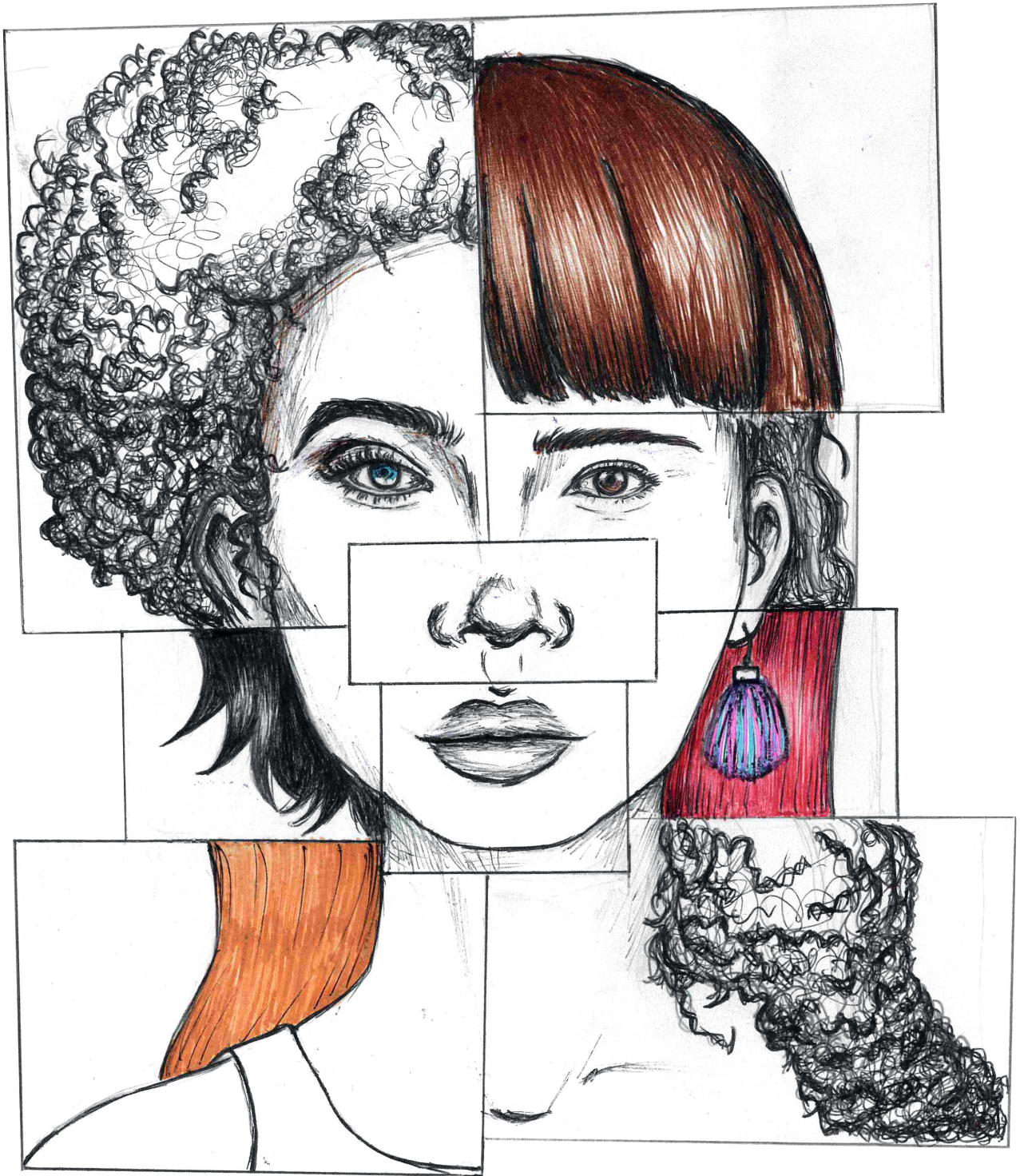


Time To be Holy

IHQ WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDIES



Time To be Holy

IHQ WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDIES



INTRODUCTION

DEAR SISTERS IN CHRIST,

It is with glorious, inexpressible joy that I present to you our first in a series of five international women's Bible studies that I believe will be inspiring, impactful and relevant for disciples of Jesus in this century. As women who are engaged in many roles, we need God's Word to speak clearly into our hearts and minds, so that we not only experience his presence, but those around us will see Jesus' love living in and through us. God is calling us to be people of influence and action wherever we find ourselves in our everyday, ordinary life. The call is clear – we must be holy people in an unholy world.

In General Brian Peddle's *Call to Mission* to the international Salvation Army, he urges Salvationists to 'Be Ready', which includes a specific call to holiness. He writes, 'We must reflect Christlikeness in all aspects of life, recognising that holiness restores our humanity and relationships with God, others and the world.' It is in response to this challenge that this Bible study series, *Time to be Holy*, was developed. It is a resource tool to be used for women and girls of all ages, as they discover and further cement the truth that it is possible to be holy in this chaotic and complicated world.

Time to be Holy is a collection of 24 Bible studies developed by 24 women from different parts of our Salvation Army world. These women are passionate about holiness and their writings will inspire and challenge us to be women with clean hands and pure hearts.

Radical! Courageous! Risk-taking! Three words that describe the early disciples after their lives were infused with the power of the Holy Spirit. They moved from their Pentecost experience and became engaged in daily living out a life transformed and filled with the presence of the Living Christ. I am convinced and convicted that the world today is desperately looking for disciples so empowered by the Holy Spirit that nothing will stop them from sharing the good news that Jesus can bring hope, life and light to everyone who will call upon his name. Count me in! Will you join me?

These Bible studies are not intended to be exclusive to women's ministries groups. They have been designed to be utilised in groups of all ages, cultures, nationalities, languages and genders. We are praying that God will use this resource far above anything we could ever dream or imagine.

My deep prayer is that everyone who engages in these Bible studies will experience a radical holiness transformation that will impact the way they do life and mission today and in the future.

May God bless and use these Bible studies for his honour, his power and his glory. May we bless him as we take 'Time to be Holy'!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosalie Peddle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Commissioner Rosalie Peddle
World President of Women's Ministries

**'THESE BIBLE STUDIES
HAVE BEEN DESIGNED TO
BE UTILISED IN GROUPS
OF ALL AGES, CULTURES,
NATIONALITIES,
LANGUAGES AND
GENDERS.'**

BECAUSE I AM HOLY

LEVITICUS 19:1-4

LIEUT-COLONEL EVAN MHAVSI

'The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy. Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God. Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the LORD your God'"' (Leviticus 19:1-4).

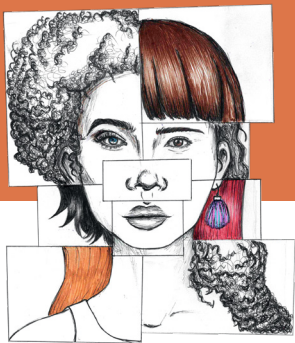
The word 'holy' describes God's nature. God commanded Moses and the assembly of Israel to emulate his character. If God is holy and the people also are holy, then a strong bond is formed between man and God. The word holy is also used with reference to things or people that have been separated or set apart for God and his service: the seventh day of Creation was made holy as a day of rest (Genesis 2:3), Moses stood on holy ground (Exodus 3:6), Mount Sinai was declared holy by God (Exodus 19:23) and the holy altar is mentioned in Exodus 29:37.

To be holy is to be in a state of moral and ethical wholeness or perfection; freedom from moral evil. The word holy denotes that which is 'sanctified' or 'set apart' for divine service and religious purity. Out of all creation, God blessed man: 'God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27). When God calls, he provides because we are his own: 'For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight' (Ephesians 1:4). The blessing of holiness was lost when our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned against God. Their sins defiled the human race to be sinners, but God, in his mercy, set his plan of salvation by sending Jesus Christ to redeem us.

As Christians, we may question the timing of our decisions as we strive to follow God's timing. When we think like this, we may wonder when it is the right time to be holy. Firstly, we must understand that God is holy at all times. He was, he is and he shall ever be holy for he does not have a beginning or an end: 'Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God' (Psalm 90:2). In Leviticus 19:3, God instructs us to observe his Sabbath. Taking time to rest in God's presence is a vital component of holy living and, no matter how busy we become, we must always strive to observe the Sabbath. The right time for every believer is now. Believers are encouraged to pursue a life pleasing to God while they have the time: 'Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil' (Ephesians 5:15-16).

In order to live a holy life, we must be individuals who are born again in the Holy Spirit: 'Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God' (John 1:12-13). The instruction, 'Be holy because I, the LORD your

'FROM THE MOMENT ONE IS BORN AGAIN, THERE IS SPIRITUAL WAR BETWEEN THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT. THE SINS OF THE FLESH ARE MANY AND FORCEFUL, LEADING TO DEATH, BUT THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT ARE FEW BUT POWERFUL AND LEAD TO EVERLASTING LIFE.'



DISCUSS:

- * What does it mean for you to be holy as God is holy in your daily life?
- * Who in your life would you consider to be holy?
- * What obstructs your pursuit of holiness?

God, am holy', emphasises the significance of our free will. As God's chosen people, we must make conscious choices which reflect holy living. Leviticus 19:3 gives two examples of ways to choose a holy lifestyle: 'Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths.' Holiness includes worshipping God. The third instruction is of not worshipping idols: 'Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves' (Leviticus 19:4). There is no room for idol worship in holy living, but only for worshipping God in Spirit and truth.

From the moment one is born again, there is spiritual war between the flesh and the spirit. The sins of the flesh are many and forceful, leading to death, but the fruits of the Spirit are few but powerful and lead to everlasting life. As children born of God, we need to live a life controlled by the Spirit's power. We need to exercise holy living in our daily lives. 'Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience' (Colossians 3:12).

Holiness takes continuous practice: we must not let our sinful nature, the flesh, take victory over God's Spirit. The spiritual being in us is strengthened by the Holy Spirit, the Word of God is food for the soul, prayer as the source of communication with God and Jesus' blood that purifies us. The life of holiness is one of spiritual transformation from darkness into light. 1 Peter 2:9-10 states, 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.' This is our calling from God: to be holy as he is holy.



Father, help us to be holy as you are holy. Thank you for giving us the chance to be born again as your children. Turn our eyes from the evil things of this world and point us towards the good and blameless. Amen.

LIEUT-COLONEL EVAN MHAVSI

ZIMBABWE AND BOTSWANA TERRITORY


At the time of writing this Bible study, Lieut-Colonel Evan Mhvasi serves as an administrator at the Mazowe Boys' High School, Zimbabwe.



STRIVING FOR SAINTLINESS

PSALM 51

LIEUT-COLONEL BRIGITTE ODILE BAMANABIO



'Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.' (Psalm 51:10-12)

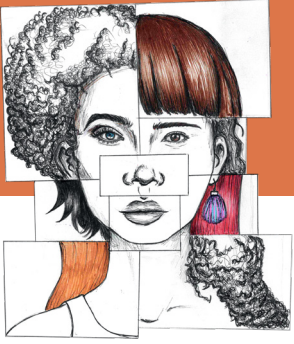
The sinful man is invited to meet the creator in order to reconcile with him. God's supreme will for his creatures is to develop a relationship based on love, communion and respect. The goal of the Cross is to restore the human being and to place God in the centre of their lives. His will is communicated to the whole humanity, to nations and to cities: Jonah 3:10; 4:11; to churches: Revelations 2:3; to groups: Acts 1:1-5; to individuals: John 21:18; Acts 9:6; 15.

Guidance from above reveals two distinct elements: the divine will and the time of God for its fulfillment. It is of the highest importance to consider that the plans of the Creator are not fulfilled instantly; rather they follow logic of setting up several parameters, the way pieces of a puzzle are assembled. A painter develops his canvas by small touches and treats each aspect with consideration. One can admire the masterpiece once all the parts of the canvas are completed. The Lord, the great architect, works like an artist in the life of a Christian, of a church, of a country in order to accomplish a perfect and glorious work. He takes time to deal with each compartment. That is why there is a distinction between the divine will and the time when it is fulfilled. Understanding this reality helps us to overcome discouragement and enables us to remain in an attitude of confidence and serenity.

'Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Saviour,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.' (Psalm 51:13-17)

The Bible reveals to us how God works throughout the ages, observing organisation and harmony (1 Corinthians 14:33). All major divine interventions take place each in a specific time. There are many biblical examples of individuals and groups chosen by God and commissioned to serve him in particular ways. Each of the following cases of God's call to holiness exhibit people who endure difficulties and sacrifice themselves as 'a broken spirit' to God's plan.

For Moses, who was sent by God to lead the Hebrew people out of the land of Egypt, obedience meant being stripped of his confidence in his human wisdom and science acquired at the court of Pharaoh and he stayed in the wilderness (Exodus 2:11-15; Acts 7:23-25). When his 'time to be holy' was fulfilled by God, he learned humility and counted solely on God to achieve the Lord's purposes. He became a channel for the hands of the Master and brought blessing for his people.



DISCUSS:

- * What does it mean to be saintly? Why should we strive for saintliness?
- * List the areas in which you have seen holiness in your life.
- * List your weaknesses and consider how you might discipline yourself.

'THE LORD, THE GREAT ARCHITECT, WORKS LIKE AN ARTIST IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN, OF A CHURCH, OF A COUNTRY IN ORDER TO ACCOMPLISH A PERFECT AND GLORIOUS WORK. HE TAKES TIME TO DEAL WITH EACH COMPARTMENT.'

For Joseph, the great promises he received took about 30 years before they were fulfilled (Genesis. 37:1-11). In the meantime, God allowed trials, dramatic and painful situations through which Joseph's character was formed. David is another example of God's will being fulfilled. After suffering humiliation, rejection, misunderstanding, contempt, loneliness, injustice, jealousy, resentment and violence, David became the anointed king of Israel.

The disciples and apostles underwent the same transforming experience: instruction, exhortations, correction, rectifications and then the new birth and the baptism of the Holy Spirit were essential for them to come to the likeness of Jesus and perform the works he planned for them long ago (Luke 6:40; Ephesians 2:10; 4:13; Philippians 1:6; Titus 3:8; Romans 12:1).

