**A picture containing shape

Description automatically generated**

|  |
| --- |
| Table of Contents  [Introduction, info and runsheet 3](#_Toc452469152)  [Meeting Content](#_Toc452469156) 6  [1. Meeting Introduction](#_Toc452469157) 6  [2. Song Ideas and pre-recorded song videos](#_Toc452469158) 7  [3. Children’s content information](#_Toc452469158) 8  [4. Prayer segment ideas 1](#_Toc452469158)0  [5. Founders’ Day Ideas 1](#_Toc452469158)4  [6. Spiritual Growth Survey 1](#_Toc452469158)5  [7. Bible Reading 1](#_Toc452469158)6  [8. Sermon 1](#_Toc452469160)7  [9. Response](#_Toc452469161) 24  [10. Benediction](#_Toc452469162) 25  [Soldier’s Covenant](#_Toc452469156) 26  Content: Mission Resources Team, 2021  *We trust you find this resource useful. We are always keen to receive feedback so that we can improve our service to you. If you have feedback, please send it to* ***missionteam@salvationarmy.org.nz*** |
|  |
| All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved. |

# Introduction

## Covenant Renewal & Founders’ Day

The first Sunday in July is traditionally Founders’ Day and Covenant Renewal – a day to remember our history, commit to the future, and encourage people to consider their covenant. At the same time, we want to provide covenant renewal resources each year to promote soldiership and offer everyone (soldier or not) the chance to re-affirm their commitment to God.

This year the theme is Love God, Love Others and is all about encouraging our people to growing in their spiritual walk. The meeting outline and sermon challenges us to continue growing in love for God and our love for others. The service is focused on the passage in Matthew 22, where Jesus shares the Greatest Commandment.

Leadership have also asked each corps/centre to complete a spiritual growth survey to help the individuals in your church family know how they’re growing spiritually, as well as inform corps/faith communities, and our territory. This will be helpful information to gather and so it is encouraged that this survey could be completed during your Covenant Renewal service (or after, or as close to this Sunday as possible).

This pack contains a theme, introduction, children’s content and meeting lead ideas, plus renewal cards are being sent to you. We have also included a range of pre-recorded worship videos that could be used to facilitate worship in your gathering.

You are welcome to adapt everything in the pack to suit your local context, e.g. use what you like here, use all local content and just play the sermon. You will know best!

**All resources can be found at either of the following links:**

<https://tsanzf.sharepoint.com/sites/MissionResources>

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/church-community/resources/covenant-renewal-2021>

If you have any questions or need help with anything, please email missionteam@salvationarmy.org.nz

## Resources Available

With this booklet, you should expect to receive a set of *Covenant Renewal Cards* for use on the day.

The Territorial website contains the electronic resources to support this day. Head to <https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/church-community/resources>. Resources available include:

* Social media image
* Pre-recorded worship videos (for corps/faith communities without live music capabilities)
* Kids material pack

Material can also be found on the Mission Resources SharePoint here: <https://tsanzf.sharepoint.com/sites/MissionResources>

## Meeting Outline

To assist with your meeting planning, here are some segment suggestions. Ideas for each section further in the pack.

| Section | Suggested Content |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Introduction | Potential script below |
| 1. Song Ideas | List of song ideas you can do live or pre-recorded worship videos. |
| 1. Children’s story / kids church lesson | All kids Covenant Renewal material can be found in the Kids Covenant Renewal pack. |
| 1. Prayer segment | Pre-written prayers that could be used during the service. |
| 1. Founders’ Day | We have included potential stories and video clips to celebrate Founders’ Day below. |
| 1. Spiritual Growth Survey | Information about the Spiritual Growth Survey leadership are asking corps/centres to complete. |
| 1. Bible reading | The scripture reading for the service. |
| 1. Sermon | Full sermon outline/notes that can be adapted to locally. |
| 1. Response | Potential script below. Follow with appropriate response music (suggestions in song list or can use pre-recorded songs). |
| 1. Benediction | Benediction ideas for concluding your service. |

## Preparation

1. Read through this document – select what video elements alongside the pre-recorded sermon you will use and what you will do live.
2. Check out the Kids pack and see how you can adapt this locally.
3. Gather your response cards and provide pens.
4. Promote the service.

# Meeting Content

Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40

Subject: Love God, Love Others

Aim: To have the congregation choose to (re)commit to growing in love for God and others.

