. Many are also happily free of the myth of the “the dynamic leader” – few of whom are found in the New Testament. They are happy doing what they do in their community. They have vision for long-term change in human society, and for the transforming work of Christ in individuals and communities. The technical word for this is “disinterestedness” – the desire to serve free of self-interest, without expectation of recognition or worldly return. I applaud their self-denying and self-giving attitude to Salvationism and Christian service. They and those who follow them, are our hope for a faith grounded in the world as it is. The world which God loved enough to give his only Son.

In my own officership I regret the times I tried to be ‘relevant’ when what the world was really looking for was that we be ‘real.’ The world I live in demands authenticity before theological or even political purity.

Younger generations seldom share the precise values and preoccupations of the previous generation, this has been the case throughout history. Thank God, it is true of the Army today. There is a longing for the substance – or essence – of The Salvation Army, rather than a desire to maintain the outward forms of Salvationism. The ‘forms’ are only useful insofar as they express the essential message of the Army. This is not confined to our hymnody, musical sub-culture or formal uniform wearing. These are all up for discussion. The signs of hope are all to do with our essence: the revival of interest and commitment to social justice; openness to people from all kinds of background; acceptance of difference; respect for ‘the other’ and a genuine love that looks beyond the world as we would like it to be and seeks to see it as God sees and loves it.

We cannot tell what heaven will be like, save that we will be with Christ which is somehow far better. For the present, we look for signs of new life springing from the fallen tree of previous generations. Our “commonwealth is in Heaven” but this world is very much our home and we are not just passing through.

What Do We Have Plenty Of?

Annie Westbrook (*name changed for security purposes*)

If there is anything I have learned in recent days which I have found to be uncompromisingly true, it is that the Hope that comes from Jesus Christ is its own spiritual creature. You will have a hard time predicting it. You can't conjure it up. And it cannot, ever, be stopped.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

What makes me hopeful these days? Hope. Hope itself is the fuel of the faith realm and I've been blessed to be encountering it in bucket loads. Let me share with you some snapshots of God's nonsensical hope.

I am currently the Salvation Army soldier in my country of residence. That's because we're not legally recognized by the government yet. Small ministries that are happening in prisons and communities in various provinces are all, as of now, under the table. I have two of the most amazing Officers. By God's careful preparatory hand they are native to this country and passionate to open fire for their own people and nation. Having been trained and having served in the West for over a decade, their perspective and understanding of different cultures is invaluable. Their giftings in the Spirit are so balanced and wide ranging. They are the wind of God's hope that has been blowing a storm through my life.

Our Sunday worship and prayer meetings are at the quarters. Sometimes it's just me and my Officers. Sometimes there are other beautiful believers we are praying will join us as Officers in the future. Three and a half years into the mission here, on the day our paperwork was finally completed with everything in order and submitted to the government, the oldest son of my Officers here (who has still been living back in the West) was the victim of a brutal acid attack.

He came close to death, but God spared him. In the months since he has had over 30 surgeries on his entire body and has not yet been given permission to leave the Intensive Care unit.

So our team of 3 became a team of 2 as Mrs. Major left the country to support her son and everything seemed to be falling apart. But hope.

"Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,

I will be joyful in God my Savior.
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.”
Habakkuk 3:17-19

God gave me this verse of scripture recently. The words have never been more alive to me as I have witnessed my Officers praising God through unthinkable circumstances. I heard prayers yelled at full screaming capacity believing for healing for my Officer's son, forgiveness for the one who attacked him, redemption for a crime, and ultimate glory to God through what has happened. There has never once been a complaint. They have been thanking God and claiming his strength and peace and Hope everyday.

On the days when “church” meetings are just me and my Officer, I really cherish these moments. Why? Because I get to sit with a servant of God, in the country of his birth and salvation, and listen to him speak so passionately about his dreams and visions of what God is going to do here through the Army. My rational self can see nothing but an uphill battle. We have no soldiers, Officers, converts, buildings, recognition, reputation, or legal permission to operate, to name a few. Our application could be rejected. Nothing could happen. Or everything could happen. In light of all the Hope we have in Christ, It's kind of refreshing to sit in the chair of all or nothing possibilities.

What do we have plenty of? Hope. Certainly not our own or anything that can be generated by human will or foresight. It's a hope straight from the source- the One who makes Shepherd boys kings, virgins mother, and persecutors preachers.

What can we base this hope on? Nothing but the promises of God, the witnesses of the Saints who have walked before us, and the prophetic dreaming of those who dare to access it today.