It is time for us to be saints as we are called to fulfil God's specific purpose for our generation. What a mistake to hide behind pseudo-spiritual formulas such as: 'When the Lord wants, he will intervene!' There are times when God awaits decision-making and changes in thoughts and attitude from his children before he can use us. He waits for us to be available. God is love, therefore the one who dwells in his love abides in God and God abides in them. It is time for us to be saints; let us take advantage of the holiness and purity of God. We must be embraced by his love and his power, in order to save, to rescue, to heal, to restore lives and build his Kingdom!



Lord, you want me to be holy and to live without a barrier between us, for a perfect relationship and collaboration. Help me, Lord, to start a journey of gradual holiness: to preserve holiness, to do good and to renounce every evil. Amen.

LIEUT-COLONEL BRIGITTE ODILE BAMANABIO

CONGO (BRAZZAVILLE) TERRITORY

Lieut-Colonel Brigitte is currently serving as Territorial Secretary for Women's Ministries. Her husband, Lieut-Colonel Eugene Bamanabio, is currently serving as the Chief Secretary of the Congo (Brazzaville) Territory. Together, they have a daughter. After serving as corps officers at various corps, they were appointed to the Rwanda and Burundi Command and the Uganda Territory. She is happy to serve the Lord and is proud to be part of the great family that is The Salvation Army.



A PURE LIFE

PSALM 119

COLONEL SARAH KATUSABE WANDULU

'How can a young person stay on the path of purity?

By living according to your word.

I seek you with all my heart;

do not let me stray from your commands.

I have hidden your word in my heart

that I might not sin against you.' (Psalm 119:9-11)

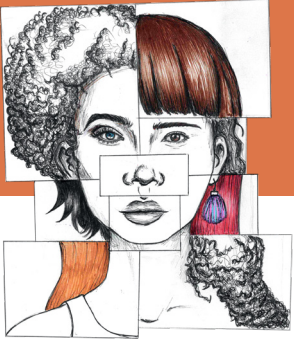
This Bible passage gives us guidance on how we can keep our ways pure amid the crazy and difficult world we live in. When you look at the movies and music produced in the current times, there is evidence that society glorifies immorality, making it challenging to live a clean and pure life. Keeping our life pure is done by keeping our life in line with God's Word. When we delight ourselves in God's Word, we will hide it in our heart, meditate upon it and share it with others. A person who obeys God will be blessed and will rejoice in pure living. Although it is a young person referred to in this psalm, the difficulty applies to a person of any age. Most people will not ask themselves these important questions because it is not an easy path to take as it involves leaving the past behind and living in the way of the Lord. Despite this, let us not shrink from the glorious readiness of living pure and noble lives. We are drowning in a sea of impurity and everywhere we look we are tempted to lead impure lives.

We cannot do this on our own; we must have good counsel, strength and more empowering people around us to overcome the many temptations around us. The question would be; where can we find that strength and wisdom? The Bible must be your guide and you must exercise great watchfulness that your way and life reflect its teachings. Even with the most accurate map you can still lose your way if you don't follow it carefully so we can also sin without knowing: 'I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands' (Psalm 119:10).

Although we have the desire to seek God, we often do so weakly with little or no confidence because of sin's hold over our lives. David started each day by seeking God's presence with all his heart: he desired to commune with God personally. A transformed heart should yearn for fellowship with God. God alone sees the heart and the heart sees God. Jesus said, in 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Matthew 5:8).

If we leave the ways of God, we most certainly will not find God for he is found by walking in his ways. The person who trusts God's Word will not wander from him. Our fallen thoughts, wills and desires are enemies to God, unless God's Word is hidden in us. 'The best thing – 'your word'; hidden in the best place, – 'in my heart'; for the best of purposes, 'that I might not sin against you.' Hiding God's Word in our hearts is a shield from sin. To be healthy Christians, we should not treat the Bible as optional reading material, but as a book that is vital to our living.

'THE BIBLE MUST BE YOUR GUIDE AND YOU MUST EXERCISE GREAT WATCHFULNESS THAT YOUR WAY AND LIFE REFLECT ITS TEACHINGS. EVEN WITH THE MOST ACCURATE MAP YOU CAN STILL LOSE YOUR WAY.'



DISCUSS:

- * What impact would daily study of the Bible bring to your personal spiritual life?
- * Read 1 Peter 2:1-10. How does this raise the bar of holiness for a follower of Jesus?
- * What exactly is holiness? How can we achieve it, since we need it to be able to see the Lord? (Hebrews 12:14)

Meditation is more than reading the Bible and believing it: it's applying the Scripture to everyday life. I challenge you to consider memorising a couple of verses each week. Write verses that particularly speak to you on small cards or sticky notes, keep them around you, then review them whenever you have opportunity and you'll have a heart full of the Word and a life that reflects it. However, memorisation alone will not keep us from sin; we must also put God's Word to work in our lives, making it a vital guide for every thing we do.

Life in the secular world is not designed to include a prayer time. Work starts early in the morning and continues late into the night. Weeks may pass before we even think of prayer. If we are too busy to read God's Word, then our lives will not reflect his image. Verse 16 reads, 'I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.' The more one reads the Bible, the more one believes in God's saving power. The Bible is filled with many stories about God's deliverance. These testimonies inspire faith and cannot be taken for granted. A daily dose of the Word of God will increase your faith.

Christians are encouraged to develop a habit of having a quiet time with God, reading and understanding his Word as a way to avoid shallowness and lukewarm status in your Christian walk with the Lord. As we worship God in spirit and truth, he reveals himself to us, and the more of himself he reveals the more we worship him. Those who internalise and rejoice in God's Word become pure in heart: 'But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his son, purifies us from all sin' (1 John 1:7).



Help me, Holy Spirit, to understand your Word so that I may remain pure. Father, give me a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Amen.

COLONEL SARAH KATUSABE WANDULU

MALAWI TERRITORY

Sarah is Ugandan by nationality, but currently serves as the Territorial President of Women's Ministries. After her parents passed away when she was eight years old, she was adopted and raised by a family of Salvation Army officers. She is married to Moses and they have four adult children – Catherine, Evangeline, Peter and Levi – and three grandchildren – Keith, Karl and Lilly. She loves God, her family and her ministry as a Salvation Army officer with all her heart.



THE VALUE OF A PURE HEART

PSALM 139:23-24

MAJOR GAUDENCIA OМУKONYI

'Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.' (Psalm 139:23-24 KJV)

According to *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, 'heart cleansing' is the term used to emphasise the removal of unworthy, self-centred attitudes of the mind and heart. Heart cleansing implies that our motivation has been purified and all our actions can be driven by love. The concept of pure motives, however, must be considered with great care. Using purification of motives as a foundation to living, we may refuse to admit and confess any specific personal acts of sin and only 'mistakes' are admitted. Purity is a gift to which we open ourselves and which we allow to claim us, but never use to our own advantage.

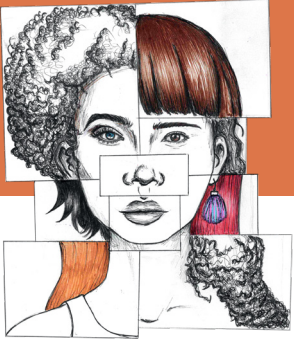
Psalm 139 is a psalm of David: 'a man after [God's] own heart' (1 Samuel 13:14). In Psalm 139:23, David expressed his request for the examination of the inner heart: 'Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts'. Here, David prayed that the Lord might search and try the character of his inner man, implying the seriousness of the heart's spiritual growth and transformation of lives. David asked the Lord for a deep, thorough examination of his spiritual conduct, his inner heart and his thought.

Later, in Psalm 139:24, David prayed for the Lord to reveal any impure characteristic that might be in him: 'And see if there be any wicked way in me.' David knew that, as a human being, he was not as perfect as God and for this reason David asked for the Lord to reveal and reprove anything that might be wrong in his character. David also expressed his request for direction, saying, 'and lead me in the way everlasting.' Here, David asked the Lord to lead him in the way of righteousness and true holiness.

The Greek word for 'pure', as found in Matthew 5:8, is *katharos*. It means to be 'clean, blameless, and unstained from guilt'. Interestingly, the word can refer specifically to that which is purified by fire or by pruning: John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11), Malachi speaks of the Messiah as being like a 'refiner's fire' (Malachi 3:2), Jesus refers to believers as being the branches and to himself as being the vine (John 15:1-17). For a vine to produce fruit, it must be pruned. Those who are truly pure, then, are those who have been declared so by the sanctifying work of Jesus Christ, his refining fire and his pruning.

As believers, let us always ask God to examine our hearts, to search us, try us and know our hearts and thoughts. We should let God examine the depth and details of our inner character, for it is only God who can change our character. God has the ability to know our standards of righteousness, godliness, holiness and if we are pursuing spiritual growth and

'AS BELIEVERS, LET US ALWAYS ASK GOD TO EXAMINE OUR HEARTS, TO SEARCH US, TRY US AND KNOW OUR HEARTS AND THOUGHTS. WE SHOULD LET GOD EXAMINE THE DEPTH AND DETAILS OF OUR INNER CHARACTER.'



DISCUSS:

- * What do you understand by the phrase 'inner heart'?
- * Describe the evil thoughts that can emanate from the human heart.
- * How can we live a life of righteousness, godliness and holiness?

transformation. We have a duty to ask God to examine our inner being and correct any wicked ways that might be wrong in our lives. Our thoughts, attitudes, purposes, plans, words and actions should confirm that we are pure in the eyes of God.

It takes courage to invite God to show us our sins, weaknesses and defects. Usually, as humans, we want to hide these negative qualities and assume that God is unaware of them. We can identify these behaviours in ourselves: we don't like to see our sins and weaknesses revealed; we don't feel that we have to dwell on them; we don't want God to see them; we certainly don't want others to see them.

Often, we respond to sin by living in denial which keeps us from looking at these issues clearly. It is essential to have courage and pray to God, inviting him to correct us, so that we can walk in his paths. This is the only way to grow in our Christian faith and live with a pure heart. It is only when we fully open up to God that he can show us our problems, things we are often blind to. When we become aware of these attitudes and behaviours, we can begin to receive help in overcoming them.

One way to prevent ourselves from sinning is found in Psalm 119:11: 'I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin'. Every Christian needs to spend time in the Word of God each day to keep them away from sinning: there is power to keep us living for God and not for ourselves. We need to ask God to search our hearts, asking him to identify sin in us so that we can confess, resist it and be counted as faithful children of God. If you want to become more like the father, the only way to be transformed is by inviting him to look at your heart and examine your motives, thoughts and desires so that you can be made pure.

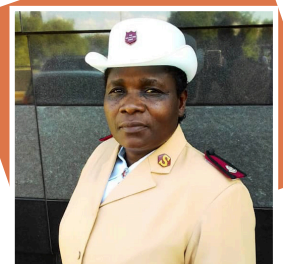


Let us pray that God may examine our hearts for the promotion of spiritual growth: that he will reveal any wicked characteristics that might be in us and lead us in the way of righteousness and true holiness. Amen.

MAJOR GAUDENCIA OMUKONYI

ZIMBABWE AND BOTSWANA TERRITORY


Gaudencia currently serves as the Director of Special Services and Spiritual Life Development Officer at the officer training college. The training college is an associate college of the University of Zimbabwe. She originally came from Kenya West Territory. She is married to Major Julius Omukonyi, who currently serves as the Training Principal at the officer training college, and they are blessed with four children; Japhlet, Berit, Mercy and William.



TO BE LIKE JESUS

ISAIAH 6:1-8

MAJOR HOPE NWOKEDI



Holiness carries the thought of being separated from the ungodly ways of the world and set apart for love, for service and for worship: it is the goal and purpose of our election in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). Holiness is an attribute of God and what is true of God must be true of his people. It means being like Christ and being dedicated to him. The Army Mother, Catherine Booth, said that it is 'a standard not only to be aimed at, but to be attained to a standard of victory over sin, the world, the flesh and the devil, real, living, reigning, triumphing Christianity.'

Isaiah 6:1-8 explains Isaiah's vision after the death of King Uzziah. The vision that Isaiah had following King Uzziah's death was in three phases. These phases can be seen as an 'upward', 'inward' and 'outward' vision. He had the vision of God's holiness (upward vision); the vision of himself (inward vision); and the vision of the people he lived with whom he was to minister to (outward vision):

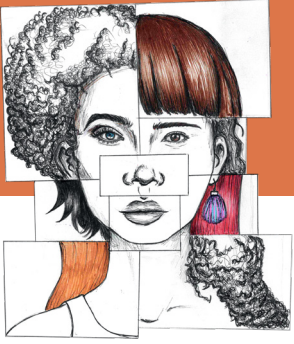
Isaiah 6:5-7 reads, "'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.'" Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

In full view of God's holiness, Isaiah instantly realised his own sinfulness and uncleanness and that of his people. He saw how filthy and unholy he was though he had been prophesying in the preceding chapters. He saw that he needed a touch of cleansing to be fit to remain in God's presence. The vision gave Isaiah a proper understanding of his message and call, revealing that God's glory, majesty and holiness demand that those who serve him also must be holy in thoughts, words and deeds.

Having been cleansed and made holy, Isaiah was given a specific commission to proclaim the word of the Lord to the people who were spiritually blind, deaf and insensitive. 1 Peter 1:15 states, 'But as he who has called you is holy, so be you holy in all you do.' God expects us to be holy so that we can be fit to be called his people, serve him faithfully in this present age and live with him in eternity; for, without holiness, no eyes shall see the Lord (Matthew 5:8, Hebrews 12:14).

The recognition of the need for God's sanctifying work in our lives will inevitably accompany such a vision. We can have a similar result to that of Isaiah – having an earnest confession, glorious cleansing and powerful commissioning by God in regard to his will and call (Isaiah 6:5-8). Holiness is achievable through the power of the Holy Spirit living in us after our conversion experience (Romans 8:11-14). The Holy Spirit within us brings the whole life of Christ into the whole of our personalities so that the whole love of God can be relayed into the whole world.

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DISCUSS:

- * Is holiness of life achievable for believers today?
- * What makes it difficult for God's people to display holiness in their daily living?
- * What practical behaviours can we see in an unholy person?

