

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

November 2008

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

This is the tenth 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 peoples 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 Pastoral Letters 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 TEN

KINDNESS

Dear Fellow-Salvationists,

Greetings in the name of Jesus!

The Army is filled with kind people. I meet them in person everywhere I go. I receive a steady stream of letters and cards from them. Kindness is a wonderful thing. It blesses the recipient in simple but profound ways, and it pleases the Lord who smiles upon the kindness of the giver.

So this Pastoral Letter is a small but heartfelt celebration of kindness and of kind Salvation Army folk right around the world.

God is closely interested in kindness. We know this because the Bible tells us that kindness is a fruit that grows when the Holy Spirit implants it into our personalities. Galatians 5:22, 23 lists nine fruits of the Spirit, with kindness named as the fifth in this list. It comes in the middle of the list, as though it is the hinge on which the other eight balance.

However, even though kindness is central to the list, it cannot outshine the fruit of love which is mentioned first before all the other fruits. Love (the love shown to us by Christ and gifted to us by him) is the fertile soil from which all the other fruits grow. In 1 Corinthians 13:4 we read that love is kind. Love and kindness are inextricably linked in the teaching of the Scriptures. One Christian writer, the great Dr Sangster, has said that Christian kindness is 'love in its smaller manifestations'.

Pause to think of the small but effective acts of kindness that have come your way recently. Think of the people who have performed these actions and take time to thank God for each person, perhaps adding a prayer that you also will receive the grace to go on being a kind person too.

Kindness is not about indulging other folk and giving them all they want. Rather it is an attitude that leads to practical actions that meet another's needs. It is often a hidden thing, done in secret and not for self-glorification. God sees it all and that is sufficient.

The Bible is full of statements about the kindness found in the heart of God. Let me list some of the references and encourage you to look them up for yourself: Luke 6:35 ('he is kind'); Nehemiah 9:17, Joel 2:13, and Jonah 4:2 (all *King James Version*: 'slow to anger, and of great kindness'); Psalm 117:2 (*KJV*: 'merciful kindness'). This divine kindness is seen at its fullest in the nature and character of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was full of love and this often expressed itself in acts and words of kindness. The same happens when we too are filled more and more with the love of Jesus.

Because God is kind, the Bible exhorts us also to be kind. Romans 12:10 speaks about being devoted to one another and about brotherly love. Ephesians 4:32 tells us to be 'kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.' Actions and words of forgiveness are a very great kindness. In his letter to the Colossian Christians (3:12) Paul reminds them that they are 'God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved' and therefore they should 'clothe' themselves with kindness. This image of being dressed all over in kindness is a very powerful one. Paul here also links kindness with its close cousins – compassion, humility, gentleness and patience. I know many Salvationists, and those beyond our ranks too, who exemplify these qualities. They are foundational to the holy life and result from the blessing of a clean heart.

Finally, we note that in 2 Peter 1:7 the Bible sees a close intimacy between godliness, kindness and love. True godliness results in kindness, and this draws upon divine love for its very survival as an attribute in our redeemed personalities.

Because of all this I rejoice and celebrate with each of you God's pouring out upon us of a measure of the Holy Spirit fruit of kindness. May this blossom, bud and grow into ripe and mature fruit in each of our lives.

I thank God for you all, keeping you daily in my prayers, as does Commissioner Helen Clifton. Thank you for the kindness of your hearts and the kindness of your actions day by day. Let the whole Army flow over and over with holy, Christlike kindness.

I commit you to the perfect love of Christ.

Shaw Clifton
General