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Editorial Introduction

By Major Stephen Court, editor

Greetings in Jesus' name. Mercy and peace to you from God our Father. Welcome to JAC158 and our new rhythm. It will be worth the wait, as we've got heaps of edification filling the pages of this issue, and all from four sources in four territories.

Leading off, Stephen McQuire (Morley, Australia) asks, 'Where Are The Soldiers?' Good question. He outlines some of the younger generations' issues with soldiership and then reimagines it for the future.

Steve Bussey (USA Eastern) follows up with a prophetic trilogy:

- i) Be In Time: An ancient and urgent call for Salvation Army prophets to serve the present age;
- ii) Contend, elaborating on a prophetic word giving at a recent salvo leadership event;
- iii) Four Catalysts for Reviving Movements, and all conveniently starting with the letter 'C'.

Phil Laeger (USA Southern) offers two musically inspired pieces:

- i) New Songs For Our First Love, addressing the question, 'what if The Salvation Army just isn't made to excel in worship leading and worship songwriting?';
- ii) My Father's Business, a devotional from Jesus' famous childhood quote, riffing on a song composed for the occasion of the Salvo Centenary in Burnaby.

And Danielle Strickland (Harvest, Canada & Bermuda) exhorts us to 'Let The Heads Roll'.

There is enough to pray through, be inspired by, and implement til Jesus returns. May God edify you and yours in the process.

Stay close to Jesus.
Much grace.

Where Are The Soldiers?

By Stephen McQuire

Opinion: Where Are the Soldiers? The Challenge of Salvation Army Soldiership Among Millennials and Gen Z in Australia

For over a century, the sight of a Salvation Army soldier—crisp uniform, blue epaulettes, and a heart devoted to "Heart to God, Hand to Man"—has been a familiar and stirring image in communities around the world. But look around today in the Western world, including Australia, and you'll notice something missing: the soldiers themselves.

While soldiership remains a cherished and vital part of The Salvation Army's identity, its prevalence has waned significantly among younger generations, particularly Millennials (Generation Y) and Generation Z. The question is: why?

Historically, soldiership was not just an affiliation to a local church or denomination, it was a movement. For the Builders and Baby Boomers, becoming a soldier was a clear, public declaration of Christian discipleship and social activism. It was about living out faith in tangible ways—helping the marginalised, standing against social ills, and aligning oneself with a mission bigger than the self. Which any member of The Salvation Army could easily get involved in.

Generation X, while more sceptical and individualistic, still maintained a strong core of committed soldiers, often influenced by a sense of duty and community inherited from their parents toward corps musical sections or as a means to pursue a higher calling to full-time ministry through officership. However, with the rise of Millennials and Gen Z, the landscape has dramatically shifted. Some key factors contribute to the sparseness of soldiership amongst younger people:

1. Institutional Distrust & Deconstruction

Millennials and Gen Z have grown up amidst scandals, global crises, and the erosion of trust in institutions, including the church. Their approach to faith is often more fluid, personal, and deconstructed. The formal structures of soldiership—uniforms, covenants, hierarchical systems—can feel restrictive, inauthentic, or irrelevant to those seeking a less institutionalised spirituality.

2. Commitment Aversion in an Unstable World

Long-term commitments can be daunting for generations facing economic instability, rising mental health challenges, and a rapidly changing world. The lifetime promises embedded in soldiership feel out of step with a culture that values flexibility and keeps its options open.

3. Changing Missional Priorities

While the younger generations are deeply passionate about justice, inclusivity, and social change, they often prefer grassroots activism, digital advocacy, and informal community movements. The Salvation Army's structured model of soldiership may not resonate with their preferred modes of engagement.

4. Aesthetic and Identity Disconnect

For Gen Y and Z, identity is fluid and often expressed through individuality rather than uniformity. The Army's uniforms, once a proud symbol of radical Christianity, can appear outdated or disconnected from contemporary expressions of faith.

According to the *Salvation Army Year Book 2024*, there has been a noticeable decline in soldiership numbers in Western territories. For instance, in the USA, the number of senior soldiers decreased from approximately 70,000 in 2000 to around 55,000 in 2023. Similarly, the UK and Ireland Territory reported a decline from 50,000 to 35,000 senior soldiers over the same period. These statistics highlight a broader trend of declining formal membership, particularly among younger demographics.

In Australia, the trend mirrors this global pattern; the overall decline in formal membership is evident. The *Annual Report 2024* of The Salvation Army Australia highlights a significant increase in community engagement and social services, yet it also implies challenges in maintaining traditional forms of membership and participation. (The Salvation Army Australia [link](#))

This raises a critical question: Is soldiership an outdated concept, or is it an under-communicated treasure?

For many in The Salvation Army, soldiership represents not legalism but liberation, that being a voluntary and joyful act of dedication to God's service. It offers clarity of mission, accountability, and a visible witness in a world hungry for authenticity. The challenge lies not in the essence of soldiership itself but how it is presented, taught, and embodied.

Reimagining Soldiership for the Future

If The Salvation Army wishes to inspire new generations of soldiers, it must grapple honestly with these generational dynamics. This doesn't mean diluting the call to commitment but rearticulating it in ways that resonate with today's seekers. This might involve:

- Framing soldiership as a **countercultural act of radical discipleship**, not mere tradition.
- Providing **pathways of flexible engagement** while maintaining the sacredness of covenant.
- Ensuring the **Army's prophetic voice** speaks courageously on issues that matter to Gen Y and Z—climate justice, racial reconciliation, gender equity, and mental health.
- **Elevating diverse voices** from these generations to help shape what soldiership looks like in practice.

Scripture underscores the importance of commitment and active faith. In Romans 12:1, Paul urges believers to "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." This aligns with the essence of soldiership: a holistic dedication to God's service.

Moreover, 1 Timothy 4:12 encourages young believers: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity." This verse serves as a reminder that age should not be a barrier to deep spiritual commitment and leadership.

The Army Needs Soldiers - Of All Generations

The Western world, including Australia, still needs The Salvation Army's unique witness. But the form that witness takes may need to evolve. Soldiership is not about nostalgia; it's about mission. The Gospel call to "save souls, grow saints, and serve suffering humanity" remains as urgent as ever.

In his book *You Lost Me*, David Kinnaman elaborates on the problem of generational decline in the wider church. He states, "Every person goes on a unique journey related to his or her faith and spirituality, and *every story matters*. The reasons young people drop out, as similar to each other they may seem, are very real and very personal to those who experience them. We in the Christian community need to bear this in mind." (p25). What this means is that we all need to be willing to have open dialogue about life, faith and mission with each other. Whether it be through small groups or one-on-one discipleship and mentoring within our own corps.

