

Covenant Renewal Sunday 2017

Resource Pack



I'M SAYING
YES
TO GOD

THE SALVATION ARMY

COVENANT RENEWAL DAY 2017

*Today I choose to **reaffirm** my covenant with **God**:*

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Saviour

I desire to build His Kingdom through The Salvation Army

*Today I'm saying **YES** to God and choosing to **listen, trust, act and believe.***

SIGNED

DATE



The Salvation Army New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga Territory

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Covenant Renewal, Founders' Day & Candidates Sunday.....	3
Resources Available	3
Supporting Resources	4
Meeting Outline.....	4
Preparation	4
Ideas for Songs.....	5
The Soldier's Covenant	6
Bible Reading: Acts 9:1-19	7
Meeting Content	9
1. Meeting Introduction.....	9
2. Children's Material.....	10
3. Candidate's Video	10
4. Sermon.....	11
5. Response.....	17
6. Benediction.....	18

We trust you find this resource useful. We are always keen to receive feedback so that we can improve our service to you. If you have feedback, please send it to missionteam@nzf.salvationarmy.org

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Content: Mission Resources

2017

Introduction

Covenant Renewal, Founders Day & Candidates Sunday

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

These aims seem to fit well together, so we have developed this resource pack to help you prepare for a combined Covenant Renewal and Candidates Sunday.

This pack contains a theme, introduction, children's slot, kids' church lesson, sermon outline, and meeting lead ideas, plus renewal cards are being sent to you via your divisional headquarters.

The theme for the service is saying yes to God. The Bible passage is around how Ananias said yes to God and his role in Saul's conversion. The message explores four parts to saying yes – listening to God, trusting his calling, acting on this and believing in the impossible. To encourage people to consider soldiership, please include this in the response as you see fit or interview someone about what saying yes to God through soldiership means for them. Since the service doubles as Candidates Sunday, please also include a challenge about officership.

The Children's Story and Kids Church lesson also focuses on Ananias and saying yes to God – exploring how we can trust God no matter what.

We recognise that this date may not suit everyone, and you may feel the combined focus will make this a busy day. You are of course welcome to adapt everything in the pack to suit your local context, e.g. to change the date, use what you like. We just hope you find these resources useful and if you use them, please personalise the sermon to reflect your own style and experiences.

Resources Available

With this booklet, you should expect to receive a set of *Covenant Renewal Cards* distributed by your divisional headquarters.

The intranet contains the electronic resources to support this day. Head to <https://intranet.sarmy.net.nz/>, under Strategic Mission Plan >> Mission Resources >> Soldiership Resources. Resources available include:

- ❑ Electronic copy of the sermon for editing (from this document)
- ❑ Themed PowerPoint with Bible message (both standard and wide-screen)
- ❑ Social media image
- ❑ Electronic copy of the children's story, kids church lesson, explanation of the Home Connection Card and the Home Connection Card for families.

Supporting Resources

Meeting Outline

To assist with your meeting planning, we are suggesting a meeting in sections, interspersed with songs, prayer, offering, etc. as you choose.

Potential scripts for each section follow.

Section	Suggested Content
1. Introduction	Introduction (script below)
2. Children's story / kids church lesson	All kids Covenant Renewal material can be found in separate files – this includes a Children's story, Kids Church lesson, info about the Home Connection Card and printable Home Connection card.
3. Video: Candidate's video	We recommend you show one of the Candidate's promotional videos somewhere in your service. There are four excellent testimonies to choose from. You can access these here: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzks-ExjTF3fsehuN-rmRSGi-Cd1Sr8sa
4. Sermon	Potential script below
5. Response	Potential script below. Follow with appropriate response music
6. Benediction	Idea below

Preparation

1. Read through this document
2. Choose which Candidate's video you will play, and sort out how to play this
3. Choose someone to tell the children's story or pass the kids' church material to your leaders
4. Print out copies of the Home Connection Cards for all your families with primary and intermediate school aged children.
5. Gather your response cards and provide pens
6. Personalise the sermon.

Ideas for Songs

SONGS FOR DURING THE SERVICE

- SASB 687 I'll Stand for Christ
- SASB 696 Soldiers of our God arise (Storm the forts of darkness)
- SASB 707 Who is on the Lord's side?
- In God we Trust – Hillsong
- Whom Shall I Fear – Chris Tomlin
- Resurrecting – Elevation Worship
- Forever – Chris Tomlin
- I Will Follow – Chris Tomlin
- This I Believe (The Creed) – Hillsong
- Let there be Light - Hillsong