Just as the Salvation Army chorus, written by General John Gowans, says:

'To be like Jesus!
This hope possesses me,
His Spirit helping me,
Like him I'll be.'
(SASB 328)

To be holy is to imitate Christ and to put Christian faith into practice. We are to allow the Holy Spirit to direct our thoughts, words and actions to please God. Article 10 in The Salvation Army's Articles of Faith is derived from 1 Thessalonians. During this passage, it is recorded that Paul prayed for believers in Christ to be sanctified by God through and through, affecting the three components of man: spirit, soul and body. Paul understood that this cleansing would keep believers blameless unto the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Our whole being is invoked in achieving the holiness of life – spirit, soul and body – on daily basis. In exhibiting the holiness in our lives, we must be ready to let go of unwholesome speech from our mouths, bitterness, rage, slander and bearing of grudges against one another. We should be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as God forgave us.

Therefore, let us desire to live holy lives for God in our time. Let perfect love rule in our hearts, for holiness begins from the heart that is genuinely converted. With God, through his Spirit, it is achievable. We should go forth and spread the 'aroma of Jesus Christ' in the world (2 Corinthians 2:14-15). The world needs us while Christ leads us. We must be true to God and men, for we are the moving epistles that men read. We can go a long way to win the world for Christ by daily living out practical holiness. Our lives of holiness can lighten the darkness of the world.



Father, lead us in the way of holy living. Purify our lips, minds and thoughts so that we may be acceptable in your presence. Amen.

MAJOR HOPE NWOKEDI

NIGERIA TERRITORY

Having served in eastern and western parts of the territory as corps officer and Divisional Youth Officer, Major Nwokedi is presently serving as corps officer of Okoko Corps in Lagos City Division. She prays that God will help her to maintain a holy living so that she may touch lives in her corps ministry.



THE REQUIREMENT AND THE REWARD

AMOS 5:14

CAPTAIN OLIVIA MUNN-SHIRSATH

Life is more fun when you are good. At least, that is what I was told as a young person. To be honest, it didn't resonate as true at the time. I was enjoying being 'bad' and the ideals of holiness held very little appeal for me. It seemed to me that holiness was an optional add-on for Christians. I couldn't see any reason why my habits should change. I knew my theology well enough to defend my case: 'I'm a sinner saved by grace'. I knew that I was going to Heaven because of God's kindness and not because of my works. I was enjoying my sin, but I was secure in my salvation. Holiness looked simultaneously boring and hard.

**'SEEK GOOD, NOT EVIL,
THAT YOU MAY LIVE.
THEN THE LORD GOD
ALMIGHTY WILL BE
WITH YOU, JUST AS
YOU SAY HE IS.'**

The prophet Amos preached to a people who felt secure. After all, they were God's chosen people – the nation of Israel! However, just like my own immature pattern, they fell into sin and thought their relationship with God wouldn't be harmed. So, he sent Amos to remind them:

'Seek good, not evil,
that you may live.
Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you,
just as you say he is' (Amos 5:14).

The people must have been shocked to hear something conditional from the Lord. They rested so confidently in the fact that God always kept his end of the covenant that they didn't consider the ramifications if they did not uphold

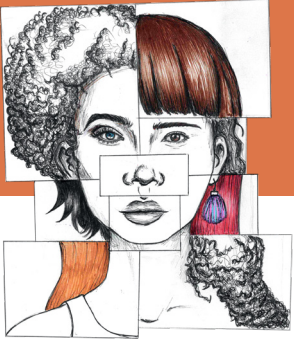
their end of the covenant. Here, we meet with a tension of the Christian life: we are not saved by our own righteousness, but we are commanded to be holy. Holiness is explicitly required, 'But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy"' (1 Peter 1:15-16) and the even more sobering, 'Without holiness no one will see the Lord' (Hebrews 12:14).

Amos's message could be read as a stern warning, or as a beautiful promise. When we seek what is good, we will truly live. Many people seek evil and still live. They aren't pursuing God's will in any form and yet they may live a long and prosperous life. But, of course, life is more than survival. I've always been the kind of person who knows how to celebrate life and enjoy luxuries. But life is more than pleasure and happiness. True, abundant life only comes from Christ.

In John 10:10, Jesus teaches, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.' This is very different from my original viewpoint: this doesn't sound boring at all! Jesus' plan for us to have life to the full often seems to be a paradox. Doesn't he invite us to take up our cross every day? Doesn't he warn us that we will be persecuted? Yes. This is the great mystery of the upside-down Kingdom of God: as we lose our lives, we find them. As we die with Christ, we live with Christ.

Abundant life isn't defined in the way the world expects. The world might expect that abundant life includes riches and fame, constant happiness and comfort. But the truth is that real, abundant, eternal life is found in knowing God (John 17:3). This verse contains this same eternal principle that is reiterated eight centuries earlier when the book of Amos was written. Amos declares that as the people seek good, not only will they live, but the Lord God Almighty will be with them.

The presence of God is life itself – it is the greatest treasure anyone could find. The presence of God is the reward of obedience to God. Then, one might say, I will work as hard as I can to know God! I will obey all of his commands! And yet, if we look to the book of Micah, we see that obedience is unexpectedly simple:



DISCUSS:

- * When was the last time that you were assured of God's presence with you?
- * How can you choose to actively walk with God this week?
- * How do you reconcile the tension between the call to holiness and salvation by grace?

'He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

God commands obedience, but 'his commands are not burdensome' (1 John 5:3). In a counter-cultural twist, Micah tells the people that God does not want their burnt offerings (Micah 6:6-7). Rather, he requires for them to do only three things: act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. The presence of God is both our requirement and our reward. We don't have to work to earn our salvation, but we do need to have a relationship with God. Walk with God and you have already received your intrinsic reward.

This reminds me of walking with my friend in New York. I often cross the street when I shouldn't and I don't mind breaking the pedestrian laws. But she always obeys the street signs! Therefore, when I walk with her, I also obey the street signs. I'm not going to leave her behind, because I want to walk with her. It's about being together. When we walk with God, we keep in step with him. When we walk with God, we act justly. When we walk with God, we love mercy. We walk with God because his presence is worth it!



God, to know you is to truly live. Forgive me for the times when I take your grace too lightly. Help me to walk closely in your presence and to follow the way to life. Amen.

CAPTAIN OLIVIA MUNN-SHIRSATH

USA EASTERN TERRITORY

Olivia and her husband, Pratik, are the corps officers of the Times Square Corps in midtown Manhattan. She has a passion for creative arts and urban ministry. Olivia and Pratik are the founders of The Glory Shop, a discipleship school for artists in the heart of the city. Olivia is an author and her first book, *The Uprising: A Holy Revolution?*, is about the radical notion that holiness is possible. She loves preaching, writing, cooking and trying new restaurants.



FROM THE HEART

MATTHEW 5:13-6:29

CAPTAIN GLENIS VIERA

The Sermon on the Mount has been the guiding light for followers of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, for more than 2,000 years. In this passage, Jesus established his teachings as a Rabbi. The crowds were already eager to hear about this Rabbi that had been teaching, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and performing healing miracles. Religious leaders were also among the crowds, maybe out of curiosity, maybe with malicious intent, maybe even because deep inside they wanted to follow the ways of Jesus.

'THERE IS NO GOOD IN KEEPING THESE COMMANDMENTS IF THEY ARE ONLY DONE FOR OUTWARD APPEARANCE.'

As Jesus addressed the crowds, he used lessons to teach effectively and practically. He started off by telling them that they are to be salt and light to the world. He wanted them to understand their purpose in the world; for the Jewish believers to be salt (seasoning and preservative) for Israel; for the Gentiles, to be light to the world.

As we arrive to our passage in Matthew 5:13-6:29, Jesus makes clear that it is not his purpose to annul or 'do without' the law, but that he has come to fulfil it, in other words, to make it whole. Jesus came to give the right interpretation to the Law. Without him the Law would be incomplete as it had been until this moment. In context, we must understand that there were many interpretations to the Law given by the religious leaders. These interpretations added 'unnecessary' mandates to those given by God to Moses.

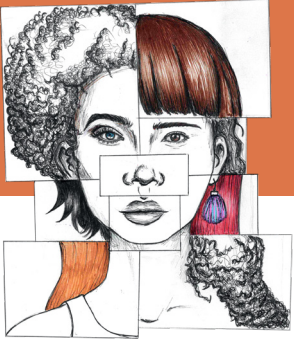
Now, Jesus explains how the Law should be observed. He wants to emphasise that keeping the Law is a matter of the heart. There is no good in keeping these commandments if they are only done for outward appearance while hearts are full of hate, bitterness, greed and lust. Here, we see Jesus turning all things upside down, better yet, inside out. Holiness is a matter of the heart! This is Jesus' premise for his sermon.

Holiness is not what appears in the surface. In Jesus' time we have the example of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These religious leaders followed the Law for outward appearances. Jesus addressed their attitude in our passage in Matthew 6. He tells the disciples to not be 'showy' in their practices. 'Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet'; 'When you pray, don't be like hypocrites'; 'And when you fast don't put on a sad face like the hypocrites.' On the contrary, Jesus explains that what was done in private, without fanfare, would receive reward in the Kingdom of Heaven. What a concept! The religious leaders must have been furious.

Today we have this kind of attitude among believers. It is much too common to seek recognition, to be looked at, to receive attention. God looks at the heart and it is from there that he wants us to be transformed. How can we love if we are bitter and hateful? How can we follow God's mandates if we grumble and complain in our hearts?

Jesus explains that the right way of following the Law is by following from the heart, from where no one else can see our intentions. These commandments are given by example in understanding that the Kingdom of God, that Jesus came to reveal, is one that is interested in the matters of the heart.

Love should be the driving force in our Christian walk. Love for God, love for neighbour (including our enemies) and love for ourselves. If we say we love God, we should do what he says out of the desire to show him our



DISCUSS:

- * Am I 'showy' in my Christian living?
- * What are the true intentions of my heart?
- * Do I live daily as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount?

affection. If we say we love our neighbour, we should respect, uplift, engage, and forgive out of the desire to show them our affection. If we say we love ourselves, we should take care of our bodies, respect ourselves, not harbour hate and bitterness out of the desire to show ourselves affection.

Holiness is a matter of the heart. We can only get closer to God by having pure hearts that seek to please him from the inside out. That can only be done by the work of Jesus Christ who showed us that we can follow God's commandments with hearts that are pure and contrite.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul expands on this concept of the heart:

'If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.'

Finally, in Hebrews 12:14 we read, 'Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.'

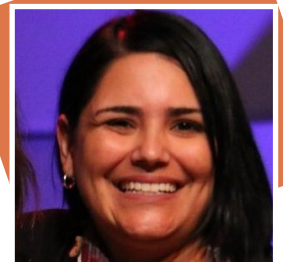


Jesus, your teachings are perfect and whole. I come to you in humbleness recognising my need for you in my heart. As I go about following you help me to have a pure heart. May my intentions be full of love for you, for my neighbour and for myself. Take away all arrogance from my heart. Let it be only space for your ways in my life. May I be a true disciple of your teachings. Amen.

CAPTAIN GLENIS VIERA

MIDDLE EAST REGION

Captain Viera is currently serving as the corps officer to the United Arab Emirates and Assistant Regional Commander. She has a wonderful husband and two beautiful daughters who keep life fun and interesting! She is originally from Puerto Rico with a heart for global ministry. Her passion is intercultural ministry and she finds purpose in diversity.



LOVING GOD AND LOVING OTHERS: HOLINESS IN PRACTICE

MARK 12:28-34

MAJOR JENNIFER HALE

Scottish pastor, Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, 'My people's greatest need is my personal holiness'. Personal holiness is at the heart of Mark 12:28-34. Talking of personal holiness, Colonel Lindsey Rowe said that 'the central theme to holiness is spiritual formation which means that we are being formed into the image of Christ; we are becoming more and more like Jesus.' As we take a closer look at Mark 12, we'll see that Jesus sums up the way of holiness in two commands.

Earlier in Mark 12, it is stated 'the leaders sent some Pharisees and supporters of Herod to trap Jesus into saying something he could be arrested for' (v 13). It's in the context of this questioning that one of the teachers was listening to this debate. He was a teacher of the law – a religious man, no doubt highly educated with a good knowledge of the Scriptures – yet, he is confronted by Christ and his teaching. He heard that Jesus was answering well and, either out of interest or in an attempt to trick Jesus, the teacher asks his own question: 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' (Mark 12:28)

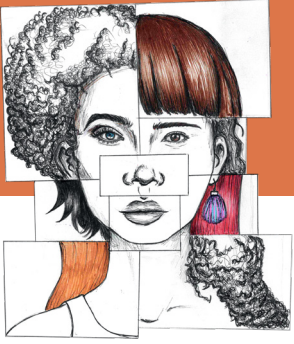
Jesus responds: "'The most important one ... is this: 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.'" (Mark 12:29-31).

One thing is for certain, the Scriptures are clear about our love for God and our love for others. In 1 John 4:8 we read that 'whoever does not love God does not know God, because God is love.' A little further along in that same text, we read, 'those who love God must also love their fellow believers.' Again, in Romans 13:8 *NLT*, Paul writes, 'If you love your neighbour, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law.'

This is what Jesus was teaching in Mark 12: love is our inner commitment to God, expressed in all our behaviour and relationships. The Scriptures are clear – if you do not show love to others, you cannot claim to love God (1 John 4:20-21). The *NIV Application Commentary* states that our love for God is a response to God's love for us. In other words, we are obedient to Jesus because we love him and that's reflected in the way we live, in our responses, in our speech, in our actions and in our most private thoughts.

Jesus' response to this important question includes the *shema* that's found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. The *shema* (Hebrew word for 'hear', pronounced Shi-MAH) states, 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' As a man of study, the teacher would have known it well. For the people of God, this prayer became

“THE MOST IMPORTANT ONE IS THIS: ‘HEAR O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ THE SECOND IS THIS: ‘LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF.’ THERE IS NO COMMANDMENT GREATER THAN THESE.”



DISCUSS:

- * What does holiness look like practically in our lives? How do we live out our various roles as mother, wife, friend, co-worker?
- * As you read these verses, what is your initial response?
- * What does it look like for us to daily love God with our heart, soul, mind and strength?
- * As a woman following Christ, what does your 'all' look like?
- * How do we love with grace and truth in our world today?

a confession of faith by which they acknowledged the one true God and his commandments for them (*Holman Bible Dictionary*).