## 1. Meeting Introduction

Today is a special day in The Salvation Army calendar year – it’s our Founders’ Day and Covenant Renewal Day. Founders’ Day is a day to acknowledge and honour the Salvation Army founders, Catherine and William Booth. What great examples of living in covenant with God and going after all he has called and asked of them.

Founders’ Day is a great day for us to consider our own covenants, so today we also celebrate Covenant Renewal day. We each have the chance today to consider the various commitments we’ve made to God. For some of us, this is in the form of a covenant that we signed when we became a soldier, adherent or officer in The Salvation Army. For others, it may be a commitment you’ve made in another church to follow Christ, or when you were in a desperate situation and you cried out to God promising that you’d change the world if He saved you. And for some of you, you’re simply here today because you’re wondering what this Christian thing is all about.

Today we’re exploring what it means to love God and love others. Being a Christian is an on-going commitment to growing in love for God and for others – not to be content where we are but to continue growing, developing, strengthening, reaching upward and outward.

There’s a famous quote from Catherine Booth, one of the founders of The Salvation Army, ‘*You are not here in the world for yourself. You have been sent here for others. The world is waiting for you!*’. A natural outworking of our love for God is a love for his world and his people – the story of God’s love for the world is still be told and you are essential to the storytelling!

Catherine and William Booth’s lives are an incredible testimony to how God uses ordinary people to change the world. What a great encouragement for us today as we each consider our own covenant or commitments we have made and what God is asking of us today.

No matter your situation, we pray that you will feel very welcome and that you will encounter God during this service, as we look at why and how the world needs you.

## 2. Ideas for Songs

There is pre-recorded music available for this service, or you are welcome to do your own worship time. If you are doing your own, here are some song suggestions to fit the service theme.

**Songs/Congregational**

* + God so Loved – We the Kingdom
  + Great Things - Phil Wickham
  + King of Kings – Hillsong Worship
  + How Great is Our God – Chris Tomlin
  + Old Church Basement – Elevation Worship
  + Goodness of God - Bethel
  + Yet Not I but Christ in Me - CityAlight
  + God Is For Us - CityAlight
  + Seek First – Housefires
  + Follow You Anywhere - Passion
  + There’s Nothing That I God Can’t Do - Passion
  + Who You Say I Am - Hillsong Worship
  + SASB 687/SASB 960 (new ed.) I’ll Stand for Christ
  + SASB 696/SASB 980 (new ed.) Storm the Forts of Darkness (Soldiers of Our God Arise)
  + SASB 707/SASB 992 (new ed.) Who is on the Lord’s Side?

**Response / Reflection**

* + Build my Life – Pat Barrett
  + Let It Be Jesus - Christy Nockles
  + Send Me Lord – Matt Redman
  + Here and Now (Nau ma ra) – Souvenirs Worship
  + Christ Is Enough - Hillsong Worship
  + More Like Jesus – Passion
  + We Fall Down - Chris Tomlin
  + Breathe – Souvenirs Worship
  + I Surrender – Hillsong
  + Way Maker – Leeland
  + Great Grace – The Mclures
  + Do It Again - Elevation Worship
  + Surrender – Lincoln Brewster
  + Here I am, Wholly Available – Modern Hymn
  + I Surrender All - Hymn
  + SASB C53 / SASB 312 (new ed.) Spirit of the living God
  + SASB 474/ SASB 636 (new ed.) All to Jesus, I surrender
  + SASB 487/ SASB 705 (new ed.) Have thine own way Lord
  + SASB 525/ SASB 623 (new ed.) Take my life and let it be
  + SASB 568 (new ed.) All that I am

## 3. Children’s Material

The Territorial Children’s Department has produced some resources for children and families.

Please download these and use the material that best suits your context.

<https://tsanzf.sharepoint.com/:f:/r/sites/MissionResources/Shared%20Documents/Covenant%20Renewal%202021?csf=1&web=1&e=ju35cX>

<https://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/church-community/resources/covenant-renewal-2021>

## 4. Prayer Segment Ideas

As another way to engage people in your service and to connect in with the Year of Prayer, you may want to include an intentional time of prayer in your service. Here are some ideas that you could adapt for your setting.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving: For Love**

(inspired by 1 John 4:18 and similar passages)

Let us give thanks for the remarkable gifts

of God’s creating and redeeming love,

the loving that casts out all fear.

