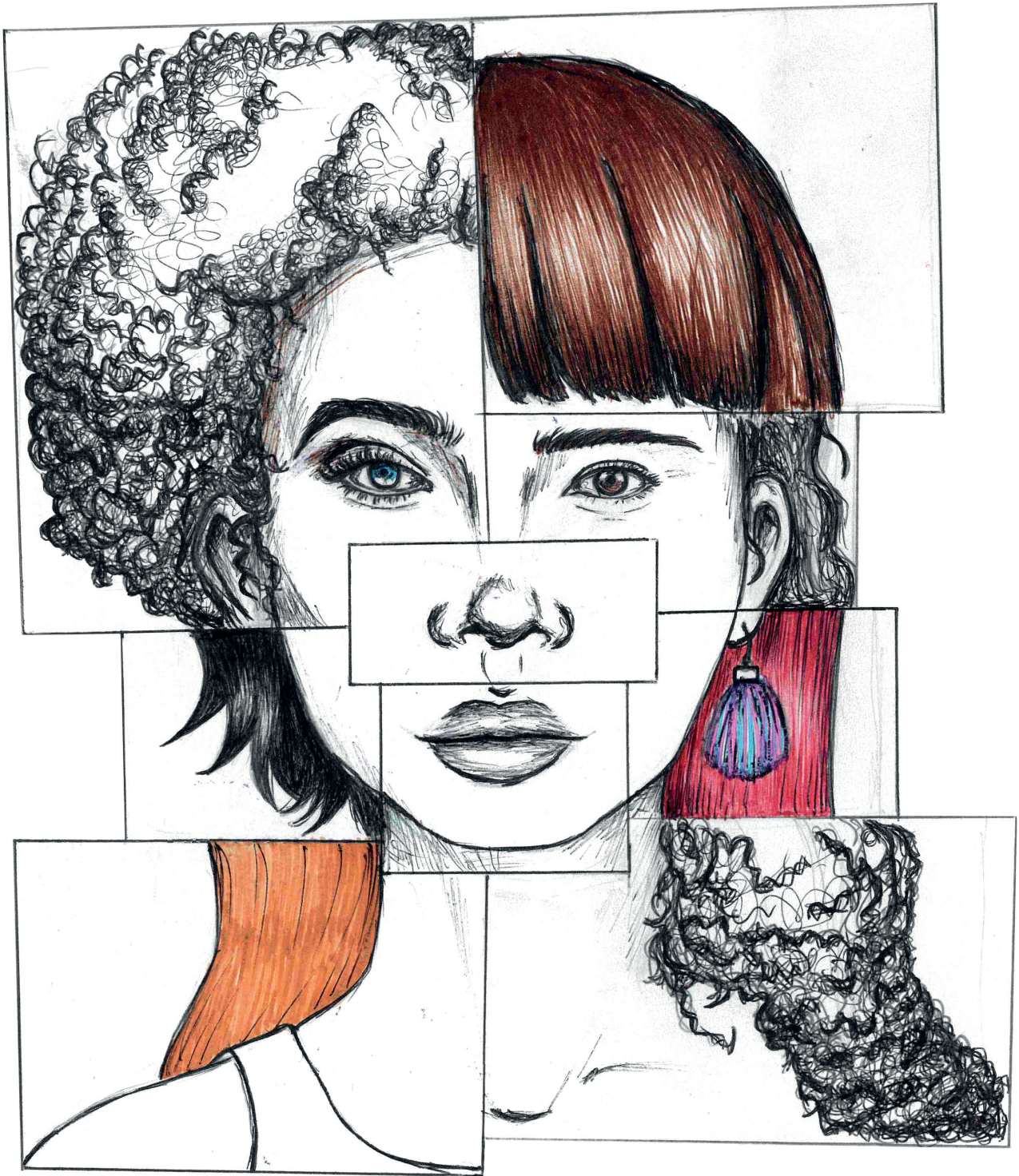


Others

IHQ WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDIES



Others

IHQ WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDIES



INTRODUCTION

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST,

I am delighted to be able to present to you the 2023 Bible study collection from international Women's Ministries, *Others*. It is my firm belief that God is calling us to walk with others; in confidence, courage, trust and resilience. Our hearts will stay connected to God, but our hands must reach out to women and girls, men and boys, across our world. Loving others is God's call to action for our lives!

But, much more than just talking about others, we must actually step out and join with them in a spirit of intentional community, hearing people when they voice their struggles and their joys. For you, this may look like speaking out and educating on injustices, or supporting others in practical and prayerful ways through times of devastation. Perhaps, in your life, living in community with others looks more like a series of opportunities to practice the embrace of new cultures and perspectives.

A story is told of Salvation Army founder, General William Booth, when he was an old man. It illustrates the significance of this theme to our mission. The Founder was expected to speak at a huge convention, but his physical condition meant that he was unable to attend and instead he sent a telegram. Thousands gathered at the event, eager to hear the great preacher speak. That night, a delegate opened the sealed telegram and the crowd grew hushed in expectancy. There was only one word written, 'OTHERS!'

General Brian Peddle's *Call to Mission* urged Salvationists to 'be engaged', 'battle-ready' and to 'take responsibility'. When contemplating the call to inclusive love, he wrote, 'We must be beyond reproach in treating all people with respect and compassion, remembering our mission to meet human needs in Christ's name without any discrimination.' It is in response to that challenge that this Bible study collection, *Others*, was formed. The studies focus on how we need to be willing, embracing and energised to go out and love others, to show them they are loved by God, and to extend a welcome for them within The Salvation Army. Supported by the instructions laid out for us 1 Corinthians 13, this collection reflects a love that 'does not dishonour others' (1 Corinthians 13:5).

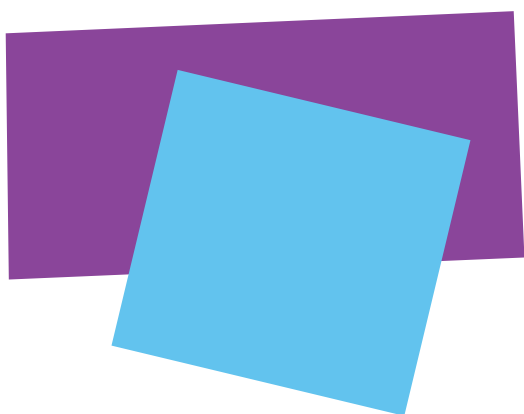
Followers of Christ are left in no doubt of this calling to love others. When we love other people well, our true identity in Christ will be revealed. Jesus is calling us to be filled with love for him and, out of that love, we will grow ever closer to him: 'A new command I give you: love one another...by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (John 13:34-35).

My prayer over this collection is that everyone who engages with these words will experience the presence of God ministering to their hearts. I pray that, out of the overflow of the Holy Spirit, others will become and remain the focus of our ministry. I also pray that the collection itself will become a space for inclusive hearts that honour God and honour others to connect. These studies have been prepared by women writers, but are not intended to be used exclusively by women's groups. I pray that these studies will be utilised in groups that host all ages, cultures, nationalities, languages and genders, so that the Church glorifies the rich and beautiful diversity of our Creator God!

We want to witness the empowering truth and courage of the Holy Spirit. We know that he can empower us to be his voice, his hands and his feet in a world that is looking for hope, truth, transformation and peace!

May God bless you as you read.

**'WHEN WE LOVE OTHER PEOPLE WELL,
OUR TRUE IDENTITY IN CHRIST
WILL BE REVEALED'**


A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosalie Peddle". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a white rectangular background that is slightly tilted.

Commissioner Rosalie Peddle
World President of Women's Ministries

WALKING THROUGH SAMARIA

JOHN 4:3-9

MAJOR AMY REARDON



As you look up the passage for this Bible study, you may be surprised to see that only verses 3-9 of this famous chapter are referenced. The bulk of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman has yet to unfold. However, something significant has indeed already occurred. The chapter demonstrates how Jesus valued even the lowest person in the ancient Palestinian societal structure – a disgraced woman. But the opening of the chapter also demonstrates Jesus' disregard for racial and cultural discrimination.

In 722 BC, the mighty nation of Assyria annexed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Assyrian king exported many of his citizens there. The Israelis and Assyrians in that land began to intermarry. In Jesus' day this region was known as Samaria. First century Jews despised Samaritans because their ancestors had diluted the Hebrew blood and faith through intermarriage and religious syncretism. They were their mixed-race, 'impure' descendants.

**'WE ARE TO IMITATE JESUS,
WITH HEARTS SO OPEN TO
ALL RACES AND CULTURES
THAT IT MAY EVEN TAKE
PEOPLE BY SURPRISE.'**

John 4:3-4 tells us that Jesus was headed from Judea to Galilee, and that 'he had to go through Samaria'. This is curious, because there is no reason why Jesus should have had to go through Samaria. Jews travelled from Judea to Galilee all the time, but they did not go through Samaria. They went around it, adding miles and complication to their journey.