Shema is a common word in the Old Testament. For example, Proverbs 20:12 states that God made ears that shema, which is more than just hearing sound. It means 'pay attention', 'focus', 'listen'; the word shema also calls for a response, not just listening or hearing. In the context of Psalm 27:7 asking God to shema is asking him to act, to do something. Similarly, God also asked his people to respond – Exodus 19:5 – Shema, shema – listen closely. In this verse, listening is basically the same as keeping the covenant – listen and obey (*The Bible Project*). In the New Testament context, however, Jesus uses the shema prayer to call for a response. Heart, soul, mind and strength – everything was to be devoted to a loving God.

The second part of Jesus' answer was taken from Leviticus 19:18 – 'love your neighbour as yourself.' Jesus answered the teacher by summarising the entire Ten Commandments – the first four tell us to love God and the final six command us to love people. If we are to love God, then we cannot help but love others, as we saw earlier. However, loving our neighbour does not mean that we never confront their sin. Jesus held the perfect balance of grace and truth.



Lord, help me to remember that holiness is as much about loving others as it is about loving you because there cannot be one without the other. Help me in my daily living to seek you first and love the people in my life as you would through the power of the Holy Spirit. Give me grace and wisdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

MAJOR JENNIFER HALE

CANADA AND BERMUDA TERRITORY

Major Jennifer is currently serving in the Canada and Bermuda Territory as Territorial Secretary for Candidates. With her husband, she has served as a corps officer in Newfoundland, Bermuda and Ontario. Before coming to territorial headquarters, they were in the Ontario Great Lakes Division as divisional youth secretaries. Together, they have a deep desire to see people actively engaged in winning the world for Jesus.



PROTAGONISTS OF GOD'S WILL

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3

COMMISSIONER DEISE ELIASSEN

For many years I learned about 'sanctification'. I loved everything I heard and always sought this experience. Although I was sincere in my quest, I could never find it. God, in his grace, made me find just the opposite: my humanity and sinfulness. I was so frustrated! I knew that the will of God was sanctification, but all I could do was the contrary. The Word of God has taught me that sanctification is not achieved by force, self-effort or faking it.

LUKE 24:46-49 (VOICE)

Jesus: This is what the Scriptures said: that the promised Anointed One should suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, that in His name a radical change of thought and life should be preached, and that in His name the forgiveness of sins should be preached, beginning in Jerusalem and extending to all nations. You have witnessed the fulfillment of these things. So I am sending my Father's promise to you. Stay in the city until you receive it – until power from heaven comes upon you.

**'FOR THIS IS
THE WILL OF
GOD, YOUR
SANCTIFICATION'**

1. Recognising Christ's lordship:

Luke 24:46 talks about a fulfilled promise, Christ's death and resurrection, which compels us to recognise the lordship of Jesus. As a man, however, Jesus set the example of living the Father's will on earth. He was obedient to death on the cross (Philippians 2:8).

Likewise, we must submit our old nature with its passions, our own will with its carnal inclinations. The cross shows us that this is God's will. Sanctification means to put an end our human deviances and to be totally surrendered and available to God. Doing good deeds is not necessarily proof of sanctification if one is not completely available to God and lives to please him entirely. Sanctification is to cease to belong to oneself and to belong entirely to God. 'And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.' 2 Corinthians 5:15 (NIV). (See also Romans 14:7-9 and 1 Peter 2:9).

Only those who recognise the lordship of Jesus can live in sanctification. This is sanctification: a life from Christ and for Christ! No longer to self, no longer according to the flesh or the world: 'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me' (Galatians 2:20).

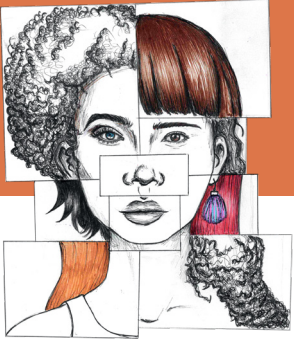
2. Reproducing Christ's likeness:

Luke 24:47 encourages radical change in the name of Jesus, allowing us to reproduce Christ's likeness (v 47).

Sanctification means to be one with Jesus. It is to say that Christ lives in me, he is everything to me: 'For of him, and through him, and to him are all things' (Romans 11:36). Sanctification is not something that is achieved, rather someone to be received: Jesus. 'It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1:30). Becoming more and more like Christ is the result of being free from sin. Just as Jesus lived a sinless life, the more we consider ourselves 'dead to sin' (Romans 6:11) and live a life of purity, we will be more like Jesus. By offering ourselves to God, sin is no longer our lord, and we are most clearly identified with Christ (Romans 6:1-14).

3. Representing Christ's living:

Luke 24:49 talks about an outpour of power from Heaven which comes over us and empowers us to represent Christ's living.



DISCUSS:

- * How can you say a full YES to Christ's lordship today?
- * What evidence do you see of Christ's likeness in you?
- * Which fruits of Jesus' life in you benefit others?

When Jesus began his ministry on earth, he was baptised by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:13-17). From then on, he started to preach, to heal, to act with power as his words penetrated the minds and hearts of people by the power of the Holy Spirit. His miracles manifested the power of God through his life reaching other people.

This is the result of a life full of the Spirit of God:

- We become witnesses of Jesus Christ to help others to grow (Romans 15:14). Bringing eternity to here and now, improving our relationships with self and others and to be in communion with God, with self and others 'in unity' (1 Corinthians 1:10). Jesus prayed for this (John 17:19, 23).
- We receive freedom, authority and support; sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit.
- We can commit to personal and communal realities of discovering God in daily situations.
- Despite human difficulties, we can be a daily witness of love sharing in service and practicing justice.

CONCLUSION:

Sanctification is a transmission and not an imitation. It is not by works, but it is the fruit of the presence of Jesus in us. Sanctification is not a set of rules to be followed, but the flowing of Jesus' life in us. When I finally understood that I could have the life of Jesus manifested in me, I began to experience the sanctification of Christ in me and through me. What a difference in thought and deed! It is still my aim to be a protagonist of God's will, becoming more and more like Jesus.



Dear heavenly Father,
Thank you for Jesus' life in me. Help me to be more and more like Jesus to glorify your name and be a blessing to the world. Amen.

COMMISSIONER DEISE ELIASSEN

SOUTH AMERICA WEST TERRITORY


Commissioner Deise is currently serving in the South America West Territory as Territorial President of Women's Ministries. Her personal mission is to deepen her relationship with God and others, letting Jesus' light shine on her. Her previous appointments in Brazil, Mozambique and at International Headquarters have also allowed her to love and share the new life she finds in Jesus with each person she meets.



LIGHT, LIFE AND LOVE

JOHN 12:42-50

STEPHANIE CHAGAS-BIJL



'Then Jesus cried out, "Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that no one who believes should stay in darkness. If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.'" (John 12:44-47)

In these closing verses of John 12, we witness Jesus' final moments before he withdraws from the crowds to be with the disciples for the Passover. To John, Jesus' discourse seems to draw together his key teachings since the beginning of his ministry.

Despite Jesus' signs and wonders, many of the Jews still did not believe him. Those who had come to faith were fearful in confessing him publicly, 'for they loved praise from men more than praise from God'. Jesus cries out that whoever believes in him will gain so much more than they can imagine, for he has come into the world as a light.

Throughout the book of John, we see the use of this symbolic language of light. Jesus is the light that has been shining in the darkness of the world, calling people to follow it, to be transformed by it, so that they too may become sons and daughters of light (12:36).

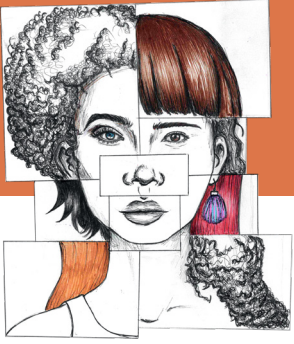
I was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, home to one of the seven wonders of the modern world, the Christ the Redeemer statue. Built strategically on top of the Corcovado mountain, I have always found it such a symbolic monument to have in a city with so much life and beauty, but equal amount of darkness reflected in the unceasing violence and relentless poverty. At night, the figure of Christ is lit up so that it is still visible from all over the city. Just as the statue is visible at all times and from all points, it acts as a constant reminder that Christ is constantly available to all.

'IN THESE VERSES, THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN LIGHT AND DARKNESS, DEATH TO SELF AND LIFE IN CHRIST IS REACHING ITS CLIMAX. JESUS IS INVITING ALL WHO HEAR TO RECEIVE HIM.'

While there is light for the whole world to see, not all choose to see it. John's opening words remind us that though the 'light shines in the darkness, the darkness has not understood it' (1:5). To reject the light is to reject the hope of salvation and eternal life (12:50), another key theme in the book of John. Assurance of eternal life means choosing to know Jesus right now in the present time. This means receiving all the spiritual blessings, deep joy and peace that it brings and the wondrous hope of being together with God in the life hereafter.

In these verses, the struggle between light and darkness, death to self and life in Christ is reaching its climax. Jesus is inviting all who hear to receive him, to allow him to open their eyes and soften their hearts. To see him not like a distant statue, made of stone, far away and out of reach, but as a living manifestation of God's sacrificial love among his people.

It is this love that Jesus talks about in John 13:34-35. As the disciples gather with Jesus to hear what would turn out to be his final teachings, he speaks of a new commandment, 'As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (13:34). While to love God and others was not something new (Leviticus 19:18), loving the way Jesus loved was radical. John gives us



DISCUSS:

- * In John 12:42-43, some of the Jews were afraid to let others know that they were following Jesus. Have you ever been scared to profess Jesus to others? Why do you think that was?
- * How are expressions of light, life and love displayed in your life? How do you see these in other believers?
- * What are some of the barriers to living out holiness in action in your day-to-day life?

glimpses of this by the way Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman (4:1-26), wept at Lazarus's death (11:33-36), fed the five thousand (6:1-15) and called his disciples to follow him (19:30). A love willing to lay down one's life for another.

A few years ago, my mum and dad became seriously ill at the same time. They couldn't look after each other so close family and friends came to help us. I remember that the practical love shown blessed me deeply. While their siblings came to be with them, their neighbours provided meals, cleaned the house, bought food and drove them to medical appointments. This love in action challenged me in the way that I seek to love others.

In a world so desperate for light, we need to resist the darkness of our own sinful nature and allow Jesus to shine his light into our hearts. In a world so desperate for life we must be open to receive the abundance of life that Jesus offers through the choices that we make. In a world so desperate for love we are called to leave aside our selfish desires and pour out to others the same measure of this new love we have received.

This is how others will know that we are his disciples. This is holiness in action.



Lord Jesus, thank you for the hope that comes from knowing you as the light that guides me, and the source of everlasting life. Renew my love for you and others, so that the reality of your presence in me may be a witness to those I encounter. Amen.

STEPHANIE CHAGAS-BIJL

UNITED KINGDOM TERRITORY WITH THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Stephanie Chagas-Bijl is a Salvationist living in London and works at the UKI territorial headquarters helping to create discipleship and outreach resources. Equipping others in their spiritual journey and seeing them grow in their relationship with Christ is one of her deepest passions. Although born in Brazil, she is also half British and enjoys travelling to new places and spending quality time with close family and friends.



FROM VINE TO BRANCH TO FRUIT

JOHN 15:1-8

CAPTAIN MIRIAM KJELLGREN

How often have I read this text and thought of nothing but: 'How well am I abiding? Do I bear fruit? Not as much as I should! Surely I will be cut off any day now!' I don't believe I have been alone in reading Jesus' inviting imagery with some anxiety. With all that fretting about my own accomplishments, a text that is about who Jesus is becomes a text about me. A text that is about who we as the church are – in Jesus – becomes a text about me. A text that is about what Jesus does – through us – becomes a text about me.

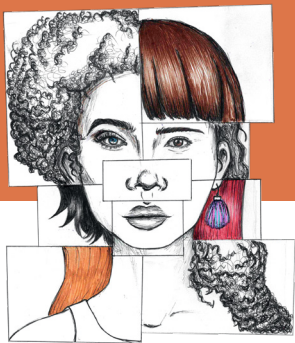
When Jesus speaks about the vine, he is not just using a clever metaphor about gardening. In the Old Testament, the vine and vineyard are images for Israel, the people of God (Ezekiel 19:10, Psalm 80:9-16, Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-6). The image communicates the close relationship between God and the people through which God fulfils purpose. The vine grower carries the responsibility for the vine and its branches. It is an intimate, caring and binding relationship. So, when Jesus says, 'I am the vine,' it is first and foremost a proclamation about who Jesus is. He is now the one on whom God's purposes rest, the one through whom salvation will come.

The branches on the vine are Jesus' disciples. The relationship between vine and branches is intimate, organic, and essential to the life of both vine and branch. In this image we get a hint of the mysterious one-ness, the profound union, between Jesus and us, his disciples. He is the one from whom life flows. He is the one that enables our fruit-bearing. The flow is outward – from vine to branch to fruit. True – there can be no fruit without branches, but in this imagery the initiative is God's.

Jesus repeats the 'I am' saying in verse 5, and we are reminded not to not use this text to overanalyse the qualification of each individual disciple. The process of fruit-bearing naturally includes some pruning and cutting. But we don't need to be afraid of being cut off. Remember verse 3: 'You have already been cleansed by the word I have spoken to you.' Fruitfulness is not a requirement for becoming part of the vine, and not something I can will into existence. Rather, it flows from the vine. Only Jesus can make it happen.

We participate through our abiding. And again, the emphasis is not on us and our adequacy, but on Jesus: 'abide in me,' he says, repeatedly. The concept of abiding is important in John's gospel. Already at the outset of the gospel, when Jesus meets his first disciples, we are told that they remained with him (John 1:39). Later, as a result from the witness of the Samaritan woman, the villagers asked Jesus to remain with them (John 4:40). It seems that the mutual abiding or remaining is essential to the relationship between Jesus and his disciples (John 6:48-56, 8:31, 14:25). Whatever happens along the way, Jesus wants his disciples to abide in him. And

'THE PROCESS OF FRUIT-BEARING NATURALLY INCLUDES SOME PRUNING AND CUTTING. BUT WE DON'T NEED TO BE AFRAID OF BEING CUT OFF ... FRUITFULNESS IS NOT A REQUIREMENT FOR BECOMING PART OF THE VINE.'