For the love that frees us to ask questions and explore,

to frame doubts and investigate new possibilities,

to build theories and then cross-examine them.

*We thank you, God of adventurous love.*

For the love that enables us to marvel at our own existence,

to ponder and remember,

recognize our own needs

and affirm our own knowledge and purpose.

*We thank you, God of determined love.*

For the love that helps us to communicate with one another,

to express trust and respect,

share heartaches and visions,

to convey love and mercy.

*We thank you, God of reconciling love.*

For the love that inspires us to warmly encourage those around us,

to affirm and build up, comfort and enlighten.

*We thank you, God of nurturing love.*

For the love that liberates us to celebrate the world around us

in poetry and song,

to delight in shapes and colours, intricacies and patterns,

awesome forces and deep mysteries.

*We thank you God of visionary love.*

For the love that encourages us to express something of our faith;

for creeds and prayers, hymns and readings,

discussion groups and sermons.

*We thank you, God of creative love.*

Above all else we thank you

for the love that allows us to admit

that we have no words in which to adequately describe

the process of faith in Christ,

the awesome worship of our God,

and the holy wonder of the Spirit.

We thank you for that point where

our love becomes wordless adoration.

Through Christ Jesus,

who is the pure glory of your loving. Amen!

- Bruce Pewer, found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

**Litany**

(inspired by John 3: 16)

1: God loved the world so much

that God sent Jesus the son

so that all who believed in him

would have eternal life

2: God loved the world so much

love gave everything it had

that anyone who grasped the story of love

would be grasped by love’s story

and find what is eternal

1: God loved the world so much

heaven opened up itself completely

so that whoever welcomed the kingdom in

through works of love and justice

would find the lasting wholeness of life

2: God loved the world so much

Jesus put on flesh and lived among us

so that the face of God would be clear to humanity

and the word of God would be clearly heard

that no life is cheap enough to destroy

1: God loved the world so much

God went there Gods-self

so that anyone who banked on love

would discover life’s ultimate value

and in so doing live in its fullness

2: God loved the world so much

God let Jesus gamble everything on love

through to crucifixion and death

so that all who ventured to love in that way

would know what had been distilled in eternity

1: God loved the world so much

that God sent Jesus the son

so that all who believed in him

would have eternal life

- Roddy Hamilton, found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

Merciful God,

You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to show us a different way to live—

the way of deep humility and obedience.

You’ve called us to love one another,

and to work together with one heart and mind,

balancing our needs with the needs of those around us.

Give us courage to follow faithfully, and with integrity—

with actions that bear witness to the words we speak,

and worship that overflows into our daily tasks and relationships—

so that our lives will bring glory and honour to You,

our Redeemer and Lord. Amen.

- Christine Longhurst, found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

**Pastoral Prayer: Epiphany 6A**

(inspired by Psalm 119: 1-8, 1 Corinthians 3: 1-9)

Loving God, we seek to follow your desire

And walk in your ways

To observe your commandment

Love God, love self, love others

Bless, O God, this land and

All the lands of the earth

Fill the minds and hearts

Of leaders with wisdom

As your servants may we labour

For Your purposes, building

Gardening, watering,

Reconciling, growing – peace

May we work together

Sister and brother, brother

And sister, as God’s field

God’s gift to you, to me

Loving God, we seek to follow your desire

And walk in your ways

To observe your commandments

Love God, love self, love others

Amen.

- Terri, found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

**Call to Worship**

(inspired by Matthew 5:13-20, Mark 12:30-31,

Matthew 22:36-40, Luke 10:27)

We are called to bring a new understanding of God:

that God so loves the world.

*We are the salt of the earth.*

We are called to bring a new hope in God:

that God gives us new life.

*We are the light of the world.*

We are called to follow

the commandments and the law.

*The Law of God is to love God*

*and to love one another.*

Come, let us be the salt of the earth,

the light of the world.

*Come, let us love one another*

*with the love of God.*

*Let us join together in our love of God*

*to worship and follow Jesus.*

- Rev. Mindi, found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

**Litany of Call and Confession**

(inspired by John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7)

Come with what you have.

For you who grieve this day

know that you are invited to bring the broken pieces of your heart.

*Loved by one another,*

*we discover God's love for us.*

Come with what you have.

For you who come with gladness

know that your melody will find harmony.