Perhaps the question is not "Why don't Millennials and Gen Z become soldiers?" but rather, "How are we inviting them into this sacred calling in a way that speaks their language, honours their values, and empowers their gifts?"

If we can answer that, we might just see a new generation of Salvation Army soldiers rise.

Note: The statistical data referenced is based on available reports from the Salvation Army Year Books and Annual Reports. For the most accurate and up-to-date figures, please refer to the official Salvation Army publications.

Be In Time

By Steve Bussey

*An Ancient and Urgent Call For Salvation Army Prophets to Serve the Present Age
Steve Bussey is with Sharon Bussey.*

BE IN TIME: AN ANCIENT AND URGENT CALL FOR SALVATION ARMY PROPHETS TO SERVE THE PRESENT AGE

1. A charge to keep I have,
a God to glorify,
a never-dying soul to save,
and fit it for the sky.

2. To serve the present age,
my calling to fulfill,
O may it all my pow'rs engage
to do my Master's will!

3. Arm me with watchful care
as in Thy sight to live,
and now Thy servant, Lord, prepare
a strict account to give!

4. Help me to watch and pray,
and still on Thee rely,
O let me not my trust betray,
but press to realms on high.
- Charles Wesley

“The prophets were men of the age, but they lived and wrought mightily for the Ages... They did not seek it. It was thrust upon them. God called them, and they went forward under divine constraint.”
- Samuel Logan Brengle

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR PROPHETS TODAY

In an age of cultural confusion, spiritual compromise, and institutional fatigue, The Salvation Army needs more than administrators, strategists, and performers. We need prophets - men and women who speak God's truth with clarity, courage, and compassion. Not FORTUNE-TELLERS obsessed with timelines, but FORTH-TELLERS who interpret the present through the lens of God's Word and call the people back to righteousness.

This past week, I have been thinking and meditating deeply about what it means to be a “prophet” in our current generation. There are many perspectives on this gift, some see this as being a spiritual futurist, predicting things like the return of Christ or the coming of the apocalypse. Others see it as a form of supernatural pastoral edification, speaking a specific message to a person as led by the Holy Spirit. These

differing perspectives have caused me to pause and probe deeper into what it means to be a prophet.

Speak. Live. Burn. Build. Be in time.

THE CALL TO BE A JEREMIAH

For years, I thought God had called Sharon and I to be like a Nehemiah, rebuilding and reinforcing walls. However, a couple of years ago after the Asbury Revival, God said something to us in our prayer times, that he was really calling us to be Jeremiahs.

Jeremiah? Who truly desires that mantle? Yet it is precisely this mantle that God places upon those willing to weep, warn, and witness.

Leadership lessons from Nehemiah abound, but where are the books on being buried in cisterns and watching Jerusalem fall?

And yet God has been teaching us what it means to be obedient to the calling He has placed on our lives. Here are some lessons learned thus far. And there is much more still to learn...

In 1 Corinthians 14:22b, Paul states that "Prophecy... is for the benefit of believers, not unbelievers."

LESSONS FROM BRENGLE AND THE ANCIENT PROPHETS

Samuel Logan Brengle, a Commissioner in The Salvation Army and a leading voice in the holiness movement, wrote profoundly on the prophetic life in his 1929 article

This article was written in the midst of the High Council crisis in The Salvation Army, a moment when a pastoral-prophetic voice was desperately needed. We stand at the threshold of a very similar moment nearly one hundred years later.

Brengle reminds us that the prophets were not primarily predictors of distant events. They were interpreters of their times, voices of divine truth in the midst of moral decay and religious pretense.

"Their value to me... has appeared to consist not in the light they throw upon generations yet unborn, but the light they throw upon my own generation."

Brengle's insight is prophetic in itself. In a world obsessed with speculation and spectacle, he calls us to DISCERNMENT and OBEDIENCE. The prophets were not entertainers or pundits. They were God's messengers, often lonely, misunderstood, and persecuted - but faithful.

To be obedient to a calling to be prophetic requires a willingness to check your ego at the door, toughen up your skin, and tenderize your heart! Commissioner Brengle, you have my attention!

The biblical prophets endured profound suffering and hardship as they remained faithful to their divine calling. Their lives were marked by a selfless sacrifice. The painful reality of rejection and isolation accompanied that call.

- Jeremiah was mocked, imprisoned, and thrown into a cistern (Jeremiah 38:6). He is known as the “weeping prophet” because of his deep sorrow over the people's sin and their refusal to repent.
- Isaiah was reportedly sawn in two (Hebrews 11:37, based on tradition).
- Ezekiel was commanded not to mourn the death of his wife as a prophetic sign (Ezekiel 24:15–18).

Not exactly a prestigious ticker tape parade for the prophets! I am not sure who would want to be a prophet based upon the “lived experience” of these defenders of the faith...

Brengle writes: “It was not a joyous, rose-strewn path the prophets trod. It was perilous, lonely, blood-stained...”

Loneliness and misunderstanding was commonplace. Many prophets were misunderstood by their own people, even by those closest to them. Think about it:

- Elijah fled into the wilderness, feeling utterly alone (1 Kings 19:10).
- Micah lamented that he was surrounded by deceit and betrayal (Micah 7:5–6).

Prophets often felt inadequate or afraid, yet obeyed regardless of their natural reluctance. Why? Because they were under divine compulsion. They were determined to “go in the strength of the Lord to work he appoints them to do.”

- Jeremiah protested, “I am only a child,” but God assured him, “Do not be afraid... I am with you” (Jeremiah 1:6–8).
- Jonah fled from God's call, only to be redirected through divine intervention (Jonah 1–3).

Brengle realized that prophets demonstrated the privilege of sanctification through faithful obedience DESPITE the heaviness of the mantle of sacrificial discipleship. “They did not seek it. It was thrust upon them. God called them, and they went forward under divine constraint.”

This wasn't easy street. It was most certainly the unpopular narrow road of holiness. Prophets had to deliver harsh truths while also proclaiming hope and restoration.

- Isaiah declared both “Woe to you” and “Comfort, comfort my people” (Isaiah 5; 40).
- Jeremiah wept over Jerusalem but also spoke of God's “everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3).

These ancient prophets were not political operatives or cultural commentators. They were holy voices, shaped by Scripture, prayer, and suffering.

Brengle's reflections from his study of these prophets of old is uncannily prophetic and offers wise counsel for how Salvationists today might be “forthtelling” in our own present generation.

Speak. Live. Burn. Build. Be in time.

FOUR QUALITIES OF PROPHETIC VOICES

Let's take a look at four critical qualities of prophets:

1. A PROPHET IS SATURATED WITH SCRIPTURE

Brengle believed and demonstrated in his life that a prophet is DEEPLY rooted in the divine rule of Holy Scripture. Any "word from the Lord" must be anchored deeply in a rich, inductive understanding of the whole counsel of God. THIS provides the guardrails for being sanctified in the truth (John 17:17).