DISCUSS:

- * What would it look like to focus more on who Jesus is, than on who I am?
- * How do we experience the pruning of the vine grower?
- * The image of the vine seems to communicate a shared communion among the disciples. How do we live out that union in our increasingly individualistic world?

it seems like, for John, the abiding of the disciples with Jesus is as important as their belief in Jesus. In fact, as we follow the disciples through the gospel story, we learn that their belief in Jesus is strong – at times. At other times, they completely fail to understand who Jesus is and his teaching. In John 4:27-34, the disciples are unable to see how Jesus is nurtured not by food alone. In John 6:60-66 they call Jesus' teaching offensive and difficult. In John 11:8-11 they try to stop Jesus from walking the path to the cross, and can't see that Lazarus is truly dead, not just asleep. Even towards their end together, the disciples don't understand what Jesus means (John 16:16-18). And when they claim to finally believe what he tells them, he seems to question them: 'Now you believe?' (John 16:29-32). Thus, it's not fair to say that their belief in Jesus, as in their intellectual capacity to understand his teaching and adhere to it, is progressing through the story. The disciples don't seem to become stronger believers - they simultaneously believe and do not believe, understand and misunderstand.

This tells us something about discipleship, and about aiming for holiness. It is not necessarily a straight line of progress towards total belief. A holy lifestyle cannot be reduced to 'just work harder, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and you will become a perfect disciple.' Neither in terms of believing or of bearing fruit. However, through all the disciples' struggling, they still remained with him. The life Jesus is inviting us to enjoy is just as much about abiding in him as it is about believing in him. It is about being mysteriously rooted in him – he who is our life - and letting him do his thing in and through us. That holiness becomes a story not so much of individuality and progress, but of union and hope.



Dear Father, thank you for inviting us into an abiding relationship with you. Help us to focus more on your son, Jesus, than on ourselves. Amen.

CAPTAIN MIRIAM KJELLGREN

NORWAY TERRITORY


Captain Kjellgren lives with her husband and their two sons in central Oslo, Norway, where she works as a Salvation Army corps officer. She has always loved the intriguing and sometimes challenging richness of biblical texts. She also enjoys good conversation, a good cup of tea and watching life return to frozen Scandinavia each spring. She prays that this material will expand and deepen our sense of God's liberating work in and through us.



CHRIST'S ROOM

ROMANS 6:1-23

MAJOR SARA BEIJER



Let us begin with a simple, but very informative picture: imagine that there are two different rooms in our existence. A teacher I had once called these two rooms the Adam room and the Christ room. What is there in Christ's room do you think? It is a space of freedom full of grace, love, goodness, the Spirit of God and eternal life. It is a very good place to be. Then we have the Adam room where no man really thrives. In Adam's room, evil, egoism, enmity, deceit and death prevail.

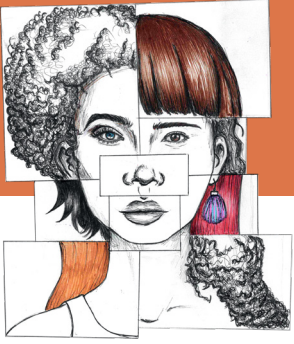
In simple terms, we can say that Romans 6 is about which of these rooms we live in and how we move from one room to another. Paul begins by saying that we as Christians have 'died to sin' (v 2). The term 'sin' is used with slightly different meanings in the New Testament, but in this chapter, Paul is referring to a cosmic power – a dominion of evil. Who rules in our lives? Is it Christ or is it sin? We live in an evil age and life is full of suffering, pain, transience and death. When Adam committed the original sin, he opened the door to the tragic room filled with evil. Yet, does it mean that we are doomed to live there and be there? Thank goodness not! Paul later says, 'Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus' (v 11).

'HAVE YOU EVER HAD A PIECE OF CLOTHING THAT YOU DID NOT LIKE? HOW DID IT AFFECT YOU? YOU MIGHT HAVE FELT UNCOMFORTABLE AND UNABLE TO RELAX IN FRONT OF PEOPLE. MAYBE YOU WOULD HAVE PERFORMED BETTER IF YOU SIMPLY WORE SOMETHING ELSE.'

How do we get out of Adam's room? By becoming dead to sin. Paul begins by talking about baptism, in which we die and arise with Christ. As a Salvationist, I may not have been baptised in water, but in salvation I have died from my old sinful life and been resurrected in Christ. So, we believe in the baptism! Certainly, we believe it is necessary to be baptised. The only thing us Salvationists oppose is the necessity of an external ceremony. 'We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life' (v 4) – or in a new room.

How do I get into the room of Christ? The key to unlocking the door is spiritual baptism and purification. There is an interesting and important wording in verse 11: 'So shall you also look upon yourselves'. Who am I after being baptised? I am 'dead to sin'. Does that mean I will never sin again? Sadly, no. I will continue to think selfish thoughts, I will put my own will before God's will and I will not always look at other people with Christ's love. Throughout my life, I will experience the temptation to return to the room of Adam. Not because it was a better life there, but because it is simply human nature. I have something of Adam in me and I will surely change rooms throughout my life. However, Paul says that we should not look at ourselves as sinners and instead see ourselves as 'dead to sin'. Upon attempting to enter Adam's room, you will discover that you no longer fit in and want to resist all that exists within the room.

The same teacher who taught me the two rooms also used the analogy of changing clothes. Have you ever had a piece of clothing that you did not like? How did it affect you? You might have felt uncomfortable and unable to relax in front of people. Maybe you would have performed better if you simply wore something else. The teacher challenged his



DISCUSS:

- * Do you think my teacher's practical exercise could be of use to you? Why? Why not?
- * What can make us step back into the room of Adam?
- * What can help us to stay in Christ's room?

students to put Romans 6:11 into practice for a week. He also referred to Colossians 3 and the story of the old and the new man. Here's what the theologian, teacher and preacher Agne Nordlander, said: 'Start each morning by drawing up a square on the floor in front of your bed and say: Here my old self is buried with its impatience, desire to assert itself, its tendencies to envy and be offended, its complaining and greed and so on. Now I stand up as a new creation together with Christ and take on the new clothes of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, tolerance, forgiveness, and love. I put my body, soul, and spirit at the disposal of God to live in God's favour and service for my fellow human beings.' This turned out to be a good exercise and I have continued to practice it during periods of my life.

How do I stay in the room of Christ? By making myself 'a slave to righteousness', living for God and letting God use me. It is hard when sin tries to pull me away, but I am not forced to follow them. I choose myself if I want to leave the room of Christ. Martin Luther, who strongly influenced the church in my country, Sweden, taught of a daily baptism. He wrote, 'Through daily repentance, the old man in us shall be submerged and killed with all its sins and desires. A new man will grow and rise, every day; a new man, righteous and holy, will live with God forever.' For me, this helps in my daily pursuit of a completely holy and Christ-like life. Perhaps I cannot succeed in being subordinate to Christ in everything during every day of my life, but today, I want it to be such a day.



God, right now I want to step into the holy room, where only your will prevails. Amen.

MAJOR SARA BEIJER

SWEDEN TERRITORY


Major Beijer has been an officer for 15 years. She and her husband Anders have served together in three different corps. They have two boys, Alfred and Elton, and when this Bible study was written they lived in Norrköping. She loves to spend time out in nature and one thing that gives her great joy is meeting people from different countries and cultures.



HOW ROME WAS CONQUERED

ROMANS 12:1-10

CAPTAIN SAGA LIPPO



Nowadays Rome is known as one of the most important centres of Christianity. In Paul's lifetime, however, Rome looked very different. Many gods and goddesses were worshipped in the city and honoured with various sacrifices. Sacrificial ceremonies were events and celebrations where all townspeople rejoiced and dined together. Converted Christians opted out of these common gatherings and, in the process, they were excluded from the community. We can imagine how heavy the experience was for many, especially if the rest of the family was still attending the parties.

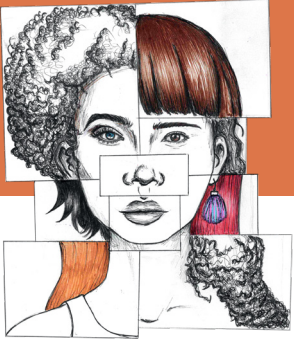
Paul certainly knew how Roman Christians felt. He knew what it meant to be left outside a familiar and safe community. He himself had been excluded after converting to Christianity. Paul guides Roman Christians by writing that they still can – and must – serve in the community. The attitude he encouraged was previously unheard of even in Rome, the city that has seen everything. Christians had to become sacrificial victims, as Paul writes to the Romans, 'Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God' (Romans 12:1).

Paul also tells the Romans to be 'transformed by the renewing of your mind' (Romans 12:2). There had been a certain way of living in Rome, but Paul was encouraging a new way of thinking. 'Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought,' Paul warns in Romans 12:3. As the old saying goes, Rome was not built in a day. Paul knew that changing Rome from a centre of pagan religions into a Christian city would take time, but he believed in the transforming power of the gospel. He believed that by living a holy life, Christians could positively influence the development of the entire city.

The Roman Christians must have been confused. What did Paul mean? How can we sacrifice ourselves? Paul responds to this astonishment by using the familiar metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ. He lists some of the gifts the Holy Spirit gives to Christians to build the church and thereby influence the whole community. There are many different ministries in The Salvation Army as are in other Christian churches. It is easy to mistake some of them as more sacred or more valuable than others. To Timothy, Paul writes that 'the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:17). An item or a thing is perfect when it fulfils the task it is intended for. A knife is the perfect tool for slicing bread and a hammer is perfect for hammering. It would not be wise to cut bread with a hammer or to hit nails with a knife. Knives and hammers are different, but both are important when they are dedicated for their own task.

Christians were subjected to various accusations and even persecution in Rome. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, the Christian Church would hardly have survived in pagan Rome. When God equipped the church with spiritual gifts, Christians were no longer the underdogs as, suddenly, they had military superiority. Anointed by the Holy Spirit, some Christians prophesied and taught the scriptures. They probably spoke the usual language and used common words which everyone in Rome understood. Yet their message had a special power, for God himself spoke through them. The moment when God starts a dialogue with man is always a special, holy

'THE GENEROSITY AND HOSPITALITY OF CHRISTIANS WAS A LIFE-RESPECTING HOSPITALITY, UNDERSTANDING THAT EVERY HUMAN BEING – INCLUDING WOMEN, CHILDREN AND SLAVES – HAD THE SAME DIGNITY.'



DISCUSS:

- * Have you faced a situation of being excluded because of your Christian faith?
- * How did you feel?
- * Have you recognised your own spiritual gifts, and do you have the courage to use them?
- * Do you think that by living a holy life you can have an impact on your own community?

moment. I'm sure many Romans experienced it on those days. Some other Christians had a special gift of encouragement. They were the ones who wrapped their arms around a tired comrade and shared motivational messages of survival. Comforting words have a special power when the 'God who gives endurance and encouragement' is present (Romans 15:5).

Christians were cursed many times in Rome, but to everyone's surprise, they did not repay evil with evil. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they were able to bless those who cursed them. Could there be a more powerful weapon? No doubt the townspeople kept an eye on the Christians – they were interested in whether the Christians lived as they taught. When people discovered that Christians loved each other sincerely, were devoted to one other in love and honoured one other above themselves (Romans 12:9-10), many were willing to join them.

Paul exhorted the Christians to be generous and take care of the needs of others. The generosity and hospitality of Christians was a life-respecting hospitality, understanding that every human being – including women, children and slaves – had the same dignity. This different, sacred, Christian life was appealing to the others in Rome. By building peace and serving those in need, Christianity eventually conquered Rome.



Dear Lord, give me your Holy Spirit and the powerful weapon of love so that I can serve my family and neighbours and encourage them to join the kingdom of God. Amen.

CAPTAIN SAGA LIPPO

FINLAND AND ESTONIA TERRITORY

Captain Lippo is a Salvation Army officer, married with two adult children. She currently serves in the territorial headquarters of the Finland and Estonia Territory, working within training and education. Biblical texts – especially Old Testament stories – fascinate her and have inspired her to continue theological studies at university.



TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-9

LIEUT-COLONEL KAREN SHAKESPEARE

I was given an ordinary terracotta pot, quite simply made and a little bit rough along the edges. What made it beautiful was the vanilla scented candle inside that gleamed brightly in a dark corner and filled the air with a powerful perfume. The value and the power was not in the pot, but in what it contained.

The Old Testament tells us that we have been created by God, shaped and moulded like clay pots. It speaks of how God can break, redesign and remould us so that we become what he wants us to be. This is true for individuals (Job 10:9) and the nation of Israel (Jeremiah 18:1-10).

Paul draws on this image and extends it. The Old Testament speaks of creation, but Paul speaks of recreation and indwelling. In Paul's world, owned and used clay pots on a daily basis for cooking and for storage. They were ordinary, fragile and not special in any way. In many senses they were disposable, and their worth was determined by the contents.

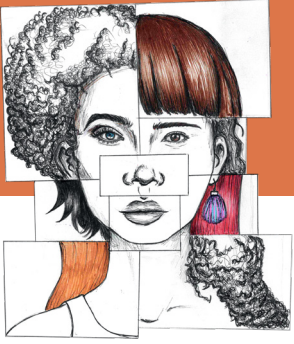
When we know Christ, we become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) and the power of the gospel in our lives is the precious treasure which sustains and strengthens the 'clay pots' of our humanity. We are God's people and it is his treasure within us that really determines who we are. Our life in Christ and his life in us makes holy living possible.

Paul's testimony in chapter 1:8-11 is reflected in chapter 4:8-9. He knows and has lived the experience. Paul does not use his circumstances to prove his worth as an apostle, but to show that God's power is the source and strength of any Christian, and this is not damaged, deflected or destroyed by the weakness of the messengers. Human frailty is no barrier to God's purposes. This is the pattern and standard for all of God's people. Holy living is sometimes difficult and at these times we need to remember that the power for endurance is not found in ourselves, but in God. We need to be realistic about who we are and who God is.

Paul does not minimise the suffering that sometimes comes to those who live the gospel, nor does he say that it should not happen. Our faith does not mean that we cannot or should not suffer but gives us the resources to live well in all circumstances. Paul's life is a testimony to this experience (Philippians 4:10-13).