*Accepting God's love for us,*

*we are called to love one another.*

Come with what you have.

For you weighed down by too many 'shoulds' and 'what-ifs'

know that here you may lay down the burdens of guilt and shame.

*Loved by one another,*

*we discover God's love for us.*

Come with what you have.

For you who have the answers,

know that new questions await you.

*Accepting God's love for us,*

*we are called to love one another.*

Come with what you have.

For you who come seeking,

know that your questions are safe in the presence of God.

*Loved by one another,*

*we discover God's love for us.*

- Katherine Hawker, found at www.re-worship.blogspot.com

## 5. Ideas for Founders’ Day

Here are some ideas for creative elements to include in your service to highlight Founders’ Day. You could include one of the stories below as part of your service; you could share about it during a segment in your service/play one of the videos or you could have one of your corps members research one of the stories and share about it.

**Video about different creative Army endeavours:**

Various short stories around creative Salvation Army endeavours over the years, created by our Creative Ministries Department.

* <https://youtu.be/jlLInPi5TMg>
* This and other videos can be found in the Covenant Renewal folder here: <https://tsanzf.sharepoint.com/sites/MissionResources>

**Making matches safe:**

The Salvation Army encouraged the change from dangerous phosphorous matches to safety matches by opening their own factory, employing people in a safe environment and for a fair wage.

* [https://glynnharrison.wordpress.com/2013/07/25/when-william-booth-took-on-the-big-manufacturers-of-safety-matches-and-won/](https://glynnharrison.wordpress.com/2013/07/25/when-william-booth-took-on-the-big-manufacturers-of-safety-matches-and-won/%20)

**Raising the age of consent:**

The Salvation was pivotal in raising the age of consent for girls from 13 to 16.

* [https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/1C9CE9592331AC2F802575CA004EF0A2](https://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq/1C9CE9592331AC2F802575CA004EF0A2%20)

**Opening Men’s homes:**

A story around William and Bramwell’s response to the large number of homeless men in London.

* [https://www.gospeltruth.net/booth/boothbiovol2/boothbiovol2ch7.htm](https://www.gospeltruth.net/booth/boothbiovol2/boothbiovol2ch7.htm%20)
* <https://goo.gl/KSAvqy>

**Lowering the cost of bread:**

In 1914, in Britain there was a grain shortage because many of the ships were being sunk by German U-boats. In one town, the bakers raised the price of bread so high that poor people could not afford it. Twice General Bramwell Booth asked the bakers to reduce their prices and they refused.

Booth wrote to the bakers saying that if the prices did not come down and the poor could eat, the Salvation Army would establish bakeries in the town and undercut the prices. The prices came down.

## 6. Spiritual Growth Survey

Covenant Renewal Day provides a great opportunity for you to invite your congregation members to consider their relationship with God and any commitments they may have made. If you could summarise your desire for your congregation members, what would it be? A thriving relationship with God? Reflecting Jesus in their everyday lives? Making a difference in their community? Being united within your congregation? Having thought about this for some time, the Mission Impact Framework working group have decided that really, this is best summarised as simply ‘spiritual growth’. Yet, for something so important, we really don’t know much about how we’re doing.

We track things like attendance, but we all know that attendance isn’t a great predictor of spiritual growth. So for Covenant Renewal Day this year, we’ve decided to make this our focus, and a key component of this is a self-reflection exercise for your congregation using a simple questionnaire. The questions relate directly to the provided Bible message.

By collecting the responses, you will be provided with helpful information about your congregation – both things to celebrate and potential areas for focus. A couple of the questions will also be collated to provide a territorial picture. As the main intent is to help you and your congregation members, we have resisted adding other questions for which we would love responses, such as demographic information and questions about current beliefs. We have included a question about whether The Salvation Army is a great place to belong, worship and serve, to provide information for the People Priority of our Strategic Framework.

The questionnaire will be available both online and as a paper form and should only take a few minutes to complete. You will be provided with a pack nearer the time, that will include instructions for accessing the electronic questionnaire, a slide that includes a QR Code for displaying in your service, and a file for printing paper copies for those who will prefer paper.

*Any questions around the Spiritual Growth Survey, please contact Alastair Kendrew*

*Alastair.kendrew@salvationarmy.org.nz*

## 7. Bible Reading: Matthew 22:34-40

You could include this scripture reading as part of the sermon time, or as a separate bible reading earlier in the service.