Brengle was immersed in the truth: "For about sixty years I have been reading the Bible... and never without blessing."

Prophetic clarity begins with biblical saturation. We must read not to master the text, but to be mastered by it. As he says elsewhere, to not get through Scripture, but rather get Scripture through you!

2 Timothy 3:16-17 reminds us that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..."

I spoke online with a Nazarene friend who was concerned that sharing a "word from the Lord" is to potentially twist Scripture and be used by the Devil! That IS true. It's soberingly true!! This is why any "word from the Lord" must be FIRMLY anchored in the "Word of God."

So a person called to fulfill a prophetic role must:

- Read the Bible daily, not just devotionally but formationally.
- Study the prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah - not for prediction, but for patterns of divine truth-telling.
- Let Scripture shape your worldview, your ethics, and your voice.

2. A PROPHET EMBRACES THE COST OF TRUTH

Brengle cautions his writers that "It was not a joyous, rose-strewn path the prophets trod. It was perilous, lonely, blood-stained..."

Prophets are not popular. They confront entrenched sin, challenge power, and suffer for righteousness. But they are sustained by God's presence. Prophetic voices are often misunderstood, resisted, or marginalized.

Those whom God has called to be prophets must accept that faithfulness may cost you influence, comfort, or position. Trust that God is your defender and sustainer.

Brigadier Cliff Siple, one of the great evangelists of the USA Eastern Territory was noted as saying, "you worry about your character. Let God worry about your reputation."

How does a person do this? Whilst many of us might claim that “sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me,” let’s be real: they often DO hurt... and sometimes with deeper wounds than any stick or stone!

Jesus Himself reminds us in Matthew 5:11-12:

“God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ANCIENT PROPHETS WERE PERSECUTED IN THE SAME WAY.”

And Jesus says that when this happens, we are BLESSED. The KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS THEIRS (v.10).

So how can we endure such fiery trials? By cultivating a life focused on INTIMACY WITH GOD through LISTENING in prayer and by the PURSUIT OF THE PRIVILEGE OF HOLINESS! A perfectly submitted heart is one that will be filled with perfect love!

Brenge reminds us that these ancient prophets “were surrendered men, selfless men, devoted as soldiers unto death...”

And he finds comfort in the great cloud of prophetic witnesses that spur him on in his own race:

“I am a lonely man, and yet I am not lonely. With my open Bible I live with prophets, priests, and kings; I walk and hold communion with apostles, saints and martyrs, and with Jesus, and mine eyes see the King in His beauty and the land that is afar off.”

Prophetic authority flows from intimacy with God, not charisma or credentials. Therefore those who are called to be prophets must practice personal holiness and corporate intercession.

Seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit - not just for power, but for purity and discernment. This is key to being filled with the full measure of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

3. A PROPHET SPEAKS TO THE PRESENT AGE

Brenge says, “Their prophecies are meant to enable me to understand the present... to interpret the will and ways of God to the men of my own generation.”

We must resist escapism and engage the real spiritual and social crises of our time. Prophetic ministry is about truth-telling NOW, not date-setting for later.

This requires listening deeply to the present context. It requires looking to the past (hindsight) and contrasting this with the present to determine points of continuity and discontinuity in the people of God to determine their alignment to His holy standards (insight) and recognizing where derailment and disaster will come in the future if there is not repentance and realignment (foresight).

These three dimensions - hindsight, insight, and foresight - are sanctified and fueled by the gracious prophetic gift of the Holy Spirit, giving us GOD'S SIGHT for this generation!

Numbers 12:6 says, "When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams."

Jeremiah 1:9 tells of his calling: "Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'I have put my words in your mouth.'"

2 Peter 1:20–21 reminds us, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation... but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

This New Testament reflection affirms the divine origin and Spirit-led nature of prophetic revelation. It reminds us also that this gift is not just for the Old and New Testament days, but a critical function of the church in this present day.

INTERLUDE: TESTING THE PROPHETIC

But ANY word must be TESTED and discerned to be from God.

1 John 4:1 admonishes the church, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

Jesus warned in Matthew 7:15–20, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them."

Deuteronomy 13:1–3 states, "If a prophet... announces a sign or wonder... and it takes place, but they say, 'Let us follow other gods,'... you must not listen to them."

So we must test whether the message aligns with Christ's truth, Scripture, and godly fruit. Discernment is essential. Not every spiritual message is from God.

True prophets:

- Do not seek personal glory.
- Submit to spiritual authority and community discernment.
- Speak with conviction and compassion, not manipulation or fear.

Once this has been tested and validated and when God's message is clear, a prophet must not err in speaking this word to the present generation. Isaiah 58:1 says, "Declare to my people their rebellion..."

In today's world in my beloved denomination, The Salvation Army that I believe God wants to preserve, this means:

- Understanding the spiritual, social, and organizational challenges facing The Salvation Army today.

- Listening to marginalized voices, frontline officers, youth, and those outside the movement.
- Asking: Where is God's heart breaking? Where is truth being compromised?

Ezekiel speaks powerfully about the responsibility of the prophet in Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33, where God appoints him as a watchman for the house of Israel. These passages outline two key prophetic failures:

A. If the Prophet Fails to Speak (Ezekiel 3:17–18; 33:7–9):

“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked person, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn them... that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood.”

Implications:

- If a prophet receives a word from God but fails to deliver it, the consequences fall on both the sinner and the prophet.
- The prophet becomes morally and spiritually accountable for the silence.

B. If the Prophet Speaks Beyond What God Has Said (Ezekiel 13:1–7):

“Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!... They say, ‘The Lord declares,’ when the Lord has not sent them; yet they expect their words to be fulfilled.”

Implications:

- Prophets who speak presumptuously, claiming divine authority for their own ideas or agendas, are condemned.
- God calls this lying divination - a serious offense that misleads the people and dishonors His name.

So speaking truth to the present isn't something to be taken lightly! Just look to Moses who disobeyed God by getting frustrated with Israel and striking the rock in anger... he never entered the promised land (at least the temporal one!).

To summarize this third lesson in a simple formula:

- Silence when God speaks = disobedience and shared guilt.
 - Speaking when God has not spoken = false prophecy and divine judgment.
 - Faithful forthtelling = obedience, even when unpopular or dangerous.
- Speak. Live. Burn. Build. Be in time.

4. A PROPHET COMBINES FIRE WITH TENDERNESS

True prophets are not harsh. They are holy. Their words burn with conviction and bleed with compassion. Prophets had to deliver harsh truths while also proclaiming hope and restoration.

Prophets carried the grief of God over His people's sin.