RESPONSE / ENDING SONGS

- SASB C53 Spirit of the living God
- SASB 474 All to Jesus, I surrender
- SASB 487 Have thine own way Lord
- SASB 525 Take my life and let it be
- Lord I give you my heart – Hillsong
- Take The World But Give Me Jesus
- With all I am (Into your hands, I commit again ...) – Hillsong
- Surrender – Lincoln Brewster
- Christ is Enough – Hillsong
- Lord I need You – Matt Maher
- Whom Shall I Fear – Chris Tomlin
- Let there be Light - Hillsong
- In God we Trust – Hillsong
- My heart is Yours (includes All to Jesus I Surrender) – Passion
- Resurrecting – Elevation Worship
- This I Believe (The Creed) - Hillsong
- No Longer a Slave – Bethel
- I Surrender – Hillsong
- I Will Follow – Chris Tomlin
- Sinking Deep – Hillsong
- Crowns – Hillsong
- We Fall Down – Chris Tomlin
- At the Cross (Love Ran Red) – Chris Tomlin
- Miracles - Bethel

The Soldier's Covenant

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bible Reading: Acts 9:1-19

SAUL'S CONVERSION

⁹ *Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"*

⁵ *"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.*

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ *The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.*

¹⁰ *In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"*

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ *The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."*

¹³ *"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."*

¹⁵ *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Meeting Content

Scripture: Acts 9:1-19

Subject: I'm Saying Yes

Aim: To have the congregation choose to (re)commit to saying yes to God

1. Meeting Introduction

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

Today we're exploring what it really looks like to say yes to God. Our Salvation Army founders, Catherine and William Booth, are a great example of this. They said yes to God when they answered his calling to rise up a new Army that met the spiritual and material needs of the world around them. When they said yes to God, they had no idea the impact this would have. Without them, there would be no Salvation Army today. What an incredible legacy! As we remember our founders and their impact today, let's be encouraged in our saying yes.

No matter your situation, we pray that you will feel very welcome and that you will encounter God during this service, as we look at our commitment to say yes to God.

2. Children's Material

A children's message, kids church lesson, and Home Connection card was sent with this resource, or can be found on our intranet.

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

Note that the Territorial Children's Department have 10 story telling packs that can be used with this material. Please email them directly about this.

3. Candidate's Video

[Choose one of the four I'm Saying Yes videos]


Today we're exploring what it looks like to say yes to God. Saying yes to God is about saying yes to the calling he has placed on our lives and serving him through that. In The Salvation Army, one of the ways we believe God calls people is to full-time ministry as Salvation Army officers.

As today is Candidate's Sunday and we're looking at what it means to say yes, let's watch the following video of [*insert person's name from video*] who shares their story about saying yes to God by living out their calling as a Salvation Army officer. What might God be calling you to this year?

[Show video clip]

4. Sermon

INTRODUCTION

[We've added the symbol  for where you should change slides if using the PowerPoint]

Simple yes's can make a big difference. We make decisions every day – choosing to say yes or no hundreds of time throughout a day.

This morning, you said yes to coming to church and no to going out for brunch. You said yes to wearing that outfit and no to another choice.

You said yes to eating breakfast or yes to running out the door.

You also said yes to being on time to church or you said no to getting up when the alarm went off.

You said yes to driving and no to walking, or the other way around.

You said yes to sitting next to that person and no to sitting somewhere else.


And you'll also say yes to having a coffee afterward or yes to a cup of tea, or yes to heading home.

That's a whole lot of decisions that we are constantly making – whether we're aware of them or not. We're making them all the time - big decisions, little decisions, major decisions, mundane decisions. Yes or no are some of the first words we learn to use as children – we learn very quickly how to make choices.

And with every decision, there are consequences. Sometimes we have no idea the impact our yes or our no will have.

This morning we're exploring what it looks like to say yes to God.

IT'S ANANI-YES, NOT ANANI-NO

 The Bible passage we'll be exploring today is Acts 9 – Saul's Conversion. Often we focus on the miraculous story of Saul's encounter with Jesus and his transformation into Paul. But today we'll be focusing on often forgotten, Ananias.

First some context for the passage:

Jesus was crucified shortly before this in AD 29 and had risen from the dead three days later. The Book of Acts opens after Christ's rising from the dead. Jesus then commissioned the disciples in Acts 1 to preach the Gospel. At this time, there was plenty of opposition to these new Christ followers and people like Saul were set on bringing them down.

In Acts 9, Saul is carrying letters from the High Priest in Jerusalem to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he finds Jesus followers among the Jews in Damascus he might arrest them. It is on the road to Damascus he encounters Jesus. Shortly after, the Lord appears to another man, Ananias in a vision.



[Read Bible passage here if you haven't read earlier]

So what makes Ananias so special? Nothing really. The Bible doesn't say much about him, he's only mentioned twice (in this passage and when Paul tells the story of his conversion). All accounts point to him being an ordinary guy. But what makes Ananias so important is that he simply said yes to God.

So what does it mean to say yes to God?

SAYING YES TO GOD MEANS WE...