Many societies and generations have believed that human beings must prove that we are self-reliant and have the power to face any situation. Paul would be familiar with the Stoic-Cynic tradition of Greek philosophy, in which it was common to find lists of hardships which people face, alongside teaching which suggested that the right thing to do. The mark of a great person was to face these obstacles with courage, patience and self-sufficiency.

'HUMAN FRAILITY IS NO BARRIER TO GOD'S PURPOSES. THIS IS THE PATTERN AND STANDARD FOR ALL OF GOD'S PEOPLE. HOLY LIVING IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT AND AT THESE TIMES WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT THE POWER FOR ENDURANCE IS NOT FOUND IN OURSELVES, BUT IN GOD.'



DISCUSS:

- * In these verses, Paul is emotionally honest. He does not try to hide his difficulties or pretend that the Christian life is easy. Are we ever tempted to pretend that all is well when it is not because we want to be seen to be a good Christian or to have a strong faith?
- * Which spiritual disciplines help us to embrace our limits and recognise our dependency on God? How do you make time for them?
- * Make a list of those times when you have been aware of the strength and power of God in your life. Take time to thank God for what he has done.

In contrast, Paul makes it clear that Christians look to God's power for strength to face the hard times and, more than this, he testifies that with God's power we will not be defeated or destroyed by adversity. He reinterprets our difficulties as a means by which the sufficiency of God's grace and power can be seen in and through our lives (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul's view is that when we suffer, we are near to where Christ was on the cross. There is no depth of suffering that God cannot reach. Suffering may be difficult, but God's power means that it will not overwhelm us or stop us from living a holy life. Suffering does not invalidate the call to be God's holy people but allows God to demonstrate his power through us.

In each of the four examples that Paul gives in verses 8 and 9, the second word in the pair is more intense than the first. God's power in our lives gives us confidence that suffering will not defeat us. We will not be crushed by physical, psychological or spiritual pressure, or despairing when we are confused or perplexed. We know that God will not abandon his people when we are persecuted, and we have confidence that ill treatment will not lead to our destruction. This is not Paul's glib answer or an unsubstantiated wish, but it is a deeply held conviction that we can face suffering with faith and trust in God.

Paul's testimony speaks to our lives. We are human and God is God. His power becomes known in our weakness. In his strength we can face any circumstance so that no situation is irredeemable or overwhelming. His presence within us sustains, strengthens and makes our ordinary humanity beautiful – like treasure that is found in a clay pot.

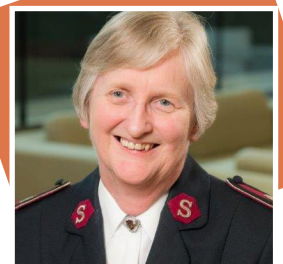


Father, you have created and recreated us. Help us be constantly aware of your presence our lives, so that your power is shown through us. Amen.

LIEUT-COLONEL KAREN SHAKESPEARE

UNITED KINGDOM TERRITORY WITH THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Lieut-Colonel Shakespeare is the Assistant Principal (Development) at William Booth College, London and is Chair of the International Theological Council. She has served in a variety of appointments at corps, divisional headquarters, United Kingdom with the Republic of Ireland's territorial headquarters, William Booth College, and as Principal of SALT College of Africa. She is married to David and they have two officer daughters, Naomi and Ellie.



CALLED TO LIVE A HOLY LIFE

EPHESIANS 5:1-10

CAPTAIN HS LALRENGPUII

Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians from prison around 60AD. The church Paul referred to in this letter is not a denomination, but the real church – the body of Christ. The then church of Ephesus seems very much associated with idol worship, lust and greed. Not only that, but many other impurities also infected the church at large. Therefore, Paul wrote this letter from prison, encouraging the church to realise her high status and he encouraged the church as the body of Christ to live out a holy life. The word 'Holy' derived from the Greek word 'Hagios' and the Hebrew word 'Qadas' meaning saint, be separate, be consecrated, set apart, sanctified. Therefore, Paul is telling us to live a separate and consecrated life.

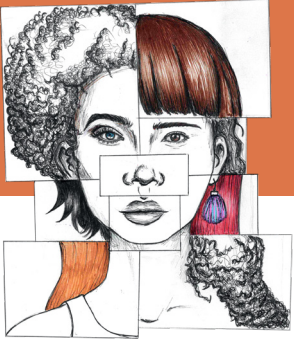
'GREED, ENVY, JEALOUSY AND LUST CORRUPT HOLY LIVES. SINCE WE ARE CALLED TO LIVE IN HOLINESS, WE MUST KEEP OURSELVES AWAY FROM THESE THINGS.'

Paul encourages us to follow God's example. Let us classify God's character into two qualities: forgiveness and love. One of God's important characters that we should follow is forgiveness. 'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you' (Ephesians 4:32). The Bible emphasises the power of forgiveness again: 'If anyone of us has someone to forgive, let us forgive each other just as God forgave us' (Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:36). Yet, we are also told that the most recognisable of God's characteristics is love: "'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another'" (John 13:35). Let us all be the fragrance of God's greatest love for God himself and for the people around us in the community. Out of many characteristics, forgiveness and love are very important in our efforts to follow God. Paul stated that in the last days, there will be people without love, unforgiving... (2 Timothy 3:2-3). We are called to live out holiness through forgiveness and love.

God calls us to bear Christ's image and live a holy life in the world. Verses 3 and 4 list things that are improper among believers, such as sexual impurity and greed. In the Old Testament, anyone fallen into sexual immorality will certainly be put to death (Leviticus 20:10-18). Sexual immorality should not be prevalent among God's holy people, as we are called to live a holy life free from sexual immorality. Paul encourages us to 'Flee from sexual immorality' (1 Corinthians 6:18). Similarly distracting believers from living a holy life, greed is an act of idolatry. Paul said, 'Be content with what you have' (Hebrews 13:5). Greed, envy, jealousy and lust corrupt holy lives. Since we are called to live in holiness, we must keep ourselves away from these things. We are called not to defame our lives by such sinful actions. As we live in a world where sinful acts of lust are common and greed and selfishness are rampant, we are called to live out a radically holy life.

Verse 5 goes on to state that no immoral, impure or greedy person will have any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ. Paul was so concerned about this issue as seen in his writings to the Corinthians about it in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. In order to have inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ, we must set ourselves aside from these sinful behaviours; following our calling to holiness.

Verses 6 and 7 tells us the importance of being holy to God. Paul notes that it is important, as believers, to watch out that no one deceives us. Deceitful behaviour and being led astray is a form of spiritual corruption. Paul uses the statement 'Do not be misled' (1 Corinthians 15:33). Jesus said to the people, 'Watch out that no one deceives you' (Matthew 24:4) and told them to be cautious of false teachers. He warned the people about the coming of false prophets and false teachings and taught them not to be deceived by such individuals.



DISCUSS:

- * What are the stumbling blocks that hinder us from living holy lives? How can we overcome these hindrances?
- * Do you have anyone that you cannot love or forgive? Commit your lives to God asking for a forgiving and loving heart.
- * Write out 10 actions you think that please God. Out of the 10 actions, how many have you acquired and how many of them do you have yet to acquire?

We need to be alert so that we will not be deceived by others. Here, Paul referred to 'them' as the people who had fallen into sexual immorality, impurity and greed. Whoever is deceived by such behaviours will receive the wrath of God. Therefore, let us continue to live a holy life for God.

Verses 8-10 tell us that we were brought from darkness to light, that we are 'children of light'. We also see that we are called to live holy and God-pleasing lives. We should bear the light in our goodness and righteousness. To have goodness means to have an uprightness of heart and life. God looks at our inner life and desired faithfulness from the womb. As well as seeking goodness from us, God loves righteousness (Micah 6:8). As we are called to live a holy life, we are called to do things with righteousness. By doing so we can shine the light for Jesus in the world and show that we are children of light and have a positive influence on others.



Father, I pray that I will become more like Jesus everyday by living a holy life with and through your help. Amen.

CAPTAIN HS LALRENGPUII

INDIA EASTERN TERRITORY


Captain Lalrengpuii is originally from Mizoram, India Eastern Territory. She currently serves as a Salvation Army officer in her recent appointment as corps officer in the Phullen Area. She also has two sons, who she calls her 'beautiful boys'.



CHOSEN TO BE HOLY

COLOSSIANS 3:12-15

COLONEL MANI KUMARI DASARI



'Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity' (Colossians 3:12-14).

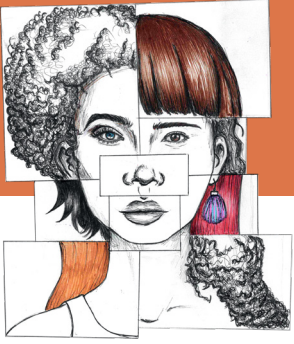
Paul reminds us that we are God's chosen ones. God selected and elected each one of us to be part of his family to have a close relationship with him through Christ Jesus. The following verses from Scripture encourage us to recognise God's invitation to a life of holiness: 'You did not choose me, but I choose you', John 15:16; 'For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight', Ephesians 1:4; 'For many are invited, but few are chosen', Matthew 22:14; 'For you are a people, holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession'; Deuteronomy 14:2.

What does God expect from holy people? The chosen ones should be holy and set apart to live a holy life, being led by the spirit of God and leading the people to God's saving grace, as it is recorded: 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light', 1 Peter 2:9.

All the above references confirm that surely we are chosen by God. All the chosen ones are expected to clothe themselves with holy garments like compassionate hearts (1 Peter 3:8), kindness, integrity (2 Samuel 2:6), humility – which is important so that we don't act arrogantly (James 4:6), gentleness and patience. We are commanded to do this, to put on and to be clothed with the new self so that people who see us will experience all of these qualities through our lifestyle. Today's world doesn't only need preachers but practitioners of God's holy word. People want to see a demonstration of Christian faith and virtues.

How is our daily living expected to be? Our life is to be a thankful response to God's choice of us, to carry his mission for salvation and sanctification. We must abide with him always to do his will. 'But we always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth', 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (KJV).

'THOUGH WE LIVE IN THIS WORLD WE DON'T BELONG TO THIS WORLD, WE ARE SET APART FOR THE LORD AND HIS HOLY WORK. HE SET US APART FOR HIS MISSION AND MINISTRY.'



DISCUSS:

- * What are the challenges to identify God's calling to be his chosen ones?
- * How do we practice Christian virtues in a pagan world?
- * How can we lead someone toward holy living and complete sanctification?

We are made holy by the blood of his beloved son Jesus who cleansed all our sins and transgressions. Though we live in this world we don't belong to this world, we are set apart for the Lord and his holy work. He set us apart for his mission and ministry. Christians are held safe and secure by God's protection, therefore we must respond to his heavenly calling by proclaiming Heaven to people dying in sin and darkness. We can do this because we are loved by God and called to love each other.

This Christian love that we share with fellow believers must also be shared with the unlovable and neglected ones in society. We are planted to grow in the fruit of the Spirit and help others to know the taste of this eternal spiritual fruit. We are anointed and commissioned to preach the gospel and reach the unreached. We are gifted with talents to use them for saving souls and leading them to the abiding grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are called to use our abilities to nurture Christian faith and serve suffering humanity.



Dear God, our Father, thank you for choosing us to represent your Kingdom on earth. Sanctify us, so that we might live holy lives as your chosen people. Amen.

COLONEL MANI KUMARI DASARI

INDIA NATIONAL OFFICE

Colonel Dasari is currently serving as Secretary for Women's Development, working in the India National Office. Having served in the India Central, Kenya East and India Eastern Territories, she has gained knowledge of various cultures and traditions, enabling her to understand the challenges that women face in different continents.



HIS HOLY THINGS

1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-4:4

CAPTAIN GOLAPI BISWAS

'May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 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.' (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13)

Paul teaches about holiness and how to live in a way that pleases God. Holiness means purity or keeping ourselves pure. Essentially, Paul is encouraging the people listening to live a holy life.

Firstly, it is important to remember that God is holy in the sense that he is all-pure and righteous, both in character and in deed (Isaiah 6:3). If we accept that God is holy, we as his people are to follow his lead. We need to understand in more detail how we can lead a holy life. The Bible is full of guidance in this respect. 1 Peter 1:16 clearly tells us that we must be holy because our God is holy. As we are his own creation and God made us his own image, we live out that image through a life of holiness.

We see God's holiness many times in the Old Testament; when God appears to Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah they experience and witness God's holiness in a very powerful way. In Romans 12:1-2, Paul reminds us to 'offer our bodies as a living sacrifice' and we may live in a way that is pleasing to God. It is a reminder of the special purpose to which we are called. In 1 Thessalonians 4:7, we are told again that God did not call us to live in immorality, but we are called to live in holiness.

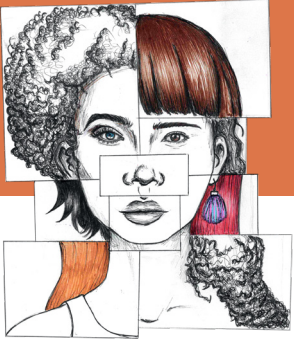
There are many reasons why we need to be holy and offer our life as a living sacrifice to God. We can't change ourselves, but we can be changed within by a new way of thinking. This will help us to know what God wants of us and to understand his good and perfect will. When we believe in him and call on his strength, he cleans us from sin and makes us holy.

Most Christians strive to be honest, humble, and faithful in their daily lives. However, when we think about living a holy life, we are also reminded of our own sin. All people have sinned and are imperfect (Romans 3:23). As believers, we regularly repent and seek cleansing from sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. In this way, we refuse to continue to dwell in sin because doing this would damage our heart and destroy our holy life. Instead, we try to keep our body, heart and soul clean. If we ask, God can help us to live better lives for him.

Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 3:13 that God will 'strengthen us'. Our God has divine power and his power sanctifies us and makes us holy. Therefore, through the blood of Jesus Christ we can be made holy and live in his presence and according to his purpose and his ways.

Living in this world is not always easy. Many things are good, but some things are bad. We can experience joy, peace, love, unity, but sometimes we face obstacles, barriers and hindrances. Therefore, we should take great care of how we conduct our lives. We should try and avoid mixing with evil, recognising that it is sometimes difficult to protect ourselves.