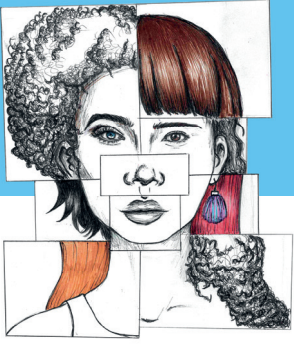
In her book *A Credible Witness*, Brenda Salter McNeil says, 'I believe that Jesus "had to" go through Samaria because he was compelled by the Father's heart' (p. 42). While walking through Samaria was an unthinkable act for most Jews, it was a distinctly purposeful act for Jesus. He set out to demonstrate that all people were of equal value.

There are three actions of Jesus in these verses that we may imitate.

1. JESUS VENTURED INTO 'FOREIGN' TERRITORY.

The doors of our churches and our homes must be open to all people, especially in this age when many cultures and races share geographical space. Beyond that, we are to walk out of our own spaces and into the neighbourhoods of others with open hearts, willing to learn and love. One reason for this is to share our faith as far and wide as we can. We are not called to turn from those who are different from us. We have been called to 'go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation' (Mark 16:15).

We also venture into other territories to understand our brothers and sisters in Christ better. I remember when the Chilean members of a corps we attended near Washington, D.C., USA, took some of us North Americans to a restaurant that served their native cuisine. Only two people in our group of 20 spoke both Spanish and English. Yet we managed to feel Christ's love and joy among us.



DISCUSS:

- * What effort could you make to explore another culture?
- * Do you harbour any ill feelings toward another race or culture? Are you willing to confess and ask the Lord to change your heart?

2. JESUS CHOSE A PLACE WHERE BOTH OF THEIR CULTURES CONNECTED.

The encounter in John 4 took place at Jacob's well. The Samaritans and the traditional Jews shared origins and both groups had respect for their forefather, Jacob. It is wise to remember that as human beings we have a great deal in common. We all love our families, enjoy a good laugh and want our lives to have meaning. Our similarities testify to the fact that none is better than another, and we can find a starting place for conversation.

When my husband and I were corps officers in Seattle, Washington, our corps had a few soldiers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In their home country the offering plate was not passed around as we were used to; people danced down the aisle to give their tithe to the Lord. We tried it in Seattle and our soldiers loved clapping and singing and dancing down the aisle so much that we decided to do it once a month. Tithing was already a shared discipline, but we opened our hearts and found a new way to do it.

3. JESUS DEMONSTRATED TRUE FELLOWSHIP.

One of the most surprising things Jesus did in our John 4 passage was to ask for a drink of water. Tony Evans writes: 'To put his Jewish lips on her Samaritan cup was an intimate act of fellowship and warm acceptance' (*Oneness Embraced*, p. 61).

When my husband and I adopted two non-infant children, I paused for a moment the first time I shared a cup with them. I often shared a cup with the children to whom I gave birth, but there was a period with our adopted kids where that level of intimacy had to be built. I can only imagine the shock the Samaritan woman felt when a Jew – who was supposed to think she was deplorable – asked to drink from her cup.

We may not share cups, but what a display of fellowship Jesus modelled for us! We are to imitate Jesus, with hearts so open to all races and cultures that it may even take people by surprise. May we be willing to walk through Samaria.



Oh Jesus, teach us to understand and respect all the people you have created. You love us all equally. Help us to do the same.

MAJOR AMY REARDON

USA WESTERN


Major Amy Reardon is Assistant Principal at the training college in California. She is a mother of five and recently became a grandmother.



TRUSTING GOD IN EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE

JEREMIAH 29:11

CAPTAIN ASTRID CHISTENSEN



“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Jeremiah is one of the great prophets of the Bible, although a reluctant one. He was also prone to depression.

Despite his unwillingness, Jeremiah is faithful to his calling. He has been called by God to prophesy to the people. He is tasked with telling the people that they live in sin and must repent, or they will be **exiled**. The people don't repent, and they are expelled from their country, just as Jeremiah had prophesied.

The people are taken away to Babylon where they live in exile. They don't want to live in Babylon. They miss Jerusalem – their beloved Zion.

God speaks to Jeremiah and tells him that he should tell the people that they shall build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat the fruits from them. They shall marry and have sons and daughters, and their sons and daughters shall marry so they can have children. They will increase in numbers – not decrease. They shall pursue happiness and prosperity for the city in which they are placed, and when the city prospers, they will prosper too.

Through Jeremiah, the people are told that 70 years will pass before the promise of returning to their own land will be fulfilled.

'WE MUST CONCENTRATE ON DOING WHAT IS RIGHT BEFORE GOD. ON BUILDING WHATEVER HE LAYS ON OUR HEARTS AND MINDS.'

The people are reminded of the words “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

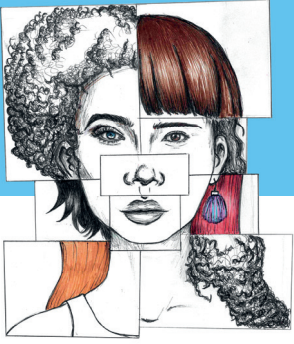
It is a very well-known verse, but it is also often used out of context.

When we read this verse, we tend to interpret it as if it speaks of instantaneous happiness. That God steps into our situation right away, and that we shall have our need for happiness fulfilled right here and now. But this is not what the verse speaks of.

If we take a closer look at the verse in context, we will see that it was said to a people who are under tremendous pressure. They are in a land they don't want to be in. They are under a dominion they don't want to be under. They have been expelled to another country. Here God says to them that they shall stay there for 70 years before the promise is fulfilled.

Depending on where we live in the world, our lives can be affected by instability, depression, divorce, anxiety, poverty, persecution, diseases, war or despair. Just like the Judeans in exile in Babylon, people of today know what it means to be under pressure, and to be in situations in which they don't want to be.

Furthermore, no matter where we are in this world, we can feel that we are in exile, and we can relate to how the people of Judah might have felt.



DISCUSS:

- * What can we learn from Jeremiah 29 about living where we are placed?
- * Are there areas in your life that make you insecure and cause you to not live your life to the full?
- * Do you need to embrace God's promise of hope and a future? What can you lay into God's hands and trust in him for?

In Philippians 3:20 we read: 'But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.'

We are created to live together with God, but as long as we are in this world, we will sense a measure of separation from God, and here comes the feeling of being in exile.

In our lives, we can find ourselves in places or situations that we don't want to be in. We can find ourselves under pressure in various situations, and sometimes it can seem as if there is no progress or hope for us.

Perhaps you are under pressure today, in your ministry, your marriage, your family life, at your work, in school, or maybe something in your local community puts pressure on you.

Jeremiah spoke to the people in exile, and they were told that they should live their lives in spite of being in a place they didn't like. They were encouraged to expand a city, which they would have preferred to leave. They should live their lives, and they should create new life. They should set down roots, knowing very well that one day the promise of returning to their own land would come to pass.

We must concentrate on doing what is right before God. On building whatever he lays on our hearts and minds. In the same way, the text speaks to us today. No matter where we are, no matter how we are – no matter what our situation is – the same words apply to us today.

Be present in the community we are placed in, and among the people we are placed together with. We must do it well and with joy and believe that we will be blessed because of that. While we keep our eyes on our true home and our true citizenship; our citizenship and our home with God.

The promise that was given to the people of Judah: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future", also applies today.

God is our Father, who keeps his promises. This is a fantastic promise to us, that whatever situation we stand in, God has higher plans with our life. It is a life that contains hope and prosperity. When we rest in this promise, we can act accordingly and reach out to others with love and hope.

It is a future that God has planned for us from the beginning.



I thank you, God my Father, that you have plans of hope and a future for me. No matter how I feel, and no matter my circumstances, I know that you encourage me to trust in you and in the promises that you have given me. Amen.

CAPTAIN ASTRID CHRISTENSEN

DENMARK AND GREENLAND

I serve in Tønder, Denmark, working with vulnerable families. I am married to Strange, who is also a captain. We have five children, aged 19, 17, 15 and nine-year-old twins. We experienced the Lord's call to ministry within The Salvation Army 11 years ago.



GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY

COLOSSIANS 1:16-17

CAPTAIN DOROTHY CHRISTOPHER MACWAN

God has always taught us to love others and to respect and include all people. If we forget or ignore this, there are severe consequences.

One such consequence is the generation gap. The generation gap is a difference of attitudes between people of different generations, which leads to a lack of understanding. It can be seen in the workplace, within families, our communities and in our ministry. It can lead us to disregard someone's value because of their age.

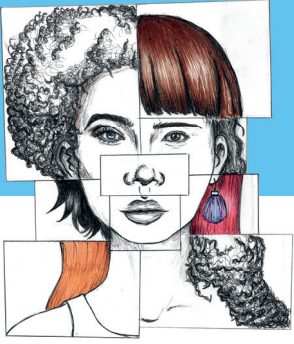
However, generational diversity is God's design. Throughout the Bible we see a beautiful picture of generational diversity which confirms how God calls people of all ages to accomplish his work. God protected an infant Moses who later became leader of the Israelites. God used Samuel, a small boy, to be a messenger to Eli's family. As an old man, God used Moses to deliver Israelites from slavery.