There is no Corps/ Division/ Territory “too far gone” that cannot be revived by it. It thrives in the most unexpected and surprising of places. Go seeking it where you're certain It's absent. I guarantee its' face will show. Most of all, take time in silence to be animated by it and start leaving a trail of ridiculous, holy Hope behind you.

I am hopeful. Because although the Army is so imperfect and will likely hurt and disappoint us while we serve in its ranks, I LOVE this Army. And as nonsensically as God loves a faithless me, I will love Him through His Army to my dying day. Regardless of who is in leadership, and the sin that always threatens to enter in, I can proclaim that God's hope is unstoppable. God will open fire in this nation. Many will be healed. My eyes will see the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Hallelujah!

I'm Hoping

Lieutenant Amanda Keene

- ✓ I'm hoping for an outpouring of the Spirit in the Army – where we hear Him and move forward in obedience to Him, no matter what the cost.
- ✓ I'm hoping for unity in mission and purpose. So many times it seems like we are all in our own silos, working toward what WE want and what WE think should be happening, but it's not really about us.
- ✓ I'm hoping that The Army's collective desire would be to be more like Jesus, not to be a high ranking officer or popular soldier/local leader.
- ✓ I'm hoping that the salvation of others would be more of a priority over statistics, budgets and property projects.
- ✓ I'm hoping that we get back to the basics in a system that we've made so complicated. I'm hoping we can just do life with people in community, pointing each other to Jesus, holding one another accountable in love, living surrendered lives, ones that are generous and abundant, loving everyone with whom we come into contact.
- ✓ I'm hoping that our joy and passion is renewed.
- ✓ I'm hoping that there is freedom for dreamers to dream and visionaries to cast vision and that there is room for all to exercise their gifts.
- ✓ I'm hoping that being a disciple and making disciples is lived out in our day to day lives and ministries.
- ✓ I'm hoping that social justice isn't just a buzz word, but that we would have a deep love and commitment to those who are marginalized.
- ✓ I'm hoping that Army leadership would reflect the nations – a glimpse into the diversity of heaven.
- ✓ I'm hoping for an Army that shuns no one and lovingly embraces everyone– an Army that lives out Kingdom values.
- ✓ I'm hoping for an Army rooted in the Word, fighting on our knees.
- ✓ I'm hoping for an Army that doesn't play the comparison game, but instead lifts one another up, celebrating successes and joys, and comforting one another in times of grief.

- ✓ I'm hoping for an Army who lives and moves out of their comfort zone – out of the comfort of sin, tradition, hierarchy, and entitlement.

The Third Act

Lieutenant Jordan Westrupp

So much of how we understand hope is grafted from the stories we tell each other, and this is not a new practice. The ancients told stories of their heroes, unlikely and overlooked, called by God to a task seemingly beyond them.... and just when the odds are against them, hope breaks like dawn. The stories we're often glued to on screens and pages remain the same. Similarly flawed, unlikely and overlooked heroes are called to a task seemingly beyond them, a threat rises, the tension of the second act is created... and the third act breaks like hope. My trade was in films, and the art of story telling, so I understand much of life through this lens. I see our primal need for hope in the stories we tell each other.

Can I speak to you for a moment from my own vantage point in this Salvation Army? I feel increasingly that we are living somewhere within the second-act of our own story, and that there is a strong sense in which those around me who are living within the story are looking to the horizon.

A bit of relatively recent history.

In the 1970s/80s my territory experienced a spiritual renewal as an overflow of the charismatic revival movement that righteously tore through many churches and spiritual groups in this country. Our faith communities were given a gift, which presented us with a sense of task and a way forward. In the late 80s and then into the 90s, once again we received a gift in the form of the church-growth-movement. Our faith communities grasped once again at methods that gave us a sense of task and a way forward. Those waves came in great sets, and we rode them while they lasted. The 90s was almost 20 years ago, and in that time the next gift was promised by many people, though none came so easily. The way forward has since seemed not so clear. Perhaps you've felt this from where you stand? The odds have seemingly started to build against us.

New leaders, new seasons, a new General. A new term. These often give to the imagination that spark of hope, and that perhaps the light is waiting just beyond where we can see. Here's the caution for myself, and maybe for you. Its all too easy to place every possible expectation on the shoulders of one leader, methods and our mission, or even our systems old and new. So if I have hope, I want to place it where I see it is needed most. I want to share what I believe lies out there, that flint of hope that I see.

Repeat after me.

Nobody knows.