- Hosea was commanded to marry a woman who would be unfaithful, symbolizing Israel's spiritual adultery (Hosea 1).

- Habakkuk wrestled with God over the triumph of injustice and cried out for revival (Habakkuk 1–3).

Brengle saw prophets as embodying and demonstrating the essence of holy love by holding grace and truth, mercy and judgment in balance:

“But though they flamed like fire heated sevenfold against sin, they had hearts as tender as a little child, and they wept for sinners, and breathed out promises as gentle as light falling on the eyes of sleeping babes. It was God, the Holy One, in these devoted, yielded men that flamed against iniquity, that sobbed and wept over the desolations sin wrought, and gave promises that still fall into our hearts with Heaven's own benediction.”

Brengle reminds us of the critical role of the pastoral in the prophetic. Without this check and balance, a prophet could be more destructive than productive in God's work in the church and the world.

A CALL TO FUTURE SALVATIONIST PROPHETS

The Salvation Army was born in prophetic fire. William and Catherine Booth did not merely organize - they proclaimed. They confronted sin, comforted the broken, and called the church to revival. They led so many into the joy of full salvation by proclaiming the justifying blood of Jesus and the sanctifying fire of the Holy Spirit! That legacy must be rekindled. That is our birthright. That is the rock on which we stand. To step away from it is to stand on sinking sand...

Brengle's teaching on Ancient Prophets so many years ago still rings fresh in our present day:

“Have we problems in The Salvation Army? Are we confronted by vice and sin in our city? Is evil triumphant and injustice and wickedness entrenched in high places in the State? We shall find light on every problem in the messages of the prophets, and we shall find help and strength in company with them, for they walked with God and lived and spoke and suffered and died for Him.”

In a time of spiritual drift, cultural compromise, and institutional weariness, the Spirit of God is stirring hearts again. He is calling forth prophets - not fortune-tellers, but forthtellers - who will speak truth with courage, compassion, and clarity.

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion...” (Isaiah 58:1).

These prophets will not be defined by titles or positions, but by holy fire and faithful obedience. They will walk in the footsteps of Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos, and Micah - men and women who stood alone, wept deeply, and spoke boldly.

“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” (Jeremiah 31:3).

“The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort” (1 Corinthians 14:3).

They will speak not to entertain, but to enliven. Not to condemn, but to call. Not to divide, but to discern. Not to break down, but to build up.

They will be watchmen and watchwomen on the walls, burdened with the Word of the Lord, refusing to be silent when truth is at stake.

They will be immersed in Scripture, shaped by prayer, and surrendered to the Spirit. Their lives will be marked by holiness, humility, and hope.

They will call The Salvation Army back to its roots - not just its history, but its holy identity as a revival movement, a people forged in blood and fire.

Speak. Live. Burn. Build. Be in time.

FINAL EXHORTATION: BE IN TIME

To those who feel the stirring call to be prophets ready to serve the present age:
If your heart burns with holy discontent...
If you see the cracks in the walls and long for renewal...
If you weep over sin and dream of revival...
If you feel the Spirit whispering, "Speak..."
Then YOU may be one of the prophets God is raising up.

Do not wait for permission.
Do not fear rejection.
Do not shrink from the cost.
Speak. Live. Burn. Build.

Be in time.
The Salvation Army needs your voice.
The Kingdom of God needs your witness.
The world needs your fire.

Let us pray with Habakkuk: "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years... remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2).

Be in Time (Salvation Army Songs, 1911)

1. The voice of wisdom cries, Be in time!
To give up every sin,
In earnest now begin,
The night will soon set in,
Be in time.

2. Ye aged sinners, hear, Be in time;
Your sands are running fast,
Your die will soon be cast,
Be in time.

3. Though late, ye may return, Be in time;
Though late, ye may return,
While the lamp holds out to burn,
Be in time.

4. Ye who are young in years, Be in time:
Ye say you're in your bloom,
But mind your day will come,
Be in time.

5. Backslider dost thou hear? Be in time;
Thy sinful course forsake,
Thy deathless soul's at stake,
Be in time.

6. Oh should the door be shut When you come,
Should God in thunder say
"Depart from Me away"
'Twill be vain to pray; BE IN TIME!

"Lord, raise up prophets in our ranks - men and women of fire and tenderness, saturated in Scripture, surrendered to Your Spirit, and faithful to Your call. May we serve the present age with holy boldness. Amen."

Contend

By Steve Bussey

Last night at the conclusion of our meeting at LEAD, Bishop Carolyn Moore shared a word from the Lord she believed God has for The Salvation Army. The word was: "CONTEND."

To contend for the faith.

To contend for the faithfulness of The Salvation Army.

To contend for the purpose God raised up our beloved movement.

As I ruminate on this prophetic challenge, this is what the Lord is saying to me:

In an age of spiritual drift and cultural compromise, the call to contend for the Church is more urgent than ever. But this is not a call to quarrel - it is a summons to agonize, to strive, and to suffer in love for the Bride of Christ to remain faithful, radiant, and rooted in the holy love of God.

The New Testament word for "contend" is ἀγωνίζομαι (agonizomai) - to struggle, strive, or fight. It evokes the image of an athlete in the arena or a soldier in battle.

Jude exhorts believers to:

"Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 1:3)

This is not passive resistance. It is active, sacrificial engagement - a holy agony for the Church to remain true to her calling.

Paul echoes this in Colossians 1:29:

"To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me."

And again in Galatians 4:19:

"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..."

To contend is to labor in love, to agonize in prayer, and to strive in holiness for the Church to be what God has called her to be.

The Salvation Army was born in the crucible of this kind of contending. It was not a movement of comfort, but of aggressive Christianity - a militant mercy that refused to let the Church sleep while the world perished.

We are made for war. We are put into this world to fight. We are called to contend, not to be content.

A Spirit-filled Church sanctified in the truth will not be a social club, but a battalion of holiness, called and committed to storm the gates of hell with the fire of divine love.

Sadly, much of the church today has lost her power because she has lost her purity. She has ceased to contend for the faith and has become content with formality.

To contend for the body of Christ then is to refuse spiritual apathy, to reject compromise, and to wrestle in prayer and proclamation for the Church to be holy, loving, and alive.

To contend as The Salvation Army is to:

- Agonize in prayer for revival
- Strive in holiness for purity
- Fight in love for the lost
- Labor in truth for the Church

Samuel Logan Brengle teaches about contending in the fight for faith in his "Helps to Holiness." He states:

"Many people say they are fighting the devil, who do not know what fighting the devil means. It is a fight of faith, in which the soul takes hold of the promise of God, and holds on to it, and believes it, and declares it to be true in spite of all the devil's lies, in spite of all circumstances and feelings to the contrary, and in which it obeys God, whether God seems to be fulfilling the promise or not. When a soul gets to the point where he will do this, and will hold fast the profession of his faith without wavering, he will soon get out of the fogs and mists and twilight of doubt and uncertainty into the broad day of perfect assurance. Glory to God!"