The book of Exodus provides a great example of generational diversity. Moses delivered and led God's chosen people to the Promised Land while embracing young people like Joshua and Caleb, whom he considered valuable in accomplishing the work that God had assigned to him. Moses was also preparing them for leadership, and Joshua became a good leader after the death of Moses.

People of all generations are equally important to God. The inclusion of different generations makes people feel respected, valued and welcomed. It boosts confidence and helps people realise their self-worth.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 states: 'Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. And so the body is not made up of one part but of many.'

**'THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE WE SEE
A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE OF
GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY WHICH
CONFIRMS HOW GOD CALLS
PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TO
ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK.'**



DISCUSS:

- * How are you including and respecting people of different ages in your family, community and church?
- * What is the picture of generational diversity in your church and family?

The human body consists of different parts that work together to keep the body healthy and functioning. In the same way, we the Church – members of God's family, of different ages and races, with different gifts – are to work in coordination with each other, by respecting, loving, encouraging and showing concern for each other, as part of the one body of Christ. Our interdependency is not a weakness; it teaches us to include, love and respect each other and that we need each other to fulfil our God-given purpose.

'There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work' (1 Corinthians 12: 4-6). May this remind us that regardless of age and differences, we all are gifted differently to do different services for the Lord. Our Lord is one, and through him we are knitted together with purpose. We all have our own capacity, gifts, understanding, values, ideas, strength and weaknesses, but when we come together we can thrive in godliness and give glory to our Almighty Heavenly Father God in his Son Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.



Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for adopting us in your family. Though we are unique individuals, varying in gender, age and gifts, you build us together with purpose, help us to see your will and beauty in each other. We want to celebrate the diversity in unity as we respect and love each other in our homes, church, community and our workplace. Amen.

CAPTAIN DOROTHY CHRISTOPHER MACWAN

INDIA WESTERN

I am Captain Dorothy Christopher Macwan presently serving as Secretary to Territorial President for Women's Ministries, based in Mumbai. My husband Captain Christopher A. Macwan is serving as Territorial Youth Secretary for Gujarat. We are glad to serve the Almighty God in our given ranks and appointment through The Salvation Army. May God bless all of us. Amen.


Since the time of writing, Captain Dorothy has taken up a new appointment at IHQ, where she serves as Assistant Under Secretary, South Asia.



WATER IS THE LIFE GIVER OF ALL THINGS/ KO TE WAI TE ORA O NGA MEA

JOHN 4

MAJOR CHRISTINE DE MAINE



'When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

Have you ever been able to drink fresh pure water straight from the source rather than out of a tap? I have had that experience and the water was sweet and delicious. Can you imagine what the water would have tasted like out of Jacob's well? Jacob's well in John 4 has historical significance that goes back to Genesis 33 when Jacob bought the land and set up camp. It was during this time that Jacob's daughter Dinah was 'violated' by the ruler of the land, Hamor the Hivite, which then set into motion anger within Jacob and his sons. Sadly, for all involved this was a situation that did not end well for both sides and the Bible does not tell us what eventually happened to Dinah. Hundreds of years later, this well is still sustaining many and through John 4 we can read about an encounter at the well between a woman (that the Bible does not name) and Jesus.

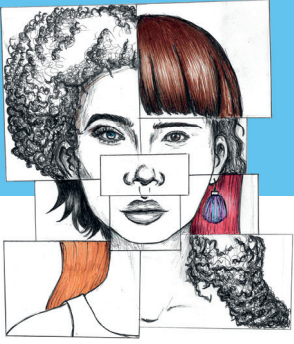
Jesus arrives at the well and sends his disciples into town to gather supplies. He is alone and probably feeling weary, thirsty and in need of some water. We know that it was the middle of the day, and the Samaritan woman came to collect water for herself and her household. In the context of this time, Jesus and this woman should have absolutely nothing to do with each other. They are not considered equals because of their gender, race, culture and their status within the community, and I believe that she visited the well in the midday heat so she could avoid people.

'JESUS SEES THIS WOMAN AS A WHOLE PERSON AND OFFERS REDEMPTION AND RESTORATION.'

However, I think Jesus had a sense that he was in the right place, at the right moment, and on the right day for this conversation to happen. We know that she was surprised when he spoke to her because she immediately points out that they are of different ethnicities and faiths. She knows he is a Jewish rabbi, a man speaking to her, and asking for a drink from the well. However, Jesus being the man that he is, does not see her as unworthy because of her faith and gender, or judge her because of her past, a past that includes many different husbands. In a patriarchal society, this woman would have had little social standing. Jesus sees a woman with brokenness that he can fulfil and a deep spiritual hunger only he can satisfy.

We all need water to sustain us, and water is the life giver to all things. Jesus asks the Samaritan woman for a drink, and he goes on to talk about the 'living water'. She doesn't seem to know quite what Jesus is saying to her, but Jesus starts to reveal the things he knows about her life, and she starts to realise that more is going on here.

Water is a precious resource for us all and in my culture of Māoridom, water is the foundation of life and what connects us to the land and our relationship with it. In New Zealand, we often introduce ourselves with a *pepeha*. It is a greeting which begins with significant mountain and river and places that are special to us. We do this because these places never move and are always constant. Jacob's well is such a place and this well is deep and the water remains the same for Dinah as it does now for this woman. This is the well that connected Jesus



DISCUSS:

- * After reading John 4, what does water mean for you? Does water have a special meaning for you?
- * How can you fully accept people who are different from you in your life?
- * How did Jesus meet you at the well?

and gave him an opportunity to tell this Samaritan woman that she could drink from a spiritual source greater than the one she knew already. Her ethnicity had given her an incomplete view of God, but God has a longing for her and many more to drink from what God can offer through Jesus Christ. As 1 Corinthians 13:5 says, love 'does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs.'

Jesus sees this woman as a whole person and offers redemption and restoration. It feels like an echo from the past, offering restoration for what happened to Dinah at this well all those years ago. This time, the Samaritan woman comes to life when Jesus reveals himself to be the 'Messiah (called Christ)'. She heads back to the town to tell the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I've ever done. Could this be the Messiah?'

Unlike Dinah and her family, this encounter brings new life where there was death. We see the full circle of how God works repeatedly – in his words and in the lives of the people throughout history – many of whom we read about in the Bible that we now study and read about. In John 4, the woman goes on to influence many other Samaritan believers to be ready to hear and receive Jesus. Now this woman goes on from being an outcast in her town to being restored, healed, believed and leading her community to the living water given by Jesus. Redemption arrives to the whole community and to the history of this well, it is reclaimed with healing through this encounter. The injustice that sits in the past is now a full circle of atonement and restoration that only God could bring through his son Jesus Christ.

This is a beautiful story of redemption. The Samaritan woman is brought to life through the 'living waters' of Jesus. Not only does this cleansing water redeem her and heal her circumstance, but it also heals the ancient wounds left by what was done to Dinah. It reminds us that Jesus was always concerned with healing the oppressed and righting injustice. For the deaths we experience, Jesus cleanses us with living water – and it is not only for us but is there to be shared. The well of life does not run dry.



Father, help us to love, accept and welcome others like you do. May we extend the living water to those who need you but do not know you. Amen.

MAJOR CHRISTINE DE MAINE

NEW ZEALAND, FIJI, TONGA AND SAMOA

Tēnā koutou katoa

Ko Christine ahau

Nō Aotearoa ahau

Greetings to you all. I am Christine from New Zealand. I have been a Salvation Army officer for 17 years and I am married with two boys. I love being with family and friends. I love learning about my culture of being Māori and learning to speak our language.



SPEAKING UP FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

PROVERBS 31:8-9

CORALIE BRIDLE

'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy' (Proverbs 31: 8-9).

William Booth lay ill and disabled when his famed one-word telegram urged Salvationists to consider 'others'. More than one hundred years later, it might be argued that the world would be a much better place if we paid serious attention to his prompting. Similarly, these verses in Proverbs 31 prompt us to specific action on behalf of others – speaking up, judging fairly and defending the rights of others. Proverbial wisdom refers to both our knowledge and our conduct. That is, it is not enough to simply know in theory how we should act. Proverbs encourages us towards practical action related to that knowledge.¹

The instructions found in this passage are originally a personal message from a mother to her son. As king, the son holds considerable power and responsibility. His mother instructs him to use his voice to speak up for others. The exact identity of the king is uncertain. He is known here as Lemuel, but scholars are divided on whether this account refers to King Solomon and his mother Bathsheba, or whether Lemuel might have been the King of Massa, one of the descendants of Ishmael.² Today we may not find ourselves positioned as queen mothers or kings, but as heirs to the biblical tradition, the instruction of this text speaks up across time and cultural setting.

Speaking up is not always a straightforward process. I remember a kindly doctor once completing a physical examination of my son and declaring that 'we will have to wait for him to tell his own story'. However, my son's disability left him unable to tell his story or indeed speak up for himself in any easily discernible manner. Speaking up for him, as he has lived his life with complex disabilities, has highlighted the responsibility of *nuanced advocacy*. I use the word *nuanced* deliberately because advocacy on behalf of others needs to be carefully negotiated.