If we're looking for a leader who's going to tell us exactly what the next chapter is going to look like, and what is the way forward, a sort of 'master-plan'. Nobody knows. I want to take comfort in those words. There won't be a new purple book, or a ministry model

based on a metaphor. No one fix-for-all program that will sweep the church. Nobody has it. I need to hear that.

But, I see hope. I'm hoping instead for the permission to take risks. I want the next season to be one where leaders give that permission, and find every way possible to remove the hurdles and the barriers that kill the spirit of those who dare to try. I hope for a culture shift where we honour and celebrate our missional innovators and our entrepreneurs. We'll try and fail, and I hope that our conversations change from 'See, I knew it wouldn't work' to 'we still believe in you, lets regroup, and try again!'. Perhaps then we shall begin this time round to write our own book, rather than borrow it from someone else?

I hope for a move of God's Spirit in my own territory in the way that He is moving in other parts of the Army world, like Papua New Guinea and Africa. I hope we can find ways to part with the abundance of material resources that we have here that those who are Spiritually rich simple don't. There should be enough of God's Spirit and resource for all in a truly globally connect Army of Salvation.

I hope that we remember that the same Spirit alive in an adult is alive in a child - that our youth have not been given a junior Spirit. That we follow Jesus, who was/is Himself a young man; who called teenagers to follow him; who changed the world; who inspired a young man and woman to start the Salvation Army, who inspired other teenagers and young people to storm the world for Salvation. I hope we capture this again. Can we let our young people lead us again?

Maybe the hero is down, having taken the punches and the dirt kicked in our faces. The odds are stacking against her. But we know how the beats of this story go. We know there is a third-act. The hint of something new is stirring the imagination. Hope beckons with the first glimmers on a dazzling horizon.

What Makes Me Missionally Hopeful

Captain Genevieve Peterson

I'd love to say that the inspiration for this article came from some deeply personal revelation during a meaningful prayer time but really, it came from binge watching 'Call the Midwife'.

Call the Midwife is a period drama series about a group of midwives working in the east end of London in the late 1950s. The plot follows the work of midwives and the nuns of Nonnatus House, a nursing convent, coping with the medical problems in the deprived Poplar. The midwives bring safe childbirth to women in the area and help look after their newborns.

The love shown and purpose lived by the characters in this show was so contagious it made me google 'how to become a midwife!' The description of the subject matter was enough to close the book on a change in profession but it did make me yearn for a life where my sole purpose was to love God, and live within a community whose need is great.

As an officer appointed to a highly disadvantaged community, I quickly saw the stupidity in this yearning!

But it does cause me to pause and consider the challenge of our time, that is, the chasm between what we have and what we want that exists purely in the space between our ears. Too often we strive for a future that could be a reality if we could just stop working so hard to make it happen! So much effort is placed into planning how we will do something, so much thinking goes into why we should do something and so much praying goes into the success of future endeavours. But how much time goes into responding to the urgent call of those in pain, desperate to birth new life, and yet carrying on alone and unassisted.

So what was it about the community of Poplar that was so attractive?

Poplar was an impoverished community which brings all the things you would expect. Family violence, child neglect, unemployment, depression and addiction. But there is also a depth and a wisdom to poor communities that you don't find in wealthy ones. There is a sense of togetherness. Of communal understanding of suffering and hardship. The cherishing of minor victories and the understanding of shared responsibility for ones neighbour.

People like to romanticise poor communities. They are usually people who have never lived in one. There is very little romance in the darkness of a poor community. But they are interesting, and while rarely progressing, there is always movement.

But it's the sadness and depth of hopelessness that often gets you in the end. In my first community there was a single dad whose life had been one of betrayal and hardship.

He was so devoted to his children. We used to refer to him as 'the one good dad'. Fathers were usually absent or abusive so the one good dad was such a source of hope. He was always there, waiting in the car park at the end of programs (for those not familiar with ministry in difficult areas, this is very rare!). He would turn up to concerts and send back permission slips (also rare!) and he would make sure we were OK; that we felt safe in our little community centre in the tough part of town.

The one good dad was diagnosed with cancer while his kids were in their early teens. He died three months later. After that, his kids had no one. Or at least, no one as stable as the one good dad, and things just fell apart from there for the older child. It was the end of hope that got her and she spiralled out of control into abuse, drugs, mental illness and regular stints of incarceration.