**The Greatest Commandment**

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

## 8. Sermon

Feel free to adapt this sermon to suit your style and setting best. There is an accompanying Powerpoint available, with the blue logo representing when to change slides.

*[We’ve added the symbol* **A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated** *for where you should change slides if using the PowerPoint]*

**Introduction**

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**

*[We have provided a few different options to start this sermon – adapt one of these, or find your own, that best suits your setting.]*

*Bible passage* – you could start this sermon by reading the Bible passage if you haven’t earlier in your meeting.

*Personal story or illustration* – you could start the sermon with a personal story or illustration that fits with the theme of this message.

*All-in service* – if this sermon is part of an all-in, all-ages services, you might want to use an interactive way to start the message. This might be presenting the Bible story in a fun way (acting, using a video, Godly Play) or a game/illustration/activity that fits with theme like playing a song about love (or first to guess the song) or a version of charades where there are a couple of volunteers guessing while the rest of the congregation act out words or hum a song about love.

*Humorous story* – you could start the sermon with a joke or funny story. Here are some short examples:

A group of tourists visiting a picturesque village walked by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked him, “Were any great men born in this village?” The old man replied, “Nope, only babies.” *(it takes time, growth, development to become good at something – we all start out as ‘babies’)*

A young man called his mother and excitedly announced that he had just met the woman of his dreams.

His mother said, “Why don’t you send her flowers and invite her to over for a home-cooked meal?”

The day after the big date, his mother called to see how things had gone.

“Mum, the evening was a complete disaster,” he replied. “It was horrible!”

“Why, didn’t she come over?” his mother asked.

“Yes, she came over. But she refused to cook!” *(words mean very little without action – he may have said he liked her, but wasn’t willing to show it or act like it)*

**SCRIPTURE**

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated*The Greatest Commandment***

*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*

*Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

In the New Testament, we read the story of when Jesus is being questioned by the Sadducees and the pharisees (religious leaders and teachers at the time).

Jesus is starting to get a following and word has got out about this new teacher. The Sadducees and Pharisees decide it’s high time they get to the bottom of this and get rid of the ‘threat’, and so they take turns questioning him. Trying to trap him into a religious debate and make him say the wrong thing.

The Pharisees think they’ve nailed it when they ask Jesus what he thinks is the greatest commandment in the law. They thought they would entrap him into ranking one of the laws higher than others, and therefore, neglecting or saying another part of the law is less important.

In Jewish law at the time, there were about 613 commandments/mitzvot so you can see where they were going with this!

You can imagine them, this gang of Pharisees, all robed and bearded up, looking smug, getting the ‘expert of the law’ to come up with a doozie and then thinking, ‘Oh, good one Barry! You got him with this one.’

And boom, Jesus replies, summing up the full essence of the law in two simple points:

Love God.

Love others.

The Pharisees had no ground for reply or rebuttal. Jesus had summed it all up, referencing Jewish law in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, and giving us a simple law to live by.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**Matthew Poole in his commentary on this passage put it this way, *‘Moses summed up all in the ten commandments, to which, truly interpreted, all the precepts of Scripture are reducible. Christ here brings the ten to two.’*

So if it all comes down to those two simple points: Love God, Love others, what does it look like for us to truly live these out?

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generatedPOINT 1: LOVE GROWS**

If you’ve been around church or Christianity for a little bit, you may have heard this phrase: Love God, love others.

You may think, well, that’s obvious – tell us something new. Something that will challenge us today.

The thing is, although it’s not a new idea or revelation, it doesn’t mean we’re all nailing it. When Jesus answers the Pharisees, he doesn’t say ‘The most important thing is that you said you loved God’ – there’s no past tense in the phrase. It implies an on-going, current and continual love of God.

The whole idea of being a Christian or disciple is about a journey. The word disciple literally means apprentice or student – that you’re continuing to learn and grow and become.

It’s not a tick box, yup, I’ve signed up to that, done! Deal. It’s an on-going, everyday, in the highs and lows, when it all makes sense or when you feel lost.

It can be easy to say, ‘I’m a Christian’, to say you love God. It’s much harder to continue growing in that love and to do it with all your heart, soul and mind.