The pursuit of nuanced advocacy requires that we ensure that our *speaking up* does not become *speaking for* or *speaking over* the person with a disability. Such approaches are patronising and dehumanising. Translation of the word 'destitute' in our text carries the idea of 'vanishing'. The destitute are those who have vanished from our minds, agendas or congregations, because we have *vanished* them to the peripheries of our communities. If we are not cautious and informed, our *speaking up* for the disabled person can affect more *vanishing*. Treating everyone the same is not the pursuit of equality. Different circumstances, experiences and cultural settings call for attention to the *craft* of speaking up for others. This requires time, listening, cultivating friendships and an openness to learning new and varied ways of engaging with each other.

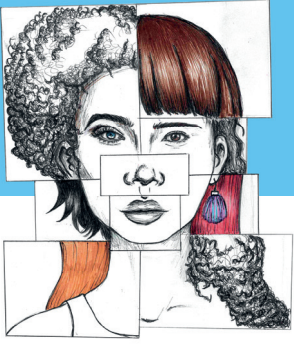
Unlike King Lemuel you are unlikely to be sitting in a royal court pronouncing judgements on matters of state. However, you might be making judgements about people with disabilities that are ignorant, unfair or ill-informed. Making assumptions about others is always fraught with jeopardy. It distorts how we observe the image of God reflected in the face and form in front of us. Generally speaking, people living with disabilities simply want to live ordinary lives. They want to be accepted for who they are. They want to celebrate life. They want to participate in the joy of living and worshipping alongside others who are seeking to do the same.

The king in this text was charged with defending the rights of the poor. Today approximately 15 per cent of the population live with a disability. Around the world they continue to face injustice, oppression, discrimination and stigmatisation. Statistically they are economically marginalised, face higher rates of unemployment and suffer earlier mortality rates than non-disabled people. Defending their personhood and their rights as human beings for whom Christ died is an urgent task for the worldwide Salvation Army.³

1 R Murphy and E Huwiler, *New International Biblical Commentary: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1999), 7.

2 Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 82.

3 The Salvation Army, *International Positional Statement: Disabilities* (London: International Headquarters, 2020).



DISCUSS:

- * How might the concept of nuanced advocacy affect the way I speak and act on behalf of others?
- * In what ways might I influence societal attitudes towards people with disability so that they align with the truths of the gospel?
- * Who are the 'others' in my current appointment, or avenue of service, who need my encouragement or voice today?

During their lifetime, Catherine and William Booth had a very personal encounter with the world of disability awareness. One of their daughters, Marian, was very ill as a young child and subsequently lived with what we might now call a developmental disability. While Catherine openly acknowledged a degree of sorrow associated with Marian's circumstances, Marian herself was not hidden away. In an age when many disabled people were institutionalised – this was a form of speaking up for people with disabilities. Marian's frail figure was well known to Salvationists of the era.⁴ William and Catherine saw beyond presupposed limitations and enabled Marian to live as ordinary a life as possible.

'THE PURSUIT OF NUANCED ADVOCACY REQUIRES THAT WE ENSURE THAT OUR SPEAKING UP DOES NOT BECOME SPEAKING FOR OR SPEAKING OVER THE PERSON WITH A DISABILITY.'

Theologian Colin Gunton wrote, 'It is not an unfortunate accident but our glory *that we are other*: each unique and different.'⁵ The fact that we are different to others is something to celebrate. We do not want the *otherness* of *others* to disappear, or we become a bland, automated and homogenous body. Difference and diversity are part of God's creation. Speaking up for others, defending their rights and judging fairly, fulfils God's call to action, honours unique identities and salutes William Booth's call to remember *others*.

4 John Larsson, *Those Incredible Booths* (London: Salvation Books, 2015), 241.

5 Colin Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 196.



Heavenly Father, craft me into a woman open to the grace revealed in people living with disabilities.

CORALIE BRIDLE

NEW ZEALAND, FIJI, TONGA AND SAMOA

Coralie is a disciple of Jesus Christ, a lifelong Salvationist and attends the Auckland City Corps in New Zealand. Oncology nursing has formed the backbone of her career. Her husband, Kevin, three adult children and two grandsons, keep her grounded amidst the complexities of modern life. She serves on the Moral and Social Issues Council in New Zealand and the International Theological Council. Coralie is currently working on her PhD looking at how The Salvation Army supports people with complex disabilities in congregations in New Zealand.



THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

NUMBERS 12:1-16

CAPTAIN ESTHELA SANIZACA

You have probably seen an iceberg. What strikes me about these masses of ice is that what you can see on the surface does not compare to its true size because most of the mass is submerged.

In Numbers 12, we find the story of Moses and his two siblings, Aaron and Miriam. We know that Moses was the leader appointed by God to lead his people, Israel. Aaron was the high priest and Miriam was the eldest and a leading prophetess.

Miriam was very important in Moses' life from the time he was a baby (Exodus 2). In Exodus 15:20-21 we read that she led a beautiful victory song of faith and gratitude as she saw God's mighty act. However, some time later we find her leading, along with Aaron, an act of rebellion against Moses because of his wife, a Cushite.

Cush was a region in southern Egypt known for its black-skinned people and scholars believe that it was most likely that Moses' wife was black-skinned.

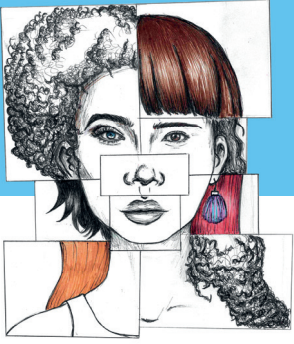
Miriam's grumbling seems to be about Moses' interracial marriage. But this was just 'the tip of the iceberg', as beneath the gossip and her disapproval for Moses' wife, lay a much deeper pride and envy problem. The rejection and the criticism of others reveals something much deeper that is taking place in her heart.

"Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?"

'GOD CONTINUES TO SHOW HIS GOODNESS BY CALLING US TO REPENTANCE AND SINCERE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.'

This verse clearly shows us the true reason for which Miriam showed that attitude of disdain and backbiting. Both Miriam and Aaron had received different gifts from the Lord with which to serve him and his people, but it seems that this was not enough. They felt confident enough in their abilities to serve equally or better than Moses. Nothing is enough for a proud heart.

This verse continues: 'The Lord heard what they said.' No one told him! He heard what Miriam and Aaron had said. He heard every word that they had pronounced and knew the intentions within their hearts.



DISCUSS:

- * What actions reveal the sincerity of your heart?
- * Are you easily influenced to look down on others?

On one hand, everything points to Miriam as the promoter of this rebellion, but let us not lose sight of Aaron. Aaron seems to yield very quickly to others' demands. On other occasions, we see him being influenced to do things that he knew were not right, such as giving in to Israel's people's demand to make a golden calf (Exodus 32). On this occasion, we see him yielding to the influence of his sister Miriam.

Verses 4 to 16 tell us about the consequences of their actions. There is no doubt that God rejects pride; in the case of Miriam, she was severely punished. Let us remember what Jesus said: 'For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted' (Luke 14:11).

In verse 13 Moses intercedes before the Lord for his sister, and just as God forgave Miriam and Aaron, God continues to show his goodness by calling us to repentance and sincere love for one another.

Have you ever wondered how others see your faith in the Lord? What does a heart that loves God and his/her neighbour look like? Can you see how an arrogant heart manifests? This reveals rejection, contempt and superiority towards others, who have been created in the image and likeness of God, just like you.



Lord, we pray that you would cleanse us from our sin and pride in all its forms. You condemn it. Please help us to grow in love for one another. As you have loved us, teach us to love. Amen.

CAPTAIN ESTHELA SANIZACA

SPAIN AND PORTUGAL


I am happily married to Captain Franklin Sánchez and we have two beautiful daughters, Salomé and Ana. I enjoy music and reading. I am called to service by the grace of the Lord. At present, I serve as corps officer in Las Palmas Corps and I am the youth officer for Spain.



REDEEMING LOVE

HOSEA 3

LIEUT-COLONEL EVA DANSO



Hosea 3 is a very short chapter that refers to the Israelites' exile and return. Israel experienced a time of purification in a foreign land, but God still loved the people and was willing to accept them back. God commanded Hosea to show the same love and forgiving spirit to his wife, Gomer. Although Hosea had good reasons to divorce Gomer, he was told to buy her back and love an adulterous and unrepentant wife.

'Love' is a regularly utilised word. 'I love chocolate', 'I love that sports group', 'I love my companions'. How regularly we 'love' things! But how does this change the assertion 'God is love' or 'God loves me'? Love is meant to be a mutual thing, but in God's case, it was one sided (Romans 5:8). God is love, and he wants his children to show love towards each other.

Our God is always there to forgive. The children of Israel fell apart, but God was there to forgive them when they returned to him. He continues to love us even when we fail him, and he looks beyond our mistakes and love us unconditionally (1 John 4:9-12).