1. Listen



One of the key things this passage highlights is that God calls each of us to partner with him in his mission. God simply wants us to say yes to him and be willing to live out our unique calling and purposes he gives to us.

In this story, God speaks to both Saul and Ananias; Saul a known and feared Christian-killer, and Ananias a 'devout man with a good testimony'. God doesn't discriminate – he doesn't pick favourites. God wants to be in relationship with all people and has good plans and purposes for everyone – not just those that tick all the good Christian boxes.

The difference in their encounters is that Ananias knew the voice of God, answering immediately 'Yes, Lord', whereas Saul answered 'Who are you, Lord?' If we claim to be Christ followers, we should have an intimacy with Christ where we know his voice. The more time we spend in prayer, the Word and learning more about God, the easier it is to determine his leading in our lives. Imagine being so close to God that you can immediately answer 'Yes, Lord' when you recognise him speaking into your life. If you signed up to be a Salvation Army soldier, then listening to God's spirit and connecting with him in worship, prayer, service and reading the Bible are all in that covenant. Like receiving a phone call from a good friend, we should be becoming more and more familiar with God so we can recognise his prompts.

The passage also highlights that God speaks to each of us in different ways. God knows us; he knows what gets our attention and what we'll best respond to. Saul needed the dramatic encounter on the road to understand that it was God calling to him, whereas Ananias knew God's prompting through a quiet vision.

How God chooses to speak to us and what he asks of each of us will be different. But we all need to be listening for the voice of God in our lives.

How might God be trying to get your attention? Are you listening for the prompts and calls of God? What might he be asking you to saying yes to?

2. Trust



An amazing thing about this passage is how it demonstrates that we're created with free will – the choice to say yes or no, the ability to walk away or dig deeper. Ananias heard what God was asking of him and feared what might happen, and rightfully so. Ananias had a natural, human response like the rest of us. 'Umm... you want me to do what, God?! Really?! But you know he's a bit of a psycho – he's been out to get us and I'm sure I'm the last person he'll listen to. Have you thought about sending John Smith – he's far more qualified.'

It's okay to ask questions. God often calls us to things out of our comfort zone, things that might affect our reputation or our relationships, things that will cost us or push us.

Asking questions, talking with God, looking to his Word and talking with other Christians is a great way to affirm a calling or prompting of God. Wanting to be sure something is the right thing is a natural, human response. But at some point, we need to simply trust that God knows best.

The passage says Ananias questioned what God was asking of him and heard God's response. The next line goes on to say, '*Then* Ananias went to the house and entered it.' That was enough for Ananias. He heard God's call, chatted about it and then trusted God knew best and got on with it.

If God calls us, he'll equip us – we just need to be available and willing and trust that God's plan is the best plan. God's commands don't always make sense, but they're always right. We simply need to trust and obey. The soldier's covenant puts it this way "I will be responsive to the Holy Spirit's work and obedient to His leading in my life".

What passions and dreams has God placed on your heart? Do you trust him in these?

3. Act



The third part of saying yes is action. It often seems so easy to say yes until we have to follow through with it. Like when you agree to help a friend move house or babysit their kids or volunteer for the corps car wash fundraiser. It's easy to say yes at the time, but actually following through takes a lot more commitment.

Saying yes to God means we walk the talk, it means we put our faith into action.

After Ananias questions God's plan, God responds with 'Go!' It's not a passive suggestion, it's a firm call to action.

Saying yes to God often means we 'go' and have to leave things behind. It can mean facing fears, moving out of our comfort zones, or doing something new. Saying yes can also mean saying no to other things. The Bible never implies following Christ is easy – it takes courage and perseverance.

It means being open to being used by God however he needs you – in the big things and the small, everyday things.

Yes, God can call us to big, great things but often it's our small acts of obedience that can have the biggest difference. Our small 'yes's' to God can have a lasting, wide-reaching impact. Like when we choose to say yes to honouring others and no to gossip at work, when we say yes to helping our elderly neighbour and no to apathy, when we say yes to the call to officership and no to doing what we've always done, when we say yes to serving in ministry and no to just being a spectator.

In his book, 'The Power of a Whisper: Hearing God, Having the Guts to Respond' Bill Hybels also talks about the impact of saying yes. He says, "Ananias delivers that small dose of knowledge, and Saul goes on to write two-thirds of the New Testament; he plants churches that will have lasting impact; he leaves a legacy, not of bitterness and rage, but of boldness and righteousness and faith. Lost people are saved, believers are encouraged, churches are strengthened and entire communities experience times of great peace, all because two men hear God's whispers and have the guts to respond."

As Christians, we're called to action. And if you've signed the Salvation Army soldier's covenant, you signed up to a life of action. The covenant uses phrases like "I will be actively involved", and "sharing the good news", "endeavouring to win others", "giving", "maintaining Christian ideals" and "caring for others". Being a Christ follower involves putting our faith into action.