Christians are often the only group that say they love something but do little about it. You know when you meet someone that’s so passionate about something, so in love with it that they don’t really need to even tell you – you can see it, they’re living it. Like someone that loves to bake; they don’t just tell you they love baking, you’ve probably tasted one of their cakes or seen the stacks of baking books or heard about the new appliance they’ve bought. Or someone that loves running; they’re tracking their times, researching the best shoes, finding new running tracks. Or someone that loves their kids like crazy; you see the photos, you hear about the time they’ve spent together, or the new thing their kid has learned.

When people love something, they’re wanting to spend time in that space. Investing themselves, learning more, developing, talking about it.

So why do we often act like loving God is something we’ve done but requires no on-going commitment? Why are we often the kinds of disciples that started on the straight and narrow path, and then have pulled over to have a sit down on a park bench or started out at a good pace and are now leisurely strolling through? Like someone that decides they love the gym; they buy the shoes, get the membership and go twice before we don’t hear them talking about it anymore.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**In the book of Revelation, John has a vision from God and writes letters to a range of churches in response. He writes to the church in Ephesus, talking about how well they’ve persevered and endured hardships, but then says ‘*But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.’ (Revelation 2:4)*

John challenges the early church in Ephesus – ‘yeah, you might be good at pushing on with it but you’ve forgotten to love Jesus in the process’.

When we think about all God has done for us, it’s not hard to respond in love, worship and adoration. But often we get so caught up in the day to day, in the rosters and routines, in the just making it through another day, that we’ve let our love for Christ fade or become background. Do you remember when you first meet Jesus? Or were first getting to know him and you wanted to find out more? When you felt something during worship, when you were first to put your hand up to serve, when your life changed, your heart softened? The joy of knowing you were saved, freed, called and redeemed? The aim isn’t to experience that once and recall that, but to grow in it, to develop it, to dive deeper and increase in faith, hope and love.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**There’s a recent worship song that is all about re-discovering this first love again, it says:

*Hallelujah is all I need / When I think of Your goodness and Your love for me / Oh, the joy of my salvation is coming back to me / It's just an old hallelujah with a new melody*

Following Jesus is a journey – an on-going understanding, experience and outworking of God’s love for us and our response in return. Sometimes we forget the joy of our salvation, of our first love when we’re in the middle of the journey, when we’ve been at this Jesus-thing for years. Maybe your old hallelujah needs a new melody – new life, a new reminder or a re-discovery of what it means to follow Jesus and grow in love for him.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**Eugene Peterson, theologian and author, wrote a book called ‘A long obedience in the same direction’. In this he says, *‘There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.’*

This quote reminds us that discipleship is not a one and done deal. It’s an on-going journey, a commitment to growing in love and closeness with Jesus.

A long obedience in one direction. An apprenticeship in holiness. A growing love, dependence, trust, gratitude, for God. That’s the greatest commandment.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**What do you need to do to re-discover or re-ignite the love you had for God? How could you continue growing toward God? Does your old hallelujah need a new melody?

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generatedPOINT 2: LOVE DOES**

The second thing we can take away from the simple encouragement to love God and love others, is the idea that love does.

According to Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees, the second greatest commandment is ‘to love others as you love yourself’. To love something or someone as you love yourself is to consider someone else’s needs and well-being – their te whare tapa wha – their whole person – like your whole person. We act and react in a way that protects and cares for ourselves and that’s how we should love others. Just like we are encouraged to love God with all we are, we are encouraged to love others as all they are.

So what does that look like?

The Bible is the story of God’s love for us. It’s the blueprint for how to love and God is the greatest example of this being outworked.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**One of the most commonly referenced Bible verses is John 3:16 *‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’*

This is how you love. ‘For God so loved the world the he GAVE.’

The passage doesn’t say, ‘For God so loved the world that he told them’, or ‘For God so loved the world that he thought about them a lot’, or ‘For God so loved the world that he said he would pray for them’, or ‘For God so loved the world that he \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’

While all those things are good things to do, they mean very little without action. God shows us how to love – by doing something! Love means very little if you tell someone ‘I love you’ but your actions don’t reflect that.

And if God shows us how to love, Jesus shows us how to love deeply. God gave us his son, Jesus gave us his life. Two massive ‘love in action’ declarations.

Jesus loved you so much, he didn’t just tell you with a rainbow in the sky or saying ‘one day you’ll be with me in paradise’, he came down from paradise, lived amongst us, walked amongst us, cried amongst us, and willingly walked his way to death by torture to show us.