God expects us to replicate this kind of love in our daily lives and relationships with other people (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13). As we reflect this love, we grow in holiness and become more like Christ. In our homes, how do we love our spouse? Where is that first love? When last did we surprise our spouse with gift, a letter or a lovely text message? How often do you forgive each other? How often do you pray for your spouse?

In Hosea 3, God is telling us to show love towards our spouse and to not focus on wrongdoing. Instead we should forgive, pray for our spouses and ask for God's intervention. In John 15:12 we read: 'My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.'

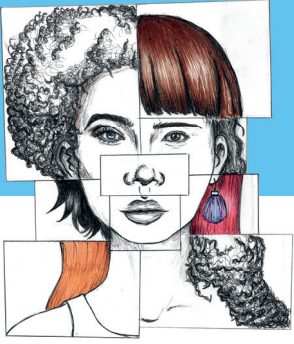
Love is fundamental for all Christians; we are called to love our neighbour just as we love ourselves.

Like the prodigal son, let us show remorse and go back to our father. He is willing to take us back and restore us again.

A beautiful definition of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. It gives a clear understanding of what love is all about:

- Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.
- Love does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
- Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
- Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.
- Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

Our love for one another needs to be reflected in our actions. At times people we love may not love us the way we want them to, but always remember Romans 5:8 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'



DISCUSS:

- * What things hinder genuine love in our families and church?
- * How can we continue to love people despite their inability and refusal to reciprocate such love?
- * Should we ever give up on loving each other?

Whilst we were wandering away from Christ, he was still there showing his love for us. John 3:16 tells us: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' This is love in action; God sent his only son to die for us.

'GOD IS LOVE, AND HE WANTS HIS CHILDREN TO SHOW LOVE TOWARDS EACH OTHER.'

'Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him' (1 John 4:7-9).

Dear sisters in Christ, in our day-to-day activities, let people see the love that Christ has given us reflect on others; a love that will soften every sorrow, a love that will lighten every care, a love that is unquestioning and a love that will triumph.



Dear Lord, give us a loving heart and help us to love others as we love ourselves. Help us to persevere and never give up on the people we ought to love, that your name will be glorified in all our relationships. We thank you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

LIEUT-COLONEL EVA DANSO

NIGERIA

Lieut-Colonel Eva is a dedicated and committed Christian who was ordained and commissioned as a Salvation Army officer in August 1991. She is happily married to Isaac and blessed with five children and 10 grandchildren. She has served in Ghana and at IHQ. She is currently serving as the Territorial Secretary for Women's Ministries in Ghana.



GOD'S CHOSEN PROPHETESS

2 KINGS 22:14-20; 2 CHRONICLES 34:22-33

MAJOR EVAMA SHAIJURAJ

'When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them' (Genesis 5:1-2).

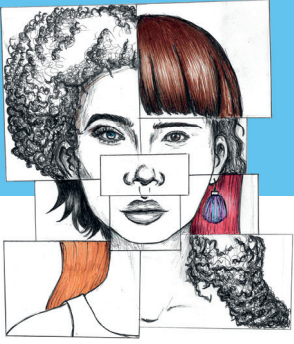
- The Bible provides the provision of equality of men and women in creation and in redemption, and it teaches women and men were created in God's image for full and equal partnership (Genesis 1:26-28, 2:23; 1 Corinthians 11:11-12; Galatians 3:28).
- The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ came to redeem women as well as men: 'By faith we all become children of God in Christ and heirs of blessings of Salvation' (Romans 8:14-17; also John 1:12-13; Galatians 3:26-28).
- The Bible shows that the Holy Spirit came upon men and women at Pentecost without distinction and indwells in them and distributes gifts without preference of gender (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 14:31).
- The Bible shows men and women are heirs of the grace of life and they are bound together in a relationship of mutual submission and responsibility (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:1-17).

In the New and Old Testaments, both men and women perform prophetic, priestly and royal functions. Prophets and prophetesses are listed throughout both testaments. The most common word used for a male prophet, or a spokesman is 'Nabi' in Hebrew. 'Nebiah' is the word used for a female prophet. A prophet or prophetess is a mouthpiece for God, an intercessor and intermediary between God and mankind. In Rabbinical tradition, there were 48 Hebrew prophets, seven Gentile prophets and seven prophetesses: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Sarah, Hannah, Abigail and Esther.

Huldah was a devoted, respectable and well-known prophetess in Israel at the time of King Josiah. She was the wife of Shallum – the uncle of the prophet Jeremiah – and lived in the New Quarter of Jerusalem. The name 'Huldah' derived from the Hebrew word 'lemma', 'to abide' or 'to continue'. Another meaning is 'weasel'. Her name is mentioned in 2 Kings 22:14-20 and 2 Chronicles 34:22-28. Even though it's a small portion in the whole Word of God, it is highly honourable. She delivered a message from God for the king. According to William E. Phipps, a professor of religion and philosophy, Huldah is the first person to declare certain writings to be Holy Scripture. Great respect was given by the rabbis, who declared that the Western Wall, the Gate of the Priests and the Huldah Gate were to never be destroyed. It is told that only King David's and Huldah's graves were ever allowed within the city of Jerusalem. Despite the discrimination that women faced at that time, God chose Huldah and other prophetesses throughout the Old and New Testaments to authoritatively bring forth his Word to his people.

King Josiah was chosen by God to repair the temple and to bring a great revival. During the renovation of the temple, Hilkiah the priest made a great discovery: 'the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses' (2 Chronicles 34:14). He gave the book to Shaphan the scribe. Shaphan read it to the king, and when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law he tore his robes and gave these orders to Hilkiah: 'Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us' (2 Kings 13).

How should the high priest and his companions enquire of the Lord? Who would be a better interpreter of his mind? There was no priest higher than Hilkiah. Shaphan probably stood at the head of the scribes. But both Hilkiah and Shaphan were conscious that there was someone in Jerusalem who had a better understanding of God. A prophetess! They asked Huldah whether it was the true Book of the Law of God. Huldah affirmed that



DISCUSS:

- * What qualities do you see in Huldah?
- * Are you prepared to become a leader like Huldah and speak the Word for the regeneration and reformation of our community?
- * How is your communion with the Lord? As a woman of God, are you open to receiving his message for his people?

it was the Word of God and the people and king accepted her declaration – it was both an oracle of judgement and oracle of salvation. The king and his people renewed their faith, resulting in the national vow to follow the God of their ancestors more faithfully.

Special characteristics of Huldah's leadership:

- Huldah wasn't afraid to boldly speak the truth, with integrity.
- People went to her because of how she lived – she was a good role model.
- She was held in high regard by ordinary people and royalty.
- She had a continual communion with her Lord.
- She was summoned in a crisis – suggesting she was seen as a leader.
- She was a prophet in the same season as Jeremiah and Zephaniah – but it was her counsel that was sought.
- She never talked with personal authority, only as a messenger of God.

'WOMEN AND MEN WERE CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE FOR FULL AND EQUAL PARTNERSHIP.'

Huldah fulfilled her mission; what a blessing and privilege to be used by God for his will! May God raise many Huldahs in this generation for the reformation and consecration of our people and nation!



Dear God, as your child, please help me to come nearer to you through the privilege of communion to receive your word so that I can boldly proclaim it for the regeneration of my people. In Jesus' name, amen!

MAJOR EVAMA SHAIJURAJ

INDIA NATIONAL


I am the National Editor for the India National Office in Kolkata. My husband Major Shaijuraj is the Chief Financial Officer. We have completed 22 years in the Lord's service, and he is faithful! We have a son, Shiljo (21) and a daughter, Riya (18).



HONOURING CHRIST IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

1 PETER 3:8-9

LIEUT-COLONEL JANET ASHCRAFT



Good mental health requires contact with other people. One of the first revelations of the Bible is that God designed us to need other people: 'It is not good for the man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). Two of the most basic and important needs we have are love and acceptance within a community. These lead to a flourishing life which is God's desire for everyone. In Scripture many of the instructions we find, when put into practice, lead the way to a life that is flourishing mentally, physically and spiritually. The Word of God refreshes the soul, makes the simple wise and brings joy to the heart (Psalm 19:7-8). In the New Testament we can see the importance that is placed on relationships and the way that we are to treat others. In 1 Peter 3:8-9 we see instructions that are important for a mentally healthy lifestyle, and the flourishing life God desires for every person.

1 Peter is directed to a group of people who had been Gentiles and fled their homes due to persecution for their faith in Jesus. It is filled with encouragement and instruction on how to live and treat others so that Christ is honoured. Prior to 1 Peter 3:8, Peter wrote about how we should live in relationship with specific groups. Beginning in verse 8 Peter summarises all he has said before, highlighting the qualities that should be evident in all our interactions with others. Each quality leads to good mental health not only for us, but also to those we are engaged with when they are put into practice. It is important for us to see these qualities found in verse 8 are not simply suggestions – they are strong instructions: **'Finally, all of you...'**

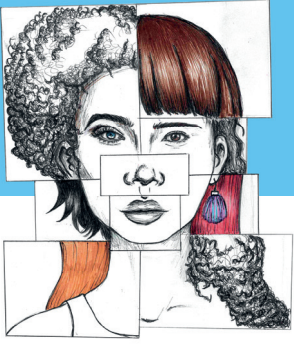
'...be like-minded.' This refers to unity on major points of Christian doctrine among believers. The major points of Christian doctrine are expressed in the Apostle's Creed. It doesn't mean agreement on all things, but it does mean we begin at the same starting point. We will still have real or strong differences, but the unity found in Jesus should overcome divisions. We are to work hard to not allow differences of opinions to result in broken relationships. We see this unity, or like-mindedness, expressed in Acts 2:1: 'When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place,' and in Romans 12:16: 'Live in harmony with one another.'

