

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

October 2007

PASTORAL LETTERS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL TO SALVATIONISTS ACROSS THE WORLD

This is the fourth in a series of Pastoral Letters from the General to every Salvationist across the world.

The Pastoral Letters are intended to be distributed unchanged and entire to all Salvationists and may be shared also with others interested in the sacred purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army.

INTRODUCTION

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

This comes to all Salvationists with my strong, ongoing affection in Christ for you, and with my prayers for your effectiveness in the sacred calling that God, in his supreme wisdom, has placed upon the people known as Salvationists.

It has been laid upon my heart that I am to take a step of obedience under God by reaching out to you all through a Pastoral Letter written from time to time. I write therefore in order to obey the One who has created us all, and with a longing that what is written will affirm, encourage and inspire you.

The themes for these occasional Pastoral Letters continue to be the themes God reveals. His holy will is made known in many ways. I pledge myself to be mindful that his will is often revealed through interaction with members of the Body and not only or always in the seclusion of the place of prayer.

It is my deep hope that each Pastoral Letter will be read wherever Salvationists are to be found, whether in private or in public settings. The chosen themes may prompt discussion, prayer and – as appropriate – action.

All Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise stated.

Shaw Clifton
General

PASTORAL LETTER FOUR

OTHERS

Dear Fellow Salvationists,

This comes to you with sincerest Salvationist greetings from London. What a blessing and privilege it is to write to you in this way, reaching out across the miles by modern technology that sometimes makes the world seem but a village! I picture you in my imagination: in gigantic cities; in tiny villages; in rural and urban settings; by the sea or deep inland; on mountains or in the plains. I can see the yellow, red and blue flag fluttering where you are, and my heart lifts up to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. My wife and I have met many of you in person in our travels and recall vividly those visits and the enrichment of spirit that they brought to us.

In this fourth pastoral letter I feel led to write on the theme of 'Others'. You and I are not called to live selfishly, but to live for others. The One who is entirely 'other' than us, and who gave his life for us, has shown us how to live for others. He became a servant of others for our sakes (Philippians 2:7).

We are exhorted by the Scriptures: 'Honour one another above yourselves ... Share with God's people who are in need' (Romans 12:10, 12). In this way the Bible helps us to keep ourselves in a true perspective. By nature we protect ourselves, we provide for ourselves, we are instinctively inclined to put self first. By God's grace at work in us we learn to protect others, to provide for others, to put others first.

'Others' is a word that carries strong symbolism for Salvationists. We are told that General William Booth, the Founder, once sent a telegram to officers around the world. It contained a greeting expressed in a single word – 'Others'. Still today that greeting, that exhortation, reaches us across the years. Still it lives on, deeply embedded in our Salvationist DNA. I salute the countless Salvationists who live for others.

This God-breathed spirit of selflessness that is so much a hallmark of authentic Christian living is dramatically illustrated from a tragic episode in 1914. That was the year in which the passenger ship named *The Empress of Ireland* went down. No fewer than 109 Salvation Army officers were drowned. As their bodies were picked up, it was noticed that not a single one of them was wearing a life-jacket. Survivors told how the Salvationists, finding there were not enough life-jackets for all the passengers, removed their own and strapped them upon even strong men with the words, 'I can die better than you!' From those sinking decks the Salvationist battle-cry rang out for all the world to hear: 'Others!'

Jesus, our King, said in a parable: 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me' (Matthew 25:40).

This letter is being written only two days after my friend and fellow-officer, Colonel Bo Brekke, was shot dead in Lahore, Pakistan. If we need to look for modern

examples of Salvationists who have lived for others we need look no further than Colonels Bo and Birgitte Brekke. Their concern for the poor and marginalised, their giftedness in lifting up the downtrodden, their loving hearts have resulted in countless lives transformed from penury to dignity and many coming to faith in Jesus. When Bo was killed he and Birgitte were serving as the leaders of The Salvation Army in Pakistan. They took risks in order to be available to others, in obedience to the commands of Christ. Bo lived and died for others.

Most of us are called in less dangerous ways to serve others. Are you serving? Are you living for others? Are you doing all you can? Are you praying for others? Are you planning for their betterment? I believe you are.

Loving Father in Heaven, look upon your people known as Salvationists and fill us again and again with your love. Let this love spill over into the lives of many, so that others are blessed, helped, and encouraged to come to faith in Christ. Grant to each of us your grace, that we might truly obey your command: 'Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love' (Galatians 5:13). Amen.

To Salvationists serving others everywhere I send warmest greetings of gratitude and encouragement in Christ.

Shaw Clifton
General
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