For Jesus so loved the world, that he gave his life.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**Jesus echoes his earlier words from John 3 in John 15 when he said this: *‘My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’*

Like, how many times does he need to tell us? Love requires action. The true measure of love is through our actions and reactions, how we navigate relationships, what we do with our time and money, with our words, what we do in public and what we do in private, what we do for the least of these, to lay our own needs down for the needs of others.

In our thoughts, words and deeds.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**Author and teacher, Bob Goff talks about ‘love does’ – he wrote a whole book about how love isn’t passive, that it’s active, that it doesn’t just think about it, it gets on with it and does it. In it he says, *'That’s because love is never stationary. In the end, love doesn’t just keep thinking about it or keep planning for it. Simply put: love does.”*

And if love does, disciples do.

If we’ve accepted God’s love for us, it’s our job to share that with others. Like a healthy fruit tree grows upward, growing stronger as it reaches toward the light, the second sign of a healthy plant is its outward growth – its branches - its reaching out, growing wider, producing fruit. We’re intended to grow upward – toward God, while also stretching outward – towards others. This is where the fruit of our growth is visible. In John 13, Jesus says *‘By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’.’*

In other words, ‘Your love for others will show that you follow me, that you love me’. These two things don’t sit in isolation, you don’t love God and not love others. They are connected, one is the fruit or outworking of the other.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**In the Enduring Word commentary for Matthew 22, it says *‘God’s moral expectation of [humankind] can be briefly and powerfully said in these two sentences. If the life of God is real in our life, it will show by the presence of this love for God and others.’*

If the Bible is the story of God’s love for us – it doesn’t finish with the final book of the Bible. The story of God’s love for us is still being written and declared and unravelled – through us. God asks us to partner with him – to be storytellers with him. This is the second greatest commandment. To join in this incredible work of sharing God’s love with the world.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**How could you show God’s love to those around you? Who in your life needs the hope and love of Jesus? What fruit is evident in your life?

**SO WHAT?**

It’s not news that what the world needs now is love. It’s what the world needed when Jesus came to live among us, it’s what the world needed when Catherine and William Booth started the Salvation Army, it’s what the world needed when that song was first penned in 1965, and it’s what the world still needs today.

And you know what’s the craziest part? God is still inviting, calling and depending on ordinary people to partner with him in his plan.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**Loving God and loving others is still the plan. All of human kind across all of human history has been given the same calling – to love God and love others. Your calling is not unique, but you are the only person who can tell the story exactly how your world needs to hear it.

Whether you became a Christian years ago, yesterday or are yet to say yes to Jesus – your calling will be the same. To live your life in a way that helps tell the greatest story ever told – that God so loved the world, that he gave his only son. For you. For me. For us. For them.

That the greatest thing we can ever do is live in a way that says ‘thank you’ to God and ‘you are loved’ to others.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**The calling is the same. Your mission may look different. How you show this love and to who will be unique to you. Bob Goff says it like this, *‘I think God’s hope and plan for us is pretty simple to figure out. For those who resonate with formulas, here it is: add your whole life, your loves, your passions, and your interests together with what God said He wants us to be about, and that’s your answer.’*

Our founders, Catherine and William Booth lived in this way. They knew God’s love and grace and loved him so much, they couldn’t bear to see people being neglected, left out and excluded from hearing this good news. They could see the needs of the people around them and could not not act – they believed loving God meant loving others and doing something about it.

They had the same calling as every other Christ follower that came before but their mission was unique to them. Just like how you love God and love others will be unique to you.

So why care? Why love God and love others? Because only you can love God and love others the way you do. Your journey didn’t start and end with saying yes to God’s love and loving him back, it continues with sharing that with others.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**Consider it this way:

For [insert your name, a congregation members name] so loved, that [she/he] \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Think of some examples from people in your church or your own life.*

*- For Bethany so loved, that she checked in with her friend each week who is struggling*

*- For Noah so loved, that he put God first each morning with prayer*

*- For Debbie so loved, that she committed to being the best mother she could be*

*- For Mat so loved, that he joined a soccer team to bring joy and do life with others*

*- For Kelvin so loved, that he put his hand up to help in the foodbank*

*- For Shaun so loved, that he invited that family over for dinner to journey with them*

*- For Janet so loved, that she took time to be the best neighbour she could be*

*- For Claire so loved, that she began to practice a heart of worship and gratitude no matter her circumstance*

## 9. Response

So what does it look like for you to continuing growing in love for God and for others?