Impoverished communities need people who can hold onto hope in the midst of darkness, and who can grab hold of those who are about to lose their own grip on hope. People of faith should be the best candidates but my experience has been that many move away when they don't get the fairy tale ending. It's that disparity between what they imagined in their mind and the gruelling reality that causes them to lose faith and return to a simpler form of ministry. If I'm honest, that's what causes me to lose hope. A people committed to Jesus who sleep through the crucifixion and wake up for the resurrection. I'm probably being too harsh, but my loyalty to God is anchored to the poor, and not to Christians. The poor disappoint less often.

Moving on from suffering - (please!) - the next element of ministry so inspiring in *Call the Midwife* was the visitation. It's just part and parcel of district nursing but it reminded me of how many times I had been invited to sit around the kitchen table with a family, or invited to play in the backyard with the kids, or asked to sit on the bedside of a sick or sad mum. It's such a privilege to be invited into someone's home. It's such an honour to be included in a family celebration. But in poor communities it comes only after a relationship of deep trust and respect has been formed. That relationship can (in my opinion) never be formed in programs, or performing welfare from the safety of your corps building, and it usually doesn't happen between the hours of 9 and 5. Often it's when we take the time to drive parents to appointments, or arrive early to help mum get the kids to school, or picking up school supplies from two suburbs over, or taking kids to visit their dads in lockup. It's responding to the middle of the night call when all hell has broken loose at home. It's being available for anything, anywhere and at any time. You can't program it. You can't control it. You can't always be prepared for it. And you are definitely going to break the Army's safety policy when you do it! But it's the only way of moving from being a professional, to a friend.

Once you are a friend, you have influence, but more than that, you have insight. You start to see how impossible their life really is. You stop thinking up easy solutions and you know that a \$40 food voucher is not the answer! On your worst days you even wonder how God could be the answer. But on your good days you remember the incarnate Jesus, and you try to reflect Him. You remember that your job is not to fix or gentrify the family, but to never leave or forsake them. To be with them in their darkest

moments, and to point them to a strength and comfort that can never be found within humans. Mostly, you understand the limitations of your role and you stop celebrating how awesome you are for 'sacrificing' so much to work amongst the poor. And you just get on and help. You are not the star of their show, and doing menial tasks like cleaning houses and combing out lice is not ground work that leads to some bigger purpose. It is held within the purpose!

Being with people is 100% the beginning and end of the work. Because this work somehow demonstrates the deep love and consistency of who God is. And suddenly the Gospel makes sense, both to those you work with, and to you. And God's love is embraced, and God's plan is understood, and through all the pain and endurance and suffering, new birth arrives. And it is miraculous. And we celebrate with the angels in heaven because the child who was lost is now found.

You see the thing about the parable of the prodigal is that the son never does have some great revelation of moral impurity that causes him to repent and return to the father. The only revelation was one of deep literal hunger and loneliness. And his literal need, and his spiritual needs are met once he returns to the place of love, and acceptance and grace. What repentance or rather what changes he made there were subsequent to the great salvation party. They may never have occurred! But the embrace is what we offer, and nothing more than their openness to be embraced is required. But a genuine embrace from God is usually all that's needed to set the changes in motion.

Many of the people I have worked with have a deep knowledge and understanding of God's love for them. And they have never stepped foot in a church. Many of them have gone on to live radically changed lives. Some of them went on to love and care so contagiously that their entire families were changed, and parts of the community completely renewed. Not made rich, but made full of hope.

Recently I reconnected with a young person who found herself in great need. She had done so well in spite of a difficult childhood, but now needed a house and a job for her partner, all before the arrival of her first child. So we called on a young guy who we had worked with pretty intensely 10 years earlier. And he had a full time job for her partner that started two days later. And then I contacted another friend I had worked with, and he helped find a house. And then a wonderful young Christian who had intentionally lived in the community years before followed up all the material things needed to set up the house.

Two months on, she held her beautiful baby boy, in her new home (the first home that had ever been hers), while her partner went off to work (the first permanent full time job he had ever held). Their note to me; 'thank you, this gift is truly from God. How else could all this be possible?' How else indeed.

The take away from this very long article? Stop thinking and start doing. Stop waiting on answers to prayer and realise that God is actively working in communities trying to

bring about hope, purpose and new life. Stop thinking that salvation work is complicated and realise that while it might be messy and tiring, it is not complicated. It is simply this; visit the poor and bring them a cake! Take the sick to a doctor and help them get their medicine. Educate the children so that they can get a job and experience freedom from the cycle of deprivation. Comb out their lice so they attend school. Advocate for them so they can return to school when they get suspended. Sit with them when the department comes to do inspections. Read their Centrelink letters so their pensions don't get cut off. Visit foster children when they get moved around from place to place and have nowhere to call home. Share the love of God with them, and show them the source of love and hope in your life. But most importantly, turn up and don't give up on them!