Brengle describes a fight of faith that is:

- SPIRITUAL: Not against flesh and blood, but against lies, doubts, and spiritual darkness (cf. Ephesians 6:12).
- PERSISTENT: Holding fast to God's promises even when circumstances and feelings contradict them.
- OBEDIENT: Acting in faith regardless of visible outcomes.

This is the essence of ἀγωνίζομαι (agonizomai) - to strive, struggle, and wrestle in faith. It's not a fight of fists, but of faithfulness. It's the kind of contending that refuses to let go of God's truth, even in the fog of spiritual warfare.

In an age where the Church is often tempted to compromise - whether through cultural accommodation, theological dilution, or spiritual apathy - Brengle's words are a clarion call to Salvationists:

1. CONTEND IN FAITH

- Refuse to be swayed by popular opinion or emotional instability.
- Declare the promises of God as true, even when they seem delayed or denied.

2. CONTEND IN HOLINESS

- Live lives of purity and obedience, not just belief.
- Let your life be a testimony that God's Word is trustworthy and transformative.

3. CONTEND IN LOVE

- Fight not with bitterness or pride, but with the burning love of Christ.
- Let your agony for the Church be rooted in compassion, not condemnation.

4. CONTEND IN COMMUNITY

- Stand together with fellow believers who are committed to truth and holiness.
- Encourage one another to hold fast without wavering (Hebrews 10:23).

O God, raise up a generation of Salvationists who will contend - not with swords, but with surrender; not with noise, but with nearness; not with compromise, but with consecration. May we fight the good fight of faith until the Church shines again with the light of Your holy love.

Four Catalysts for Reviving Movements

By Steve Bussey

Every great revival and reform in history shares a common DNA. It doesn't begin with committees or clever branding - it begins with consecrated hearts and holy fire.

If we want to see The Salvation Army (or any movement) rediscover its original power, we must return to these four essential catalytic principles:

1. Consecrated leaders.
2. Clarified doctrine.
3. Contagious practices.
4. Catalytic structures.

Let's explore why each of these catalysts are essential:

1. CONSECRATED LEADERS

Revival never starts with structures; it starts with surrendered lives. Leaders who are fully yielded to God - heart, mind, and mission - become living altars where the fire falls. Consecration is costly, but without it, all strategy is hollow.

No programs or policy reform alone will produce revival - it always begins with people fully surrendered to God. Structures can organize a movement, but only consecrated hearts ignite it.

A consecrated leader is more than competent; they are consumed by holy love, willing to lay down ambition, comfort, and reputation for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Consecration might sound nice, but it is costly. It demands:

- Full surrender of self - not partial obedience, but absolute availability.
- Purity of motive - serving for God's glory, not personal advancement.
- Courage to obey - even when obedience means swimming against institutional currents.

Such leaders become living altars where the fire of the Holy Spirit falls. Their lives radiate holiness and mission, creating a gravitational pull that awakens others. Without this, all strategy is hollow - because revival is not engineered; it is birthed through yielded vessels.

History confirms this: Wesley, Booth, Brengle, and countless others were not perfect, but they were consecrated. And through them, God shook nations.

If we long for a new awakening, we must start here: leaders on their knees, hearts ablaze, lives fully surrendered.

2. CLARIFIED DOCTRINE

Movements drift when their message blurs. We need a clear, compelling theology that anchors us in Scripture and our Wesleyan-Salvationist roots: holiness of heart

and life, the urgency of salvation, and the inseparability of evangelism and mercy. Doctrine isn't dry - it's the fuel for devotion and mission.

We lose their power when our message becomes vague. Drift begins quietly - when conviction gives way to convenience, and the core truths that once fueled passion are diluted by cultural trends or institutional pragmatism.

Revival requires a return to clarity: a theology that is biblical, compelling, and actionable.

For The Salvation Army and other Wesleyan - rooted movements, this means:

- Abandoning popular gospels driven by a theology that is so tailored to accommodate our 'modern sensibilities' that they become syncretic contradictions that cut the cords with the historic faith and implode global unity.
- Returning to an emphasis on holiness of heart and life - not as an abstract ideal, but as a lived reality through the Spirit's sanctifying power.
- Embracing the urgency of salvation - a burning conviction that eternity matters and that Christ's redeeming grace is for all.
- The inseparability of evangelism and mercy - saving souls and serving suffering humanity as one gospel witness.

When truth is clear, worship deepens, courage rises, and mission accelerates. Without clarity, even the most innovative strategies collapse under the weight of ambiguity.

History proves this and can be recovered in seminal documents that provide the breadcrumbs to find our way home:

Rediscovering the authoritative Word of God, reading Wesley, the Booths and other great holiness and Salvationist writings, seriously studying our Articles of War, digging deep into our classic Wesleyan-rooted Handbook of Doctrine (I recommend pre-1969), examining historic Orders and Regulations to discover strategic practices and disciplines - these critical tools didn't just inform the minds of early Salvationists; they ignited a worldwide holiness movement!

If we long for revival, we must recover a theology that is unashamedly biblical, radically holy, and relentlessly missional.

3. CONTAGIOUS PRACTICES

Revival doesn't spread through mere theory - it spreads through habits that embody the gospel. Any exploration of the past without a vision for the future is a sad form of nostalgic (and archaic) navel gazing! Hindsight from the past must provide insight into our present state to cultivate foresight for the future!

These practices are not optional extras; they are the rhythms that make holiness visible and mission tangible. Our history shows us what works when the Spirit moves:

3A. KNEE DRILLS: Prayer That Shakes Heaven

Prayer is the engine of revival. Not perfunctory prayers, but agonizing intercession that storms the mercy seat and refuses to let go until heaven answers. These gatherings are not filler - they are fire. When God's people pray with desperation and faith, movements awaken. If we cannot make time for prevailing, toiling prayer we cannot expect revival power from on high.

3B. COMPANY MEETINGS: Bands and Classes That Transform

Wesleyan-style bands and classes were the backbone of early Methodism - and they remain vital. These are not casual small groups; they are covenant communities where believers confess, learn, and obey. Scripture is studied not for information but for transformation. Leaders ask hard questions, and members take concrete steps toward holiness and mission.

In the early Army, these company meetings (bands) and soldier's meetings (classes) were mobilized through brigades, boot camps that moved recruits from the classroom to soldiers and officers united in action in the mission field.

Imagine what would happen were we to once again operate with increased clarity, intentionality, accountability, and speed? We would storm the forts of darkness - pulling down the devil's kingdom wherever he holds dominion and raise the glorious standard of the blood of Jesus and the fire of the Holy Spirit in total victory in this generation!