Each year we set a aside a day to consider our covenants – our commitments to God.

Maybe you become a Christian years ago and have chosen to honour God by living in certain ways or doing certain things.

Maybe your covenant with God is through soldiership or being an adherent.

Maybe you’re still trying to figure out who God is in your life and how you might live in response.

**A picture containing text, several

Description automatically generated**Whatever your personal covenant with God is, we all have the same calling.

* Have you abandoned your first love? Has life made you weary or encouraged you to forget the greatest commandment? What steps are you putting in place to grow in love for God?
* Maybe today you need to re-discover the love for Christ you had at first. Do you need a new melody with your old hallelujah?
* Maybe you need to commit to growing closer to Jesus and working on your long obedience in one direction.
* Maybe you’re keen to deepen your love for Christ, or maybe you’ve been stretching your branches outward but have been neglecting growing upward and want to change that.
* How is your love for others? Do you struggle with what your calling is or why you’re here? Who is God asking you to love? How could you be better at being part of telling God’s story of love?
* Maybe you want to think of someone that God has placed on your heart to show God’s love to.
* Maybe you want to stop thinking and start doing – putting your faith into action and growing in your love for others.
* Maybe today you want to commit to the calling of loving God and loving others by choosing one way you want to do that better.

What would it look like for you to ‘so love’ that you did something? What next step is God encouraging you to take today?

Today, we have some covenant renewal cards available. The card includes the words ‘I choose to continue growing in my love for God and love for others, by:’ with space for you to reflect and write ways that you might do this.

If you would like to respond and make a commitment today, we invite you to come forward, and sign the card. Maybe you want to make this commitment for the first time today, or you want to reaffirm this covenant again – we invite you to come forward.

If you’d like prayer, please come forward and someone would love to pray for you.

## 10. Benediction

Here are a couple of benediction options that fit this year’s theme.

***1 Thessalonians 3:12-13***

*12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*

***Benediction and Commission option:***

*Go now, with courage in our God.*

*Declare the message of the gospel*

*which God has entrusted to us,*

*and in wholehearted love for God and for others,*

*share not only the message, but your very selves.*

*And may God be your haven;*

*May Christ Jesus lead you into love - heart, soul and mind;*

*And may the Holy Spirit bless the work of your hands*

*........and gladden all your days.*

*We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,*

*........In the name of Christ. Amen.*

* *Nathan Nettleton via www.re-worship.blogspot.com*

## The Soldier’s Covenant

Having accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and desiring to fulfil my membership of His Church on earth as a soldier of The Salvation Army, I now by God's grace enter into a sacred covenant.

I believe and will live by the truths of the word of God expressed in The Salvation Army's eleven articles of faith …

I will be responsive to the Holy Spirit's work and obedient to His leading in my life, growing in grace through worship, prayer, service and the reading of the Bible. I will make the values of the Kingdom of God and not the values of the world the standard for my life.

I will uphold Christian integrity in every area of my life, allowing nothing in thought, word or deed that is unworthy, unclean, untrue, profane, dishonest or immoral.

I will maintain Christian ideals in all my relationships with others; my family and neighbours, my colleagues and fellow salvationists, those to whom and for whom I am responsible, and the wider community.

I will uphold the sanctity of marriage and of family life. I will be a faithful steward of my time and gifts, my money and possessions, my body, my mind and my spirit, knowing that I am accountable to God.

I will abstain from alcoholic drink, tobacco, the non-medical use of addictive drugs, gambling, pornography, the occult and all else that could enslave the body or spirit.

I will be faithful to the purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, endeavouring to win others to Him, and in His name caring for the needy and the disadvantaged.

I will be actively involved, as I am able, in the life, work, worship and witness of the corps, giving as large a proportion of my income as possible to support its ministries and the worldwide work of the Army.

I will be true to the principles and practices of The Salvation Army, loyal to its leaders, and I will show the spirit of salvationism whether in times of popularity or persecution.

I now call upon all present to witness that I enter into this covenant and sign these articles of war of my own free will, convinced that the love of Christ, who died and now lives to save me, requires from me this devotion of my life to His service for the salvation of the whole world; and therefore do here declare my full determination, by God's help, to be a true soldier of The Salvation Army.