What makes me missionally hopeful? The Salvation Army was born for this work. All we have to do now is remember how to leave the corps building and start having some fun with some of the most amazing, resilient, hilarious characters you will ever meet. I promise, it will be the least boring mission you will ever do!

Ten Things That Make Me Missionally Hopeful

Major Rob Birks

(only #1 is listed by importance)

10. Retired Army leaders, like General Paul & Commissioner Kay Rader, Commissioner Bill Francis, Commissioner Phil Needham and others, who love God deeply and desire The Salvation Army to fall deeper in love with Him and with those in the world for which He sent Jesus (everyone).
9. The ever-expanding number of countries where Salvationists are sent to serve and to save.
8. The budding emphasis (at least in the Western world) on creating communities of Salvationists focused on loving God & loving OTHERS in all kinds of ways.
7. Financial difficulties which may necessitate that we eschew everything that is not mission-critical.
6. Increasingly, Salvationists are most interested in living the mission of our movement, as opposed to maintaining and/or protecting what we currently have & know.
5. Partnerships.
4. Younger Salvationists who are disinterested in becoming expert mechanics for our movement's machinery.
3. INFINITUM (infinitulife.com) and the renewed interest in all things discipleship.
2. The awareness that women and other historically mistreated and marginalized people must be treated justly and hold key leadership roles in our small part of God's Kingdom.

And **the number one reason I am missionally hopeful** (sometimes against all hope)...

- 1. JESUS!** - His redemptive plan for all creation and the fact that He invites us, all of us, to be junior partners.

Nine Things I'm Hoping For During This Term

Major Stephen Court

General terms are typically five years long in this generation, when the elected general is young enough to serve the full duration before retirement.

Here's the noun: 'a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.'

These are nine hopes I have for this next half-decade*:

1. Jesus High. That we lift the name of Jesus so high that all kinds of people from everywhere will be drawn to Him. There are currently several billion people who need to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Let's elevate that Name!

2. Jesus' Love. That we will love people with such love that not only will they see that we are Jesus Christ's disciples but they will be drawn into relationship with Him. This is impossible in our own strength – this love comes first FROM God and then emanates out from our lives when He reigns in each of us.

3. Jesus' Justice. That we will fight winsomely for justice and many victims and oppressed and marginalised and voiceless people will be dignified. A happy secondary effect will likely be that many will be attracted to fight alongside us and then sort out our motivation and empowerment and come to get to know the Lord Jesus Christ, too!

4. Holy Spirit Power. That our covenanted lives will be so spick and span (think of the words to that old song, 'If on my soul a trace of sin remaineth' – we sang it on Sunday) that God is comfortably delegating supernatural authority such that the 'Greater Things' we read about are regularly and frequently manifest in our lives and warfighting and sick people are healed and oppressed people are delivered victimised people are freed and antagonistic people are softened to Jesus.

5. Every Country. That we invade the remaining 70 or so countries still lacking a Salvationist presence. 14/ year. Not easy. But we've been blogging for 15 years+ now every day and many times we've thrown out goals and challenges to accelerate the advance of this component of the Great Commission – so if we'd jumped on some of the earlier challenges, we might only have 40 or 50 or so left now and the 'job' would be easier...

6. Every Province / State. That we invade every province and every state in every country in the world. A national beachhead is great. But we want to strike while the iron is hot and go hard in expanding, gaining beachheads regionally as well.

7. Every City. That we invade every city in the world. Massive challenge. But success in 'v' and 'vi' will accelerate our expansion...

8. No Regrets. That between now and then we (I) see what He's doing and do what we're (I'm) seeing (lifting this prayer from John 5:19, in which Jesus explains, "The Son can do nothing by Himself. He can do only what He sees His Father doing; whatever the Father does, the Son also does." So, this is a prayer for clear spiritual vision and close intimacy with God.

9. Multiplication Maxim. That we all throw our lives away multiplying multiplying disciples multiplying multiplying bases.**

*I admit that these are ambitious. It would be easier to 'hope' for incremental change and maybe shoot for '2%' increases in this or that area. But improved efficiencies and refined programming and intensified attention could all reach such modest 'hopes'. These, in contrast, REQUIRE GOD'S INVOLVEMENT.

** For a breakdown of the Base Network, see www.armybarmy.com/JAC/jac105.html