3C. OPEN AIR: Bold Public Witness

Revival is never ashamed of the gospel. Open-air meetings - whether on a street corner, in a park, or online - declare Jesus unapologetically. This is not about spectacle; it's about presence.

When believers step into public spaces with courage and clarity, the gospel breaks out of the building and into the world. We cannot be ashamed of the gospel - it is the power of God for salvation. The world needs it, and this alone will set it right!

3D. LEAGUES OF MERCY: Love in Action

Acts of mercy are not charity projects - they are apologetic acts that validate the gospel. When we roll up our sleeves to serve the poor, visit the lonely, and fight injustice, we demonstrate that salvation is not theoretical - it is a practical pathway of hope for the whosoever. These works must be Spirit-driven, not functionally atheistic, so that every act whispers: "Jesus loves you, and His kingdom is near."

Contagious practices create a culture of holiness and mission. Such practices make holiness visible and mission tangible.

They turn doctrine into devotion, and devotion into action. They are simple, reproducible, and Spirit-filled - and when multiplied, they become the scaffolding for revival.

4. CATALYTIC STRUCTURES

Fire needs a fireplace. Passion without structure burns out; structure without passion freezes over. Revival thrives when Spirit-led frameworks channel energy without quenching it. These structures must be simple, scalable, and sanctified - designed to accelerate obedience, not bureaucracy.

What is needed is not institutional choke points; but rather missional scaffolding that is flexible enough to adapt, strong enough to sustain growth, but true to the never - changing essentials that define our identity, purpose, doctrine, spirit, and discipline.

Headquarters exists not to control but to serve the frontlines. Its role is to resource, replicate, and remove barriers. When catalytic structures are in place, the Army moves from power-grabbing self-service to sanctified symmetry - every level aligned for one purpose: the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

Why does this matter? Why is it necessary? Without catalytic structures, revival fizzles into chaos or calcifies into bureaucracy. With them, consecrated leaders, clarified doctrine, and contagious practices can scale into a Spirit-driven movement that transforms nations.

But this is not just true at headquarters, but in every frontline location. Why must these principles be applied everywhere?

Revival cannot be sustained if it is confined to the top of an organization. Headquarters may set tone and provide resources, but the frontline is where the mission lives and breathes. If catalytic structures - those simple, Spirit-led frameworks that multiply disciples and mobilize mission - exist only at HQ, the movement becomes top-heavy and fragile.

4A. Revival Must Be Localized:

Corps, outposts, and community ministries are the places where souls are saved and lives transformed. Without structures that enable prayer, discipleship, witness, and mercy at this level, revival stalls.

4B. The Scalability of Revival Depends on Replication:

A single center cannot carry a global movement. Structures must be reproducible so every unit can implement them with minimal resources.

4C. A Culture of Revival is Shaped from the Ground Up:

When frontline units embody holiness and a passion for revival, the entire movement shifts from maintenance to mobilization.

Final thoughts:

Did you know that the first name of The Salvation Army (before we were called the Christian Mission) was that we were the "Revival Society?" Maybe it's time to rediscover the seed idea!

History leaves no doubt: when leaders are consecrated, doctrine is clarified, practices are contagious, and structures are catalytic, movements awaken. This is how God has worked before - and how He will work again. But this is not automatic. It demands courage, sacrifice, and holy resolve.

We stand at a crossroads. Will we settle for maintenance, or will we contend for awakening? Will we cling to comfort, or will we embrace consecration? Revival will not come through clever programs or polished branding. It will come through surrendered leaders, clear truth, embodied practices, and Spirit-led frameworks - in every corps, every division, every headquarters.

Start where you are.

- Consecrate yourself afresh - be the altar where the fire falls.
- Clarify the message - teach and live the gospel of holiness and mission.
- Practice the gospel - pray, disciple, witness, and serve until it becomes contagious.
- Build catalytic structures - simple systems that multiply obedience and mobilize mission.

These are not optional extras; they are the scaffolding for revival. When multiplied, they create a culture where holiness is visible, mission is tangible, and the Spirit moves freely.

The time is now. The call is clear. Will you rise to it?

New Songs For Our First Love

By Phil Laeger

(Thoughts on Worship Leadership & Songwriting in The Salvation Army)

A friend recently asked me, "Phil, what if The Salvation Army just isn't made to excel in worship leading and worship songwriting? What if that's just not our thing as a denomination?" In essence, what he was asking was whether I felt like I was wasting my time with my plea over the years for the Army to devote more energy to training in these areas.

At first, I'll admit I was a little hurt by the question. But upon reflection, I think it's a fair one. And so I've been wrestling to find an answer, and here's where I've landed...

We do so many good things as an organization and denomination. We serve people well. We do disaster work brilliantly. We rehabilitate men and women well. We do camping well. All of these good works spring from our inception as an Army of God unleashed upon the world as a weapon against the enemy and the powers of darkness. In essence, to win the world.

But to win the world...for Jesus. Through Jesus. In His name and in His power, through the Holy Spirit. If we lose that, then even our best good works risk becoming disconnected from their eternal meaning. They risk becoming band-aids on mortal wounds. Jesus is the reason. His kingdom. His return. His rule and reign. Salvation in and through Him. We're an Army - but we are first and foremost a Salvation Army.

When we first began, songs "flew off the shelves" so to speak. We could not contain our effervescence and excitement about Jesus - who He is, what He can do, what He has done, and what He will do. We were in love with Him, and we spent our lives and our songs in service to Him in the world.

In some places, we have lost much of that passion. I know there are still faithful voices and vibrant worship happening across the globe, but in many contexts we've grown quiet, distracted, or too dependent on outside affirmation. Yet the Lord has something so much richer for us.

I have tried to leave The Salvation Army many times. Believe me, I've sought satisfaction in serving the Lord through other means, in other places. But He keeps bringing me back. And I've come to believe that one of the reasons is so that I might - however imperfectly - remind us not to silence our reckless and undying passion for Jesus and His Word. The Army was built upon abandonment to Him fully - in my mind's eye, I see the young man kneeling and proclaiming,

"God shall have all there is of William Booth."

That same holy abandonment to Jesus and worship of Him in song and service is the cornerstone of who we are. We need new songs that remind us of this - not merely resting on the nostalgia of past moments, but living fully in the here and now for Him, offering all of our creative efforts to this end.

If we stop making *new* music for Him - not simply brass and vocal arrangements of old songs - it could be a symptom of a deeper heart-sickness. That's why I will keep advocating for worship leadership training and worship songwriting development, so that we can better steward our people into a deeper service flowing from a heart of love for Him.