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DISCUSS:

- * How can Christians be holy in everyday living?
- * What do you need to do to keep living a holy life in today's world?
- * Our Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. How should we prepare ourselves for that day?

We have been placed into this world by God and, in the midst of imperfection and opposition, we strive for a life that is pleasing to God.

In Matthew 13:24-29, Jesus told a parable. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who planted good seed in his field, but the enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat. They grew together and the weeds showed up with the corn. The man's servant came to him and reported what happened. They asked, do you want us to go and pull up the weeds? The man answered no, because as you gather the weeds you might pull up some of the wheat as well. Let the wheat and the weeds both grow together until harvest. When the harvest time comes, then first gather the weeds and tie them together to be burned and then gather in the wheat and put it in my barn.

As believers, our hope and expectation is that when our Lord Jesus Christ comes, all who belong to him will experience a perfect and holy life in the presence of God forever. In the meantime, as we journey in this world, where both good and evil things are all around us, we have the assurance of his grace as we do our best to stay true to him and try to avoid sin.

The Bible reminds us to surrender to our almighty God who makes us holy and keeps our whole being – spirit, soul, and body – free from fault. As we follow his example, obey him and grow in holiness each day, we hold on to the promise of eternal life with God. It will only be in Heaven that all sin will be removed and we will truly be made perfect and holy.



Dear Holy Father, help us to grow in holiness so that we can be identified as belonging to you. Amen.

CAPTAIN GOLAPI BISWAS

BANGLADESH COMMAND

Captain Biswas currently serves as the Youth and Candidates Officer in Bangladesh. She is the mother of two children and has been a Salvation Army officer for 14 years. She has a strong conviction that the future of Bangladesh belongs to its youth and feels blessed with this opportunity to serve and journey with the young people and future Christian leaders.



HOLINESS AND SADNESS

2 THESSALONIANS 2:13-17

NAZIA YOUSAF

In many countries, such as my homeland, Pakistan, people regularly experience moral confusion, witness acts of terrorism and injustice or face discrimination. It would be natural to cry out like David, 'How long, O LORD!' (Psalm 13:1). When I read *The Shack*, by William P. Young, it reminded me that even in peaceful countries, people can experience their own deep darkness. Whatever the circumstance, even devout people can think at times that God has forgotten them, that he is hiding his face from them in their crisis. Discouragement, resentment or disappointment start to take over their lives and feelings. Couldn't God have prevented these bad things? Why didn't he?

When experiencing these dark feelings directed against God, do we find it too easy to forget that 'we ought always to give thanks' or find ourselves refusing to 'stand firm'? This experience becomes an attack on our holiness, challenging our desire to be like Christ and to love everyone as he did. Disappointment, resentment and anger can hide any fruit of the Spirit in our lives. In fact, we can find ourselves feeling we have no fruit.

It is hard to show love when resentment pours out of us. We may feel that the Holy Spirit must have stopped working in us. Is our sadness, resentment and anger the proof? Or are these sometimes part of the struggle of holiness, for some an everyday battle? How can holiness be at work and show through during these times?

The Bible records saints of God who had serious moments of crisis in their faith. While the traditional Jewish couples prayed for descendants who would carry on the family name, Sarah and Abraham finally recognised their child-bearing days were over. As a result, they scoffed God when he told them they were to have a son. Even Jesus cried from the Cross "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

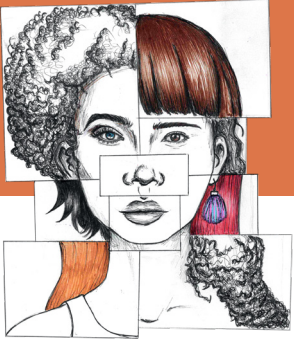
In such times of despair, it helps to go back and read verse 13 again: 'we ought always to thank God'. This does not refer to our circumstances, but because we are loved by God, and that God has chosen us as first fruits. We are already special to God, before we had the right feelings or did the good works. He has chosen us and saved us through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

'TO CONTINUE IN OUR WALK WITH GOD, WE NEED TO OVERCOME THE DISAPPOINTMENTS IN OURSELVES, OTHER PEOPLE, OUR CIRCUMSTANCES OR EVEN WITH GOD.'

Verse 14 states, 'He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.' This was important for the Thessalonian church to remember. They were outside the Jewish faith, but God eventually made it possible for them to be full members of the early Church. They had been blessed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. They were within God's plans for them and they were able to achieve his blessing.

To continue in our walk with God, we need to overcome the disappointments in ourselves, other people, our circumstances or even with God. Disappointment often leads us to anger which leads to sin if not resolved: 'An angry man stirs up dissension' (Proverbs 29:22); 'Give up rage, anger, malice' (Colossians 3:8); 'Anger gives a foothold to the devil' (Ephesians 4:27) and makes any service we want to give to God ineffective.

It is helpful for us to change the nature of our question; no longer 'Why, Lord?', but rather, 'What is it you want from me, Lord?'; 'What would you have me do now, Lord?' Of course, we'll still feel angry or disheartened by disappointments, but



DISCUSS:

- * Does a strong holiness experience guarantee we will not be disappointed?
- * What might make Christians feel resentful or angry?
- * Think of disappointment in your life. How did you, or how do you, work your way through it so that your walk with God is still close?

we'll also discover that God is eager to show us what he wants us to do next. Jesus knew what the Father's will was for him when he went to the Cross. We have to persist in order to find out God's perfect will for us, even though persistence is not a natural response for the majority of us.

So, what does the Bible tell us in response? Scripture tells us to 'cast our anxiety on the Lord' (1 Peter 5:7). This requires spending some time talking to our heavenly Father – voicing our feelings and confirming our plans with him. Search for the good and praise him: this is a difficult time to try to be thankful. We must persevere in our belief in God and his plan for our lives. Sometimes, it takes a painful disappointment to teach us a skill or strengthen our faith or to put us in the right place at the right time. We don't know his ways or his thoughts, but we have to believe in his promise. Finally, in times of discouragement, anger or resentment, we are reminded once again that God loves us, and wants to send encouragement and hope and strengthen us in all our good work.



Lord, your ways aren't our ways. Help us to give you our disappointments, to trust you when we don't understand. Help us to focus on who you are and to always tell you how we feel. Lord, help us to always praise you, no matter what. We pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

NAZIA YOUSAF

UNITED KINGDOM TERRITORY WITH THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND


Nazia is originally from Lahore, Pakistan and is currently training to be a Salvation Army officer at William Booth College, London, United Kingdom. She is a trained staff nurse and midwife and has previously worked as a health and parenting consultant at Pakistan territorial headquarters for nine years. Nazia is passionate about rights for women, children and minorities. Her calling is to help lift people to a safe and secure environment where they can enjoy their God-given life to its full potential, knowing their worth in Christ. She wants her ministry to bring people to know and experience Christ's love, peace and joy.



TRULY SANCTIFIED IN MARRIAGE

JOHN 17:13-19

CAPTAIN NILANTHI SIYAMAKRISNAN



“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.” (John 17:13-19)

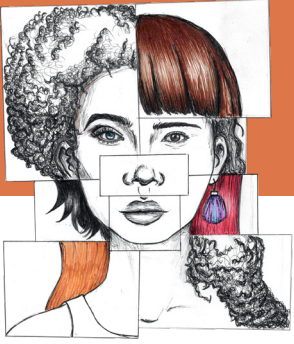
This passage teaches much about God's work of holiness. These verses answer questions related to the diverse ideas in today's Christianity about what it means to pursue holiness, and yet remain 'in the world' to be God's agents of holiness.

I have gathered some thoughts concerning the value and significance of marriage and being single in God's eyes, and what the Bible says about them. After all, Scripture does not speak about marriage as the only option. Choosing to stay single for the sake of God's Kingdom is a reality in the Bible which is often ignored. At this point I would like to make clear that the decision of a Christian to remain unmarried is not to be confused with the vow of celibacy taken by priests, monks and nuns as a mandatory requirement of taking up one of the Catholic religious vocations. However, being unmarried may be a special calling from God. Paul gives this advice to the believers in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 'Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.'

Genesis tells the story of creation of man and woman: 'The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make him a helper suitable for him ... Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh' (Genesis 2:18, 22-24).

What is the biblical purpose of marriage? We believe marriage to be ordained by God for the union between a man and a woman. We see the primary purposes of this union as intimate companionship, rearing children and mutual support for both husband and wife to fulfil their life callings.

'WHAT IS THE BIBLICAL PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE? WE BELIEVE MARRIAGE TO BE ORDAINED BY GOD FOR THE UNION BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN. WE SEE THE PRIMARY PURPOSES OF THIS UNION AS INTIMATE COMPANIONSHIP, REARING CHILDREN AND MUTUAL SUPPORT FOR BOTH HUSBAND AND WIFE TO FULFIL THEIR LIFE CALLINGS.'



DISCUSS:

- * Is holiness striving to stay as far away as possible from anything that the world considers fun? How can we be sure that we don't become like the world?
- * Is there some special ceremony and experience that leads us into a higher level of spirituality?
- * As women, how should we live holiness out in every aspect of our lives?

Here are some keys to a successful marriage: Talking with your spouse is one of the best ways to keep your marriage healthy and successful. Be honest about what you're feeling but be kind and respectful when you communicate. Part of good communication is being a good listener and taking the time to understand what it is your spouse wants and needs from you. Trust in an intimate relationship is rooted in feeling safe with another person. Infidelity, lies and broken promises can severely damage the trust between a husband and wife. That does not necessarily mean that a marriage can't be saved. Malachi 2:14 says, 'You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.'

Sex is designed for married couples. We were created to be sexually exclusive. Becoming 'one flesh' with your partner is important for satisfying sexual needs. Casual sex or sex outside of marriage may relieve sexual tension but fails to meet our needs for deeper intimacy that sex in a Christian marriage was designed for.

A husband and wife build their relationship and intimacy, one sexual encounter at a time – of course, they do this in more ways than by just having sex. That deepening level of intimacy can turn 'just' sex into 'making love'. Having sex outside of marriage is not only against God's design, but also promotes mistrust that may destroy marital intimacy.

Sex in a Christian marriage is a beautiful, God-designed act. It is not only for procreation, but for pleasure. Sex in a Christian marriage is God's gift of physical, spiritual and emotional intimacy with our partner. Sex was created to be enjoyable for both spouses. If a sexual activity doesn't bring pleasure to both partners, it can lead to resentment. Sex was designed for us to become one flesh.



Dear Father, we overcome the world because we know your name; we share your life; we have your word. You give us unity in our fellowship and joy in our hearts. Thank you that we may enjoy human love, as well as your heavenly love. Amen.

CAPTAIN NILANTHI SIYAMAKRISNAN

SRI LANKA TERRITORY

Captain Siyamakrisnan is currently serving in the Sri Lanka Territory. Her appointment is based at the officer training college as a Training Officer and Business Manager.



HOLY CHARACTER AND HOLY CONDUCT

TITUS 2:1-14

CORALIE BRIDLE

While I was pregnant with my first child, I read every book that I could find on how to be a good mother. I gleaned some gems from this written wisdom, but nothing prepared me as thoroughly as watching others parent their children. In this pastoral letter, the apostle Paul shares how his child in the faith, Titus, is to care for the new Christian community on the island of Crete. We know that Titus was not simply 'book learning' because he had been on the road with Paul, observing his character and conduct, in the context of ministry and mission.

There had been some opposition to Paul's teaching. Some imported and confusing teaching was leading people out of faith. Households were both the basic unit of a cohesive society and the setting for the 'house churches' that Titus was overseeing. The household could be made up of blood relations, extended family, needy relatives and slaves. Christianity at this time was seen as a destabilising cult, so expectations of the Christian household called for behaviour that did not bring the gospel into disrepute or disgrace. One writer has said that the holy living outlined in this passage is the 'moral cosmetic' that the church brings to the public square. In a sense, the public life of the Christian underwrites the truth of the gospel.

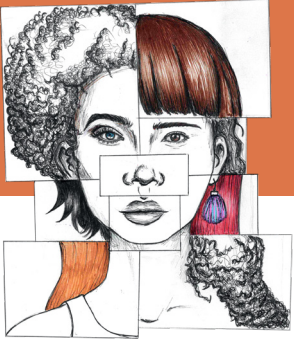
Paul charges Titus to 'promote the kind of living that reflects wholesome teaching' (Titus 2:1 *NLT*). He then calls for the older men of the household of God to demonstrate behaviour that is restrained, level-headed, sensible and self-controlled. Faith in this context is the embodied response of living for Christ. To be worthy of respect these men are charged with living lives marked by love, dignity and Christ-like wisdom. There is a compelling picture here of mature men – noble in intention, dignified in bearing and gracious in disposition.

Then, the focus moves towards women in the household of God. Women are called to act in a reverent way that demonstrates the holiness of a heart that is in deep communion with God. Distractions and preoccupations come in many forms and Paul urges the older women to pursue lives of ultimately enriching restraint. In applying this to our lives, we can learn that careless and hurtful conversations must be guarded against. Against the jarring images of some women in contemporary culture, Salvationist women are called to be poised, graceful and charming ambassadors of the gospel.

In an age in which arranged marriages were the norm, women who truly demonstrated love for her husband stood out in the broader societal context. Paul's comments are aimed at no specific roles, but to how women are to approach the tasks that fall to them in any given role. In the 21st century, where many women are employed outside of the home, we are called to be productive in the normal occupations of our daily lives. There is also a warning – to not allow our homes to lose their life-giving, protective and sustaining functions.

Verses 5 and 6 remind us that young people need encouragement and understanding rather than criticism. In the second, our teaching or mentoring of younger women and men calls for full alignment between our character and conduct. Young people in the contemporary context, surrounded by so much that is fake, can spot inconsistency in a heartbeat. It is not sufficient to call them to wise up, if those

'...YOUNG PEOPLE NEED ENCOURAGEMENT AND UNDERSTANDING RATHER THAN CRITICISM ... OUR TEACHING OR MENTORING OF YOUNGER WOMEN AND MEN CALLS FOR FULL ALIGNMENT BETWEEN OUR CHARACTER AND CONDUCT.'