What use is our 'yes' without action? When we hear God's calling, we need to trust his plan and have the courage to act on it.

What is holding you back from living out God's calling? In what area of your life do you need courage to act? What do you need to leave behind to move into God's calling?

4. Believe



The final part of our yes is believing that God will use us, even if we can't see the bigger picture. In the story of Saul's conversion, Ananias arrives at Saul's house, places his hands on him and says, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Ananias not only trusted God's plan and went to Saul's house, but he had enough faith to address Saul as brother. Calling him brother showed that Ananias believed Saul was now a brother in Christ – a man that just days earlier was persecuting Christ followers. Ananias believed in God's word and his power, and had enough faith to believe that God was already at work in Saul. In this same moment, Saul is also healed from his blindness.

Often we find it easy to say we trust in God's plan and are willing to play our part, but how often do we truly believe something will happen - that lives will be transformed, people will be healed and our communities will come to know Jesus?

In Russ Johnston's book, 'God Can Make it Happen' he writes, "Most of us believe God *can* move mountains, but how many of us believe he *will*?"

Hebrews chapter 11 starts with, "Now faith is being sure of what we ask for and certain of what we do not see." And goes on to list a long line of people who, through faith, did incredible things for God. How big is our faith? The Bible shows us that God can do the impossible, and often uses ordinary people to bring this about. If God calls us to it and we ask for the impossible in his name, he has the power to do it.

We just need to play our part and have the faith that God will do the rest. Like our founders, Catherine and William Booth, we need to have faith that God will use and bless what we offer him. The Booths would have no idea the legacy their willingness would create – they would have no idea the impact their obedience would have on thousands of lives and communities over the last 150 years. They simply said yes to God, put their faith into action, and let him do the rest.

Ananias is only mentioned two times in Scripture but the legacy of his obedience still impacts us today. Without Ananias, there would be no Paul. Like the Booths, Ananias probably had no idea what the impact of his simple 'Yes, Lord' and humble obedience would have – he just believed in a God who was bigger than his doubt.

We need to believe God is a God of the impossible. We need to believe that God is faithful when we are faithful. We need to believe God can use us to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

And like Ananias, we might never know the impact of our yes.

How big is your faith? Do you struggle to believe God will truly make a difference? What do you need faith for in your life that God can do the impossible?

SUMMARY



We've looked at what it means to say yes to God and the four components of our yes.

1. Listen: we need to be listening to God's calling
2. Trust: we need to trust God's plan
3. Act: we need to put our faith into action
4. Believe: we need to believe God can do the impossible

Imagine if every soldier or adherent fully lived out their covenant? And if every Christ follower said yes to God daily?

Imagine what God could do through our church if each of us listened to the voice and prompting of God in our day to day lives?

Imagine if each of us trusted God enough to follow his leading and step out of our comfort zones?

Imagine the impact our corps could have on our family, friends and community if we had the courage to put our faith into action and live out our calling?

And imagine how God would move if we had the faith to believe in the impossible?

If God is calling you to something, you won't be fulfilled, content or satisfied until you begin living in that calling. Our small acts of obedience can have a massive difference. Without the simple obedience and courage of Ananias, there would be no Paul and his legacy on the modern-day church.

We might never know the impact of our yes. But we need to be listening to, trusting in and acting on what God is calling us to say yes to, and believing he will do the impossible.

5. Response

As we've reflected on the story of Ananias and his obedience to God's calling in his life, maybe it's challenged you about your own calling and your response to God's leading in your life.

What would it look like for you to say YES to God's calling?



- Perhaps you've never said yes to God and known what it means to be in relationship with him. Perhaps you said yes years ago but struggle to hear his voice in your life. Maybe you want to say yes to hearing from God today.
- Maybe you felt called to become a soldier or adherent years ago and want to re-affirm that covenant today. For others, you might not have made this commitment but feel God calling you to take that step, or others might even feel a call to full-time ministry or officership. What area is God calling you to 'step up' in?
- Perhaps you have no idea what God's plan for you is. Maybe you're fighting that calling. Do you need to say yes to God and trust his calling today?
- For others, you might have said yes years ago but are struggling with actually living that out. Maybe you're afraid of what it means for your reputation, relationships or comfort. What do you need courage for today?
- Or maybe today you simply need faith to believe God can and will use you. That your yes will have an impact you might never know. That God can and will do the impossible. Do you need faith to believe God is a God of the impossible?



Today, we have some covenant renewal cards available. The cards simply say that "I'm saying yes to God ..." [space for your name], and includes the words listen, trust, act, believe.

If you would like to respond and say yes to God today, we invite you to come forward, and sign the card. Maybe you want to say yes to God for the first time today, or you want to say yes to God's calling again – we invite you to come forward.

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

6. Benediction

Ephesians 3:20-21

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”