We need greater investment in these areas - not just in musicianship, but in equipping leaders who can shepherd congregations in worship with humility and faithfulness. Some good work is already happening, but we need more. And I know there are many of you who share this passion. If that's you, I encourage you to make your voice heard. Send a message to your leaders. Let them know that you long to see your people equipped and trained in this vital area. For Jesus and for the sake of the world.

My Father's Business

By Phil Laeger

Entering the New Year with 12-year-old Jesus

It's the week between Christmas and the New Year. As it normally does, the Church has been reading the story of Jesus' birth all Advent season, which I love.

However, there's one story from the gospel of Luke that has fascinated me for years. It's the story of Jesus as a twelve-year-old boy in the Temple, confounding the teachers and upsetting His earthly parents. We don't spend a lot of time thinking about this particular story in the Church. Advent passes and we're gearing up for Good Friday and Easter, which are just down the road.

But let's stop for a second and think about pre-teen Jesus and how His words and actions shape everything to come. I think we will see an encouraging and fruitful example for us as we head into this new season.

When we think of Jesus referring to God as His Father, our minds usually turn to the book of John. John's Gospel is replete with accounts of Jesus dialoguing with religious leaders of His day. It is clear in these accounts that His understanding of His mission and purpose in life is very different from their understanding of theirs. Not only does John's gospel begin with a reference to God being Jesus' Father (1:18), but throughout the book, Jesus repeatedly refers to His relationship to His heavenly Father (see John 2:16, 3:16, 5:16-47, 6:32ff, 8:19-54, 10:15-38, 11:41, 12:26-50, and pretty much the entire chapters of 14-17).

Jesus' identity is rooted in His relationship with *the Father* - that is, God, *His Father*, the God of Israel. He repeatedly affirms to both His disciples and the Jewish leaders that everything they see Him doing springs from obedience to what He has seen and heard *His Father* saying and doing, and what *His Father* has commanded Him to do.

The religious leaders are, on the other hand, by and large bound in adherence to rules and tradition. They have searched the Scriptures diligently looking for life (John 5:39) but would not come to Jesus for true life.

Now, I think that it is too simplistic of a dichotomy to say that Jesus was about relationship and the Pharisees were about rules. We have accounts of some amazing religious leaders (yes, even Pharisees) in Jesus' day. But for most of them, in their pursuit of God, they had centered their own performance instead of God's goodness.

Obedience, yes, but an obedience that often seemed devoid of a dynamic relationship with the Maker and Savior of Israel (see Jesus' prodigal son parable for analogy). These leaders may have operated out of a desire for faithfulness to Torah and tradition, but Jesus knew that the Torah was meant to be a reflection of relationship with and obedience to a Person. That Person, He claimed, was His Father.

This was how Jesus understood His mission and purpose on earth: a directive for living and existing that flowed directly out of that singular relationship.



My eldest son exactly a millennium ago (used by permission and with his consent!)

But it isn't just in John's gospel that we see this Abba-centered perspective/narrative. All four gospels include accounts of Jesus' reference to God as His Father (Matthew 10:32, 11:27, 12:50, 15:13; Mark 14:36; Luke 10:21-22, 22:29, 22:42, 23:46).

Luke records that Jesus was aware of His identity (and therefore His purpose and mission) from a very early age. In fact, the very first words we hear Jesus speak are as a 12-year old boy, when He had gone missing from His parents. Finding Him after what must have been an emotionally taxing 3-day search by her and Joseph, Mary asks why Jesus has done this to them. His reply,

Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?

(Luke 2:49, NKJV)

To His earthly parents, it must have seemed a selfish (or at least careless) act. At the very least, His obedience greatly inconvenienced them.

Indeed, obedience is costly. Not just for us, but for those around us. And yet, it is worth us counting the cost as we look back on the year we've just lived and look forward to the year ahead.

What would it mean for you and I to be 100% completely about our Father's business going into 2026? To answer this question for myself (and perhaps you, since you're reading this), I think it may be helpful to break down the thought experiment into its component parts:

1. *God is our Father.*
2. *Our Father is a good Father.*
3. *Our Father's business is a good business.*
4. *Our Father's business is relational.*

1. God is our Father

Having put our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior of our lives, we hear His words to us as to Mary on Resurrection morning, the risen Jesus reassuring her and commissioning her, "Go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father

and your Father, to my God and your God.” (John 20:17, NLT). Let us not lose sight of His Fatherhood of us in this coming year.

2. Our Father is a good Father

Knowing that God is our good Father means that we can trust that *whatever He is calling us to is in our own interests, even when it is hard to see that*. Jesus' Father is our Father. He is our heavenly older Brother. He knows God better than we do. So we can trust Him that our Father is not going to give us a stone or serpent when we've asked for bread and fish. (Matthew 7:9-11)

3. Our Father's business is a good business

The business of the kingdom of heaven is a good one. Jesus has come to give us life and life abundantly (John 10:10). So anything He commissions us to do is going to help many people! Even sacrificial service is going to serve both us and everyone else in the end - we just have to keep our eyes on Jesus, "For the sake of the joy that lay before Him, He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken His seat at the right of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2, NASB)

4. Our Father's business is relational

Most importantly (and I have to confess this is sometimes the hardest one for me): God is a God of relationships - of heavenly and eternal relationships. From creation, from the very first laws of Torah, through the prophets and kings of old, to Jesus and His Church, the fundamental principle is and has always been one of *relational priority*.

Relational priority is foundational because it springs from the very essence of who God is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect community as demonstrated time and again throughout Scripture. Triune from everlasting to everlasting. Spirit hovering, Father speaking through the Word/Son in creation and from that point forward. Every patriarch chosen, every prophet called, every judge raised up, every king anointed - all relational. Not transactional but relational.

Going back again to Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, we see that Jesus is aiming at those of us in our Father's house who have become transactional in our approach to Him and His riches. We have become like embittered hired servants instead of thankful children. How He longs for that partnership and for His children to bask in the enjoyment of all of the blessings of His house.

But we must again make communion and community with Him the cornerstone of all we do. Jesus knew this from a very early age and never strayed from it. He called us to it again and again. When the disciples tried to prevent the little children from coming to Him, He rebuked them, knowing that this Father-child relationship was the very basis of the kingdom of heaven, of everything He had set about to do on earth as a result of His Father's command and example.

So, this year, let us truly be about our Father's business. Which will mean spending time in our Father's presence. Which will mean thriving and flourishing for our souls and our communities and those we serve in Jesus' name. Make it so, Lord. Help us to be about our Father's business in the year ahead.

I'll leave you with the lyrics from a song I just finished production on, releasing early next year. It's all about being about our Father's business...