**'THE UNITY FOUND
IN JESUS SHOULD
OVERCOME
DIVISIONS.'**

'...be sympathetic.' This word 'sympathy' is made up of two Greek words, one that means 'to be affected' by something – to feel; the other is 'with', so it is to 'feel with'. It refers to an exchange of feelings with another person, whether it's joy or sorrow. We see this in Romans 12:15: 'Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.' When you are sympathetic with someone, you know what is happening in each other's lives, and are willing to be in a give-and-take relationship.

'...love one another.' Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be people who are loving. This type of 'love' is the same as in 1 Peter 1:22, which says, 'love one another deeply, from the heart'. It is affection and fondness that is genuine and deep. As *Wuest Word Studies in The New Testament* puts it, 'it is a love of liking'. This is the type of love Jesus spoke of in John 13:35, 'By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

'...be compassionate.' This is being tender-hearted toward others, especially when they are suffering. It is the opposite of hard-hearted and callous, which our hearts can sometimes be to another person's pain. When we have experienced hardship and suffering ourselves it is much easier to be compassionate towards others. The founder of World Vision International, Bob Pierce, said 'Let my heart be broken by the things that break God's heart.'



DISCUSS:

- * What do you find the hardest to put into practice from verses 8-9? Why?
- * Is it possible to fully live in this way without the help of the Holy Spirit?
- * Positive social interaction fosters empathy, compassion, trust and intimacy with others. It also helps ward off stress and depression. Share a time when you have found this to be your experience.

'...[be] humble.' Being humble is not the same as having low self-esteem. It is looking to other's interests above your own. 'True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less' (C.S. Lewis). Jesus is the ultimate example of humility – he shows us how we should be relating to each other (Philippians 2:5).

'Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing' (verse 9). Just as Jesus said, 'Forgive and you will be forgiven,' Peter is saying, 'Bless and you will be blessed.' To bless is to wish well, and to turn the wish into a prayer. This is how we are to respond to those who aren't nice to us, and it can be a very difficult thing to do.

Treating others in these ways leads to a mentally healthy lifestyle, blessed by God, even when facing hardship and suffering.

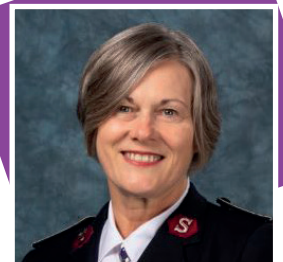


Thank you for showing us how to live so that we can flourish in every way, just as you intended.

LIEUT-COLONEL JANET ASHCRAFT

USA EASTERN


Janet's favourite pastime is being with her three grandchildren. When she isn't with them, she enjoys walking, reading, and playing games. Janet holds an MA in Counselling.



A MAN'S WORLD

GENESIS 2:18-25

CAPTAIN JESSICA WELCH-TURSI



Have you ever heard the song, 'It's a Man's World' by James Brown? It was released in 1966, but the words still resonate. From the first time I heard this song the words were stuck in my head. I have felt them on my skin. I have experienced them in the way I was treated (or not). Interestingly, the lyrics continue: 'But it wouldn't be nothing, nothing without a woman or a girl.' I can appreciate the sentiment, but it still doesn't seem right. Growing up and living in a 'man's world' has deeply impacted how women view themselves and how they live out their identity.

'TOGETHER, MEN AND WOMEN ARE CALLED TO LIVE FOR AND SERVE THEIR CREATOR.'

God made mankind in his own image (Genesis 1:26). The Triune God has not lost sight of us. We take shape like clay under in his capable hands. Our first breath springs forth from his. Our first heartbeat, an echo of his. Instinctively we affirm with the psalmist: the knowledge you have of me is wonderful (Psalm 139:6). Man and woman were created in his image. That is where we find our identity.

'The LORD God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him"' (Genesis 2:18). The Hebrew word used for helper is 'ezer'. Did God create women as a mere help? Subservient? Submissive? Available? Is that our identity?

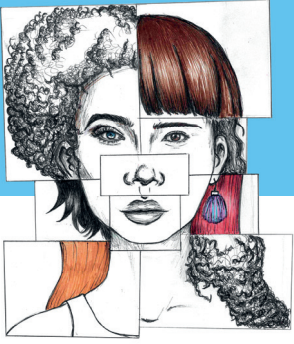
'Ezer' is used 21 times in the Old Testament. Of these, only twice is it in reference to the first woman, Eve. Three times it refers powerful nations to whom Israel calls for help when besieged. In the remaining 16 instances 'ezer' refers to God himself as our help, the one who comes alongside us in our helplessness (Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:26; Psalm 33:20). This is the meaning of *ezer*.

If God is not subordinate to his creatures, then the idea that an ezer-helper is inferior to another is simply wrong. The Old Testament does not suggest 'helper' as in 'servant', but as saviour or our protector, as in 'God is our help' (Psalm 33:20).

No, this should not be 'a man's world'. It is God's world and he created us as equals. Without the woman, the man is only half of the equation. And, of course, without the man, the woman is too.

Realising our own identity is not meant to make the pendulum swing completely in the opposite direction. 1 Corinthians 13:5 states that love 'does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.'

My prayer is that in finding who I am in Christ, I will not dishonour others. Honouring who I am should inspire me to honour others. I don't want to be self-seeking; I want to be God-seeking. I don't want to be angered by the state of the world, I want to be moved by it and seek to empower women, ezer, to realise and embrace who they are and blossom into who they were created to be.



DISCUSS:

- * In what ways have I felt impacted by the notion that this is a 'man's world'? Do I carry any resentment or wounds because of it? Take the time to surrender it all to God (realising that this is a process, and you might need to bring this before the throne repeatedly).
- * What would it look like for me to embrace my God-given identity of ezer? How would it change the way I see myself? The choices I make?
- * How can I empower other women to embrace their identity as equals in the eyes of God? How can that change our corps, our community, our city?

There is a sense in which we only live our identity, totally and deeply, when we realise that we are equal yet different, different yet complementary, and, above all, when we learn to love each other as such: sacrificially as exemplified by Christ.

Together, men and women are called to live for and serve their Creator. We now realise that, from the beginning, it has all been a scheme of the enemy who, in making sure that women are left on the sidelines, in fact, limits men's abilities as well.

Can we imagine what we could achieve for his glory and the advancement of his Kingdom if we lived as equals? So, what are we going to do? We must choose, collectively and individually, to live together, according to our divine identity and according to the design of our Creator, and for his glory.



Loving Father, you are our everything. You are the alpha and the omega. You are my beginning and my purpose. Thank you for creating me in such a thoughtful and loving way. Help me embrace my identity, not as subordinate, but as equal in your Kingdom. Heal the wounds of my heart and plant new hope deep within. Allow me to see who I was meant to be and who I can be in you. Amen.

CAPTAIN JESSICA WELCH-TURSI

ITALY AND GREECE

Captain Jessica lives and serves in Italy with her husband, Christopher. They have two miracle boys, Liam and Rafaël. Jessica's passion is gathering people around the table, sharing good food, hearing people's stories and telling them about Jesus.



JESUS REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED...

MATTHEW 8:1-4

COLONEL JULIE FORREST

An example of radical inclusion is found in Matthew 8: 'Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man.'

Leprosy was seen as a disease that contaminated people. If you had leprosy you had to leave your family and town or village and go and live on the outskirts – homeless. The lepers depended on family members and friends delivering them food and water to survive. To have leprosy was a very difficult diagnosis. People did not get better from leprosy; they were not able to touch those they loved for fear of contamination. If anyone were approaching them, they would ring a bell shouting 'unclean, unclean' and they would live in this isolated state until death.

Can we imagine what it felt like to be a leper in the days of Jesus? Separated from friends and family, sick, homeless, relying on others for food, rejected from your hometown, loss of employment, and so much more. If I imagine myself in this situation, I would have to add to this list the loss of physical touch – this would be incredibly difficult – not to be hugged or touched by another person.

How do we see radical inclusion? Personally, I love how Jesus shows radical inclusion to the leper! The sequence of events here is so important. In response to the leper's statement, 'if you are willing, you can make me clean' Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man and said, 'be clean'. Richard Beck in his book *Unclean* says 'Jesus' first move is into ritual defilement. By touching the leper, Jesus intentionally and wilfully seeks contamination, standing in solidarity with the unclean.'

What was the impact of Jesus healing the leper? How did this ripple out to affect the community? (See verse 4.)

Today we know a lot more about leprosy and lepers are no longer sent away, rejected and alone. What Jesus did here speaks into our world today as people still feel excluded. We can celebrate that Jesus came for the most excluded and the most marginalised.