DISCUSS:

- * Is my character and conduct consistent with the gospel in the public and private spheres of my life?
- * How might I influence the societal frameworks around me to align with the truths of the gospel?
- * Who are the people currently reading the text of my life and how can I best support them?

doing the calling are shallow. Later, Paul reiterates that actions speak louder than words. Fine oratory that does not flow from the pure fount will always leave a congregation with their thirst unquenched. There is a serious instruction here, calling for a heart that appreciates the message entrusted to it.

Slavery was a common feature of first-century Greco-Roman life and it is estimated that half of the population was indentured. Verses 9 and 10 speak to a cultural situation which we may not comprehend. It is important to recognise that many people today continue to work for minimum wages, excessive hours and in undervalued care and service industries. Paul instructs us to live with integrity within the circumstances and frameworks we have. The Christians in Crete were working within what was possible at the time. We must do no less.

Finally, in verses 11-14, Paul provides the theological rationale for all of the preceding instructions. Our present lives relate to the future that God has promised in Jesus. We are encouraged to live that future today. We are called to be a covenant-keeping people who express the salvation of Christ in good works, holy character and conduct. In this way, everyone works together to enable love and grace to weave through the community of God.



Heavenly Father, craft me into a woman of holy character and holy conduct so that my life might speak grace and truth to my generation and those who come after me.

CORALIE BRIDLE

NEW ZEALAND, FIJI, TONGA AND SAMOA TERRITORY


Coralie is a lifelong Salvationist and attends Auckland City Corps, New Zealand. While working as an oncology nurse, she also serves on the New Zealand Moral and Social Issues Council and the International Theological Council. Her husband, Kevin, three adult children and grandson keep her grounded amidst the complexities of life. Coralie is currently working on her PhD looking at disability as a theological construct, frameworks for supporting people with complex disabilities within The Salvation Army and post-resurrection identity.



RELIGION ISN'T A BAD THING

JAMES 1:26-27; 4:8

MAJOR PRIYA MORGAN



When we talk about doing something religiously it means we have made a habit of it. Some people run religiously every day. Some people watch their favorite television programme religiously every week. An activity does not have to be religious in nature for it to be done on a religious basis. Activities that have clear patterns of behaviour can be good or bad. Habitual patterns of behaviour demonstrate our priorities in life. Sometimes, it is beneficial for us to reflect on what have become 'religious' habits in our lives so that we can ensure we don't get comfortable in the motions of our daily and weekly routines.

The Voice describes what could be considered a stereotypical example of a religious person:

'Once inside the temple, the Pharisee stands up and prays this prayer in honour of himself: "God, how I thank You that I am not on the same level as other people – crooks, cheaters, the sexually immoral – like this tax collector over here. Just look at me! I fast not once but twice a week, and I faithfully pay my tithes on every penny of income"' (Luke 18:11-12).

Religion is not an easy concept to understand, however it can be described as a way in which people express their relationship with God. As Christians, we must ensure that our understanding of religion is in balance with our faith.

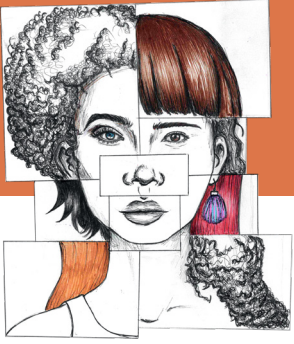
'WE MAY THINK THAT RELIGION IS SOMETHING WE DO, WHICH IN ONE SENSE IS CORRECT, BUT THIS IS ONLY A PART OF "TRUE" RELIGION. BIBLICAL SCHOLAR, HENRY ALFORD SAID THAT RELIGION IS, "THE EXTERNAL MANIFESTATION OF ... A RELATIONSHIP TO GOD ROOTED IN THE HEART AND SHAPING OF LIFE."

It is commonly accepted that James would have been writing his letter to a Jewish-born Christian audience. Due to their Jewish heritage the recipients of this letter would have had quite heavy expectations placed upon them. James warns them, however, not to allow the religious practices of Judaism to stand in the way of their Christ-centred faith. In the verses provided James explores what it means to be 'truly' religious:

'Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world' (James 1:26-27).

'Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded' (James 4:8).

Religion is an outward expression of an individual's or a community's inward-heart relationship with God. Religion is the way in which our lives connect with the life of God. When James refers to religion in these verses, he is talking about our relationship with God and how we express this relationship by the way we live. He offers some good advice and gives some specific examples in regard to how we need to live our everyday lives. We may think that religion is something we do, which in one sense is correct, but this is only a part of 'true' religion. Biblical scholar, Henry Alford said that religion is, 'the external manifestation of ... a relationship to God rooted in the heart and shaping of life.'



DISCUSS:

- * What one thing can you do today that will help bring you closer to God?
- * Who is the 'orphan' or the 'widow' in your neighbourhood? What practical thing can you do to express your care and concern?
- * In your everyday life, what competes for your attention over God? What can you do to restore a Godly balance? When will you put this into action?

To be truly religious, we must take note of James's description of a Christian who lives in holiness. We must watch our speech so as not to offend others and deceive ourselves, we should look after the vulnerable and suffering members of our society and avoid earthly impurities. As Christians, we should take time to pause to quietly confess to God our shortcomings and ask for his help as we seek to express his character more in our lives. Upon acknowledging our human failures, we start a journey to a meaningful relationship with God from a place of meaningless religion.

James advises those who are existing in a state of meaningless religion to draw near to God, so that he will draw near to them. By washing our hands and purifying our hearts from sin, we can enjoy a full and satisfying experience of God. God's approach is always by invitation. He does not push his way in. Read quietly and slowly Matthew 11:28-30 from *The Message*. Take time to consider what these words are saying to you personally. Imagine Jesus is sitting beside you. How does this make you feel? What is Jesus inviting you to do? What does it mean for you to live freely and lightly?

'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly' (Matthew 11:28-30 MSG).



Holy God, forgive my self-importance. May the words that I speak glorify you and build others up. Give me a real concern for the lost and lonely. Keep me close to your heart. Only by your grace. Amen.

MAJOR PRIYA MORGAN

UNITED KINGDOM TERRITORY WITH THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Major Morgan is currently serving as Divisional Leader for Leader Development in the Southern Division of the United Kingdom Territory with the Republic of Ireland. Originally from Australia, she is married to Gregory and they have two adult children, Thea and Zachary. In the 29 years that she has been an officer, Priya has enjoyed serving in corps appointments, territorial youth work, officer training and education. She has recently completed a Masters in Theological Studies and is particularly interested in advocating for women in the areas of education and gender equity.



HOLINESS EVERY DAY

1 PETER 1:13-22

CAPTAIN MIWA NAKAJIMA

'Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

'Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

'Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.' (1 Peter 13-22)

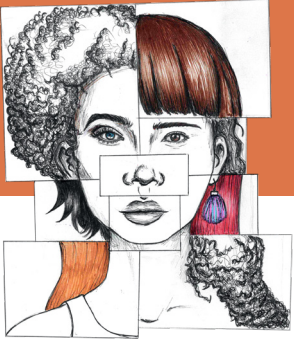
1 Peter 1:13-22 tells us how we used to live an empty life without God, but Jesus sacrificed his own life so that we would be saved from dying in our sins. We are told that through the precious blood of Jesus we are no longer slaves, but God's children (Galatians 4:7). We are heirs to God's kingdom! As the citizens of heaven, we are to live by the standards of God's Kingdom: 'in reverent fear of him during your time here as "temporary residents"' (1 Peter 1:17 *NLT*). Drawing from this imagery, we are called to look after and preserve the Kingdom.

In verse 15, we are commanded to lead holy lives: 'just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.' To be holy means to be sanctified, to be set apart for honourable use for God. We have been made his children, God wants to set us apart so the world would know that we belong to him.

1 Peter 2:9 reads, 'You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.' By calling us to be holy in all we do, God makes an opportunity for the people around us to recognise the Kingdom values that we live by.

Looking at the world around us, there is no question that this is the time to be holy. The world is more and more focused on satisfying one's own desire and relying on one's own understanding. Without Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life, people are driven by impulse and do whatever they feel like doing. But we would know, as one who has been saved from this emptiness, that there is no true joy or hope

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DISCUSS:

- * What comes to mind when you hear the word 'holiness'?
- * Are you alert and fully sober, setting your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus is revealed at his coming?
- * Think of the practical ways you could live out the Kingdom standards this week.

apart from God. Now is the time to be holy, because unless someone demonstrates holiness in day-to-day living in practical and realistic ways, people have no chance to experience the values of the Kingdom, which is full of grace and love.

We are given many scriptural examples of Kingdom living, but in verse 22 we are told to 'have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.' All the instructions in the Bible on practical holiness are impossible if we are to attempt them in our own strength. This is where many people get discouraged or sceptical about Christianity or holiness, because biblical standards seem too high to attain. Many would say, 'I can't go to church because I don't have my act together.' The fact is, we cannot be holy unless we have a living relationship with God. God is perfect in holiness and we are very weak in our flesh. We can become holy only by being connected to God. We will grow in our practical holiness as the Holy Spirit helps and guides us in our spiritual walk.

Verse 21 states, 'Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.' Having this faith and hope in God clearly sets us apart from the world. The world around us needs faith and hope more than ever before. Let us be holy in everything we do, to communicate to people the love and grace that has so richly been bestowed upon us.



Father God, thank you for setting us apart as your special possession. Help us to be holy in everything we do, so that people around us will see a glimpse of Heaven in and through us. Amen.

CAPTAIN MIWA NAKAJIMA

JAPAN TERRITORY


Captain Nakajima currently serves as Private Secretary to the Territorial Commander and Secretary for Spiritual Life Development in the Japan Territory. A large part of her ministry consists of translation between English and Japanese. As a follower of Jesus, her desire is to hear the heart of God and to communicate it to people around her in word and deed.



'COME!'

2 PETER 2:1-22

MAJOR MAYUKO TERASAWA



'Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires' (2 Peter 1:2-4).

If you were told that you didn't have much time left on earth, what would you write to your family, friends, followers and co-workers? This passage was written by Peter as his last letter to the believers. The Lord Jesus Christ had made it clear to Peter that he would soon leave this earthly life (1:14).

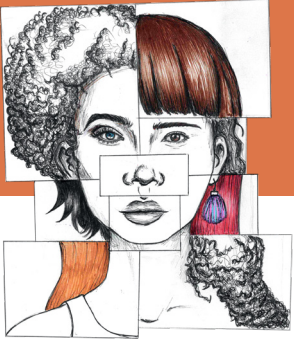
Previously Peter had written to comfort and encourage the believers in the midst of suffering and persecution, but in this letter he wanted to warn them of an internal attack from false teachers.

Peter had witnessed Jesus' divine power and glory time after time. He wrote 'We were eye-witnesses of his majesty. He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain' (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Peter made mistakes many times because of his short temper and superficial understandings. Jesus noticed Peter's small faith and had forgiven it and encouraged him. Each time he made a mistake, Peter understood Jesus' power and mercy. God is calling us to be holy from Genesis to Revelation, from the beginning of the world to the day of the Lord (1 Peter 3:10). Even though no one can deny this holy calling, for us as Christians, sometimes we hear other voices discouraging us from acting out in faith in pursuit of holiness: 'not for me just yet', 'I don't want it', 'it could never happen for me'.

This reminds me of the story of Peter's divine experience. As a skilful fisherman Peter was familiar with the Sea of Galilee. Peter had confidence himself about the sea and fishing in it, but Jesus showed Peter that his self-confidence did not have the power to conquer every difficult situation. In Matthew's Gospel, Peter and other disciples were on the boat heading to the other side of lake Galilee (14:22-32). They struggled to make progress because the wind was against them. They obeyed Jesus' order to get into the boat, but the journey was not easy. All night they had tried in vain to get to the other side. They felt tired of battling the wind and waves and were disappointed. When Jesus walked on the lake and appeared before them, they were terrified. We tend to

'ARE YOU IN THE TROUBLED SEA OR ARE STRONG WINDS AGAINST YOU? ARE YOU IN A TIME OF STRONG DISAPPOINTMENT AND HOPELESSNESS? IF WE HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED HOLINESS FOR OURSELVES, THEN IN THE MIDST OF LIFE'S STORM, WE ARE AFRAID TO GO THE NEXT STEP, TO CHANGE OURSELVES AND TO RECEIVE TRANSFORMATION.'



DISCUSS:

- * Have you ever heard someone say, 'Holiness is not a real experience nowadays'? How do you respond to this comment?
- * What is the wind that distracts your advance to holiness?
- * What is the water that you struggle in and want to rise above?

be terrified by everything when our hearts are down. Even a miracle can cause us to worry when our hearts are filled with disappointment.

Are you in the troubled sea or are strong winds against you? Are you in a time of strong disappointment and hopelessness? If we have not experienced holiness for ourselves, then in the midst of life's storm, we are afraid to go the next step, to change ourselves and to receive transformation.

But, as Jesus did for Peter, he comes and invites us to be holy and experience his divine nature by his power: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid' (14:27). How do we answer this invitation? Peter answered from the boat in the strong wind: 'Lord, if it's you ... tell me to come to you on the water' (14:28). Jesus calls us to escape from the corrupt world and to completely receive his divine nature. Jesus is calling us to live a holy life. Just as Peter did, we too would like to answer his invitation.

Jesus invites us to walk on the water. As Peter walked on the water, we too can put the corrupt world under our feet! We don't need to struggle in the water anymore! The Bible describes Peter's faults honestly. He moved his eyes from Jesus to the wind, then began to sink. Many times, we experience a similar thing. We have to keep our eyes on Jesus to continue walking on the water. When we find ourselves sinking in the water, we can cry out to Jesus to save us from the water: 'Lord, save me!'

'And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith' (Hebrews 12:1-2).



Dear Lord, thank you for your invitation into your divine power. I need to hear your calling to 'come' day by day and moment by moment. May your grace and peace be ours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Your divine power has given me everything I need for a godly life through my knowledge of you who called me by your own glory and goodness. I fix my eyes only on you Jesus. Amen.

MAJOR MAYUKO TERASAWA

JAPAN TERRITORY

Major Terasawa is currently serving as Literary Secretary and Editorial Secretary in the Japan Territory. As part of her role, she is an editor of the territorial publications, which allows her to witness to the power of the Bible. In her spare time, she loves music, arts, handcrafts, architecture and nature.





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