Until He Comes

*They're watching the markets
They're building their barns
They don't know that tomorrow
Their time will be done
There will be an accounting
The bill will come due
And have we been faithful
With the work left to do?*

*The harvest is great, but the workers are late
The harvest is great
But the workers have got other things to do
Other things to do*

*Lord, I look around me
This world has lost its appeal
I'm living for glory
Oh, I want what is real
I wanna tell everybody
About the love that I've found
Your Church should be getting ready
But when I look around*

*The harvest is great, but the workers are late
The harvest is great
But the workers have got other things to do
Other things to do*

*So let the dead bury their own
My eyes are on a heavenly home
Let the dead bury their own
My eyes are on a heavenly home*

*A pure Bride, a true Church
You're worth it all, You're worth it all, Lord
Your promise is not in vain
Your word remains the same
So, let's stop playing games*

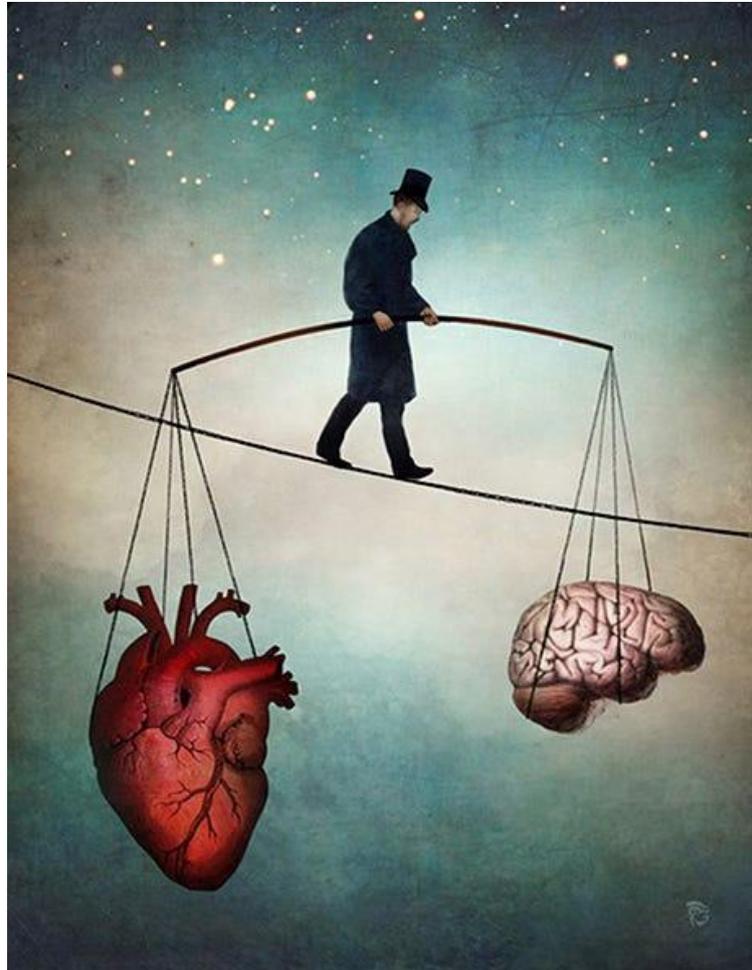
*I wanna be about my Father's business
I wanna be about my Father's business
I wanna be about my Father's business
Until He comes, until He comes*

*I wanna be about my Father's business
I wanna be about my Father's business
I wanna be about my Father's business
Until He comes, until He comes
Oh, until He comes
Until You come*

Let The Heads Roll

By Danielle Strickland

*Toppling cherished theologies, inherited traditions, reputations, comforts,
power and ego.*



In our family, there's a story that resurfaces every so often, usually when something fragile breaks. Recently, during home group at my house, a ball flew through the room and knocked over one of the wise men in my nativity set. His head snapped clean off.

My mother was visiting. She didn't love it.

She slipped instantly into an old, familiar register - outrage layered with shame - and suddenly we were both standing inside a memory that has followed our family for decades.

I was seven or eight. We were moving (again), driving across Canada, collapsing into a hotel room for the night. At the last moment, my mom had been given a farewell gift by a dear friend: a beautiful ceramic figurine. It mattered to her. It represented being seen. Remembered. Loved. She carefully placed it on the dresser, away from danger.

But kids trapped all day in the back of a station wagon don't know how to be careful. A wrestling match broke out on the bed. The dresser shook. The figurine fell. Its head broke off.

My mother lost it.



The original figurines... repaired now 40+ years later. :-)

Of course, it wasn't just about the figurine. It never is. It was exhaustion, grief, transition, anxiety, and the terror of a life constantly uprooted. But that moment marked us. A head on the floor. A rupture in the room.

So when the wise man fell at home group, I reacted fast. "Mom - cut it out. Chill."

This time, the stakes were different. I wasn't moving. I wasn't overwhelmed. I wasn't attached to the figurine. And honestly? I think more wise men could stand to lose their heads - especially if it helps their hearts lead the way. Why not let some joyful kids, excited about Jesus, help with that?

But here's the real miracle.

My mother did chill.

She paused. She noticed what was happening inside her. And led by the Spirit, she right-sized the moment. She didn't rush to fix the broken piece. The wise man stayed beheaded on the floor for the rest of the night.

Instead, she watched the room fill with worship. The same kids she had wanted to scold chose worship songs at karaoke and sang with joy and abandon. The night bent toward Jesus. Something deeper took precedence.

The next day, my mom shared a reflection she had written - an honest reckoning, posted publicly [<link>](#). The Spirit had shifted her attention. Not condemning her, but inviting her. Into rest. Into revelation.

You could say the Spirit beheaded her too.

Not in violence - but in freedom.

She moved from her head - what's right, what's wrong, what's proper - into her heart - what matters most. And that shift is never easy. For any of us.

But Christmas is designed to help us do exactly that.

The story itself insists on it. Read it closely and you'll see how often God disrupts certainty in order to make room for wonder. Herod cannot enter awe; he clings to control and unleashes violence. Zechariah is rendered silent because his frameworks can't yet hold what God is doing - especially not through a woman's body and voice. The shepherds proclaim astonishing news, and we're never told how most people respond. I suspect it was easier to dismiss them than to let their message rearrange everything.



The Christmas story is a holy interruption. A beheading of our false securities.

And it invites us to notice what God might need to topple in us too: cherished theologies, inherited traditions, reputations, comforts, power, ego. Not to shame us - but to free us. To get our hearts bigger than our heads. Or at least back in charge.

So if I have a resolution this year, inspired by this season, it's this:

Let the heads roll.

Let them lie where they fall.

Let your heart swell with wonder at God-with-us.

Because if God is with us, and I believe He is, then no matter how fragile, unlikely, or easy to dismiss this story feels, the question still echoes: *Who can be against us?*

And the answer, rising from the Heart of all hearts, is clear:

Nothing.

Nothing can stop God's love.

This is the news that changes everything - if we let it.