This study is asking us to consider radical inclusion/sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is who we are attracted to sexually and emotionally. There are several sexual orientations, the most well-known would be heterosexual, bisexual, gay and lesbian. From the example of Jesus, how should we show a radical inclusion to those who are not heterosexual?

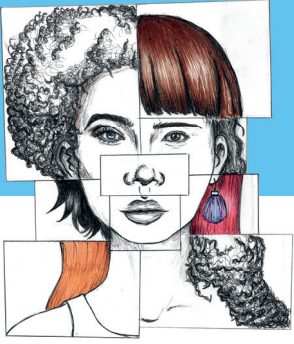
Samuel Wells in *How Then Shall We Live? Christian Engagement with Contemporary Issues* writes: 'A terrifying, murderous and persecuted history, which has left LGBT (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Trans) people so marginalised, scapegoated and diminished in the church its astonishing they're still here, makes LGBT people almost uniquely qualified to identify with those people closest to Jesus' heart, Jesus' company and Jesus' ministry.'

Jesus often became friends with and taught about those who society would reject, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the lepers, and used these friendships to teach us about inclusion.

In Matthew 21:31 Jesus said prostitutes and tax collectors will enter the kingdom of God – why do you think Jesus said this?

When asked about the greatest commandment, he used the parable of the Good Samaritan: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul...and love your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:25-37).

Who is your neighbour?



DISCUSS:

- * Discuss how it feels to need to hide your true sexual identity. How would living with the fear of rejection, persecution, discrimination and ridicule affect how you live?
- * What are the challenges to showing radical inclusion to all sexual orientation in your context?
- * What could we do better?

We preach a gospel of the 'whosoever', John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'. Why should we consider radical inclusion regarding sexual orientation? Around the world many people who are not heterosexual have to pretend they are to prevent rejection, hatred, discrimination, bullying and violence. Even within the Church they feel they cannot be their true self for fear of being judged. Homophobic comments and behaviours hurt and damage and can cause people to consider or engage in self-harm and suicide. Would Jesus walk past or would he reach out and touch them? Would he offer them the unconditional love of God, letting them know that through his suffering and death he made an atonement for the whole world? That they too do not need to perish, but can have eternal life, that they too are good enough, they too are children of God?

'BY TOUCHING THE LEPER, JESUS INTENTIONALLY AND WILFULLY SEEKS CONTAMINATION, STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE UNCLEAN.'

How should we treat people? I find the answer in Colossians 3:12-14: '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'.

May God's Holy Spirit challenge us each to take steps, even small steps, towards radical inclusion.



Lord help me to reflect your love and compassion to all the people I meet, may I too touch lives with radical inclusion. Amen

COLONEL JULIE FORREST

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Colonel Julie Forrest serves at IHQ as the International Liaison Officer for Dialogue on Human Sexuality. Julie has been married to Peter for 35 years and they have two sons and two grandchildren. Julie has a heart for people and social justice.



LOVE THAT SPANS GENERATIONS

RUTH 1:1-22

MAJOR LEANNE BROWSKI

'THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RUTH AND NAOMI DEPICTS A BEAUTIFUL MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL INTERDEPENDENCE SPANNING TWO DIFFERENT GENERATIONS AND TWO DIFFERENT CULTURES.'

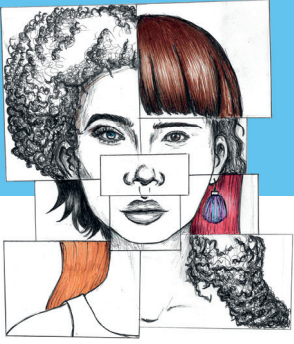
If you mention the words 'mother-in-law' you often get a varied response, especially from women who have experience with a mother-in-law relationship. Some may smile, and voice appreciation for the love, advice and acceptance they have received from their mother-in-law, while others may roll their eyes, sigh heavily and go into great detail about enduring their challenging relationship with the mother of their beloved husband. I wonder if Ruth experienced moments of both sides of that coin in her relationship with Naomi?

When famine hits Bethlehem (meaning 'the house of bread') we see that Elimelek took his wife Naomi, and their two sons Mahlon and Kilion, to Moab where the land was fertile, and food was in abundance. Given the history between Israel and Moabites this move was significant and even more so the romantic developments that followed (see Numbers 25). While living in Moab, Mahlon and Kilion marry two of the local women named Orpah and Ruth. Strangers in a foreign land, Elimelek and his family started to make a life for themselves possibly hoping that better days were ahead. Sadly, this is not the case as Elimelek dies and just 10 years later both Mahlon and Kilion follow suit. Naomi is now a widow living in a foreign land, with both her children deceased. Being a widow was seen as a hardship but being a childless widow was seen as a curse, and the once bright future for all three ladies suddenly seems significantly bleak.

Hearing that the food situation in Bethlehem is improving and with no reason to remain in Moab, Naomi decides to return home. Both Orpah and Ruth are willing to return with Naomi, but she insists that it would be better for them to remain. Orpah reluctantly decides to stay, Ruth resolutely decides to go. Neither Orpah nor Ruth dishonour Naomi in their choices, but Ruth goes a step further than Orpah. Ruth loves extravagantly and seeks to honour Naomi as she puts the well-being of her mother-in-law ahead of herself. '[Love] does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs' (1 Corinthians 13:5). Ruth could have remained where it was familiar, within her country, in her culture, where she had relatives, worshipping her gods, and with the possibility of marriage once again. In fact, it would be the 'wise' thing to do! But Ruth doesn't do that. Ruth shows incredible love towards Naomi.

The Hebrew word for this kind of sacrificial love is called 'Hesed'. Hesed is rooted in deep devotion, expresses sincere concern for the other person and is evidenced through action. Ruth's response to her mother-in-law's repeated urging to stay in Moab shows her heartfelt devotion and sacrificial commitment to Naomi: 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God' (Ruth 1: 16).

The relationship between Ruth and Naomi depicts a beautiful mutually beneficial interdependence spanning two different generations and two different cultures. We see how Ruth's loyalty, commitment and interaction with Naomi opens a new world to her grieving mother-in-law. Naomi, who describes herself as 'bitter' (Ruth 1:20) and 'empty' (Ruth 1:21) and faces the world with a pessimistic point of view that stems from her brokenness and loss, comes to find new hope, a new family and a new future. Naomi who saw herself as having nothing to offer Ruth, offers much as she guides and advises Ruth on how to navigate a system which was foreign to her (Ruth 3:1-4). This leads Ruth to a new husband, a new life, a baby boy and a place in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Ruth, a childless widow, an immigrant in a strange land receives respect, acceptance



DISCUSS:

- * What relationships do you currently have with those who are older and younger than yourself?
- * How can you show this 'hesed' love to those who are older and younger than you?
- * How can you use your current hardships to help the generation that follows you?

and a new status when the women of Israel declare to Naomi that the love Ruth has shown her is greater than the blessing of having even seven sons (Ruth 4:14-15). High praise indeed from a time in history when sons were seen as the source of security, provision, protection and the blessing of God.

Naomi is willing to teach Ruth things she does not know (Ruth 2:22; 3:1-4). Each generation before our own has the wisdom, experience and ability to help us navigate the journey we are on. Naomi's understanding of life, culture and family politics assisted Ruth in finding her way on an unfamiliar path. Ruth was teachable and willing to learn from her mother-in-law (Ruth 3:5) which led to her capturing the attention and ultimately the heart of Boaz (Ruth 4:9-10).

Naomi's overwhelming pain in the opening chapter of the book of Ruth is turned around and as the curtain closes on the story of Ruth, we see that through Boaz and Obed, Naomi gains a legacy and a future that she thought would never be hers. Deuteronomy 25:5-6 shows us that this precious baby boy would carry on the name of the household of Elimelek. We see how through Naomi, Ruth receives acceptance, respect of others, a husband and a place in a family name that continues to echo down the halls of time. Two generations, loving and learning together, leaning and gleaning from each other, both needing the other, as they walk through deep waters. However, something even greater was unfolding through their story. Naomi and Ruth would not have known that these events, though bleak, scary and desperately painful at times, were all part of God raising up a king for Israel who would slay giants, lead his people to many great victories, and above all, be a man after his very own heart.

'From everlasting to everlasting, the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children' (Psalm 103:17).



Dear Lord, may my love for the generation ahead of me and the generation that follows me be like that of Ruth and Naomi, and may you be glorified through it all.

MAJOR LEANNE BROWSKI

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Leanne serves with her husband as a divisional leader in the Mid Kwa Zulu Natal Division. Leanne has been married to Brendan for 24 years, has been an officer for 19 years and is grateful to be the mother of three fantastic teenagers. Loving Jesus and loving others bring Leanne great joy and she thrives on being able to do both authentically and creatively.



INCLUDING AND RESPECTING OTHERS IN PURSUIT OF GENDER EQUITY

JOHN 4:4-26

MAJOR MARGARET STAFFORD

When Jesus was asked by a scholar of the law: 'Which is the greatest commandment?' (Matthew 22:36), Jesus did not even have to think. He repeated the Shema back to the man. Jewish men and women would learn the Shema from childhood – love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul – with your entire being. But Jesus added that the second, which is just as important is to 'love your neighbour as yourself' (Matthew 22:39). This part of the Shema is not as emphasised as at the beginning.

I found this on a website for Jewish Jewels:

'Love of God, however, is not considered the epitome of Jewish living. Even more important, as mentioned in *A Code of Jewish Ethics Volume 1* by Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, is the love of one's neighbour. Why? Because the love of one's neighbour is seen as a measure of one's love of God. What matters most to God? According to Rabbi Akiva (*Jerusalem Talmud*, Nedarim 9:4), "Love your neighbour as yourself; this is the major principle of the Torah." In the Jewish mind, there is an equation on each side of an equal sign. Love God = love your neighbour.'

I realised that the Jewish law scholar would have known this. He would have realised that you cannot love God if you do not love your neighbour. You might be questioning what this has got to do with equity, justice, even with life as we live it today. My answer: everything!

For me, equality is something we cannot truly grasp. We live in an unequal society, which is why we have this fight for social justice and why we exist as an international charity organisation as well as a church. Life is not equal. Some are born in palaces, others in stables. But we are not looking at equality, we are looking at equity.

Look at Psalm 99:4 speaking about God who sits enthroned among the cherubim: 'The King in his might loves justice. You have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob' (*English Standard Version*).

Another example, speaking about David in 2 Samuel 8:15: 'So David reigned over all Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people.'

The Hebrew word for equity (*mê-šā-rîm*) can mean uprightness, straightness, levelness, fairness, truth, order and integrity. In the *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, equity is defined as 'the spirit of the law behind the letter; justice is the application of the spirit of equity'.²

Man was created by God from dust and introduced to the creation of living things and woman was created by God from bone. Taken from man, and introducing her to man, God makes a pronouncement of protection: 'A man shall leave his mother and his father and hold fast to his wife' (Genesis 2:24). Jesus adds, 'What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate' (Matthew 19:6).

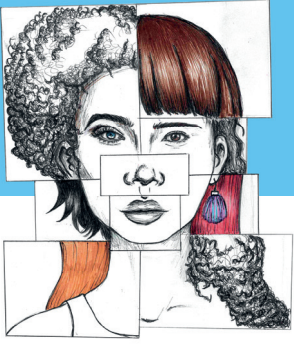
We really do need one another. God himself said it was not good for man to be alone and I do believe that it is not good for woman to be alone either.

We lose sight of the very purpose of our creation – to care for the creation of God, and according to Isaiah we

**'GENDER EQUITY
RECOGNISES THAT
EVERY ONE OF
US IS IMPORTANT
TO GOD.'**

1 (<https://www.jewishjewels.org/blog/love-god-love-your-neighbor>)

2 What Does the Bible Say About Equity vs. Equality – The Religion and Politics Blog (nealhardin.com)



DISCUSS:

- * What actions, attitudes and assumptions do I carry in my heart when speaking to anyone not like me?
- * How does knowing Jesus change my actions, attitudes and assumptions?
- * How can I provide opportunities and create expectations about individuals, regardless of gender?

are 'the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise' (Isaiah 43:21). We were created on purpose for a purpose. Not to fight each other but to complement one another.

How is loving our neighbour expressed in gender equity? Let us look at the difference between the two: 'Gender equity is a set of actions, attitudes and assumptions that provide opportunities and create expectations about individuals regardless of gender.'³

Another explanation is: 'Equality focuses on creating the same starting line for everyone. Equity has the goal of providing everyone with the full range of opportunities and benefits – the same finish line.'⁴

Gender equity recognises that every one of us is important to God and that God sees us as the pinnacle of his creation, nothing more – but certainly nothing less. We are all seekers, both male and female, we seek the heart of God, we seek his will for our lives and we seek his will for those we love.

A beautiful illustration of gender equity in action is the story of the woman at the well. Life had not been fair to this woman. She knew what it was to be loved and left, to be shunned by the women in the town. She knew what it was like to be brought up as a Samaritan – a 'half-breed' – shunned by the Jewish community for her mixed race.

Yet Jesus seeks her out and asks her for water. Read her story in John 4:4-26. The one thing that strikes this woman about this man is his non-judgemental discernment – something she had not come to expect from all who knew her. She realised he knew everything about her and still he offered her the water of life.

³ Women's Educational Equity Act (Equity Resource Centre)

⁴ <https://www.ywcalgary.ca/news/equity-v-s-equality-whats-difference/>



May God help us to love his creation as he does. Father, teach us what it truly means to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. By doing so we will reflect you more clearly in all that we do. Amen.

MAJOR MARGARET STAFFORD

MIDDLE EAST

I am a daughter of officer parents, the wife of Jeff and mother to Natalie, Nicole, Matthew and Mark and, most importantly, a nana to Kaylie, Benjamin and Daniel, Nikoli, Keanu and Connor. Presently I serve as a part of the leadership team in the Middle East. I am based in the United Arab Emirates living in Abu Dhabi. I count it a great privilege to work in this melting pot of nations, customs and creeds.



BELONG

GALATIANS 3:28

MAJOR MARIE DAVIS

'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary the word 'belong' means 'to be suitable, appropriate, or advantageous; to be the property of a person or thing'.

No one likes to feel alone, unloved and unattached. God created us to be relational which makes us feel appreciated and a part of something greater. It was never God's intention for us to be alone without family or friends. He demonstrated this in Genesis 2:18: 'The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."'

God created humankind and made provisions for us to enjoy the company of others. Here are some important points for us to consider as God's children while we reflect on what it means to belong:

You are not excluded – you belong: 'Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture' (Psalm 100:3).

This confirms that we are the property of God. We belong to him, we are not excluded from God but rather, 'It is he who made us, and we are his.'

Life's situations can paralyse us to a point where we feel left out, not a part of and forgotten. Facing life's challenges is inevitable. However, our challenges cannot change where we belong. We remain as 'God's people and the sheep of his pasture'.

'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it' (Psalm 24:1).

The psalmist gives us a sense of direction, purpose and fulfilment. None of us are excluded, you and I are a part of the 'all who live in it' which means we are neither orphans nor castaways.

The provision that God made for us leads to true belonging. True belonging is being fully known and being fully loved.

To live in denial of who we are and where we belong can negatively impact our lives and manifest as low self-esteem, hopelessness, fear and rejection. However, understanding our worth and to whom we belong allows us to work on our negativity, which keeps us mentally stable in our daily living. We can find such assurance in Scripture: 'For I know the plans I have for you' (Jeremiah 29:11); 'For we are God's handiwork' (Ephesians 2:10).

Other Scripture confirms where and whom we belong to and reminds us that we were created by our Heavenly Father. He ensures that he takes care of us, reassuring us through his word that we are not alone but rather we are his.

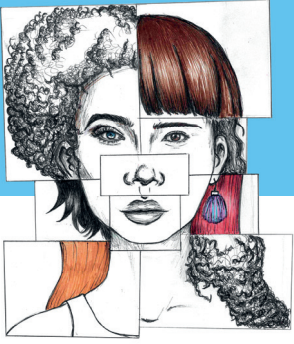
What are the benefits of belonging?

'Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory' (Romans 8: 17).

(A) HEIRS

An heir can be defined as one who receives his allotted possession by right of sonship.

According to the *Matthew Henry Commentary*, 'In earthly inheritances this rule does not hold, only the first-born are heirs; but the church is a church of first-born, for they are all heirs. Heaven is an inheritance that all the saints are heirs to.'



DISCUSS:

- * Do you feel a part of what God has offered you?
- * Do you understand how valuable you are to God?
- * What are you willing to do, to ensure you enjoy the benefits God has in store for you?

'GOD CREATED HUMANKIND AND MADE PROVISIONS FOR US TO ENJOY THE COMPANY OF OTHERS.'

The Bible gave account in Genesis 25:29-34 of Esau who was rightfully entitled to receive the birthright as the first born. However, he completely disregarded this privilege by selling it to his younger brother Jacob, whom by law was never to share in this inheritance.

As co-heirs with Christ there is neither first or last son, we are all equal and share in the same privilege and benefits.

(B) SECURITY

'For the Lord will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared' (Proverbs 3:26).

Sheep left exposed will be vulnerable to the wolves but with a shepherd to keep watch they are safe. We all feel vulnerable and exposed to the elements of evil that surround us; the uncertainty of life often puts us in a fearful position. Pastor and author Rick Warren said: 'Real security can only be found in that which can never be taken from you – your relationship with God.' Security is one of the greatest benefits we receive as God's children. However, this does not mean we are exempt from attacks. It simply means we have the confidence to drive out our fears and that we are not facing our adversaries alone.

Our Heavenly Father champions us his children, therefore he gives to us inclusiveness. He is not partial, selective nor shows favouritism, rather he is just, equal and fair.

Other benefits to consider:

- Open communication: 'Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you' (Jeremiah 29:12).
- Provision: 'Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food?' (Job 38: 41).
- Discipline: 'If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all' (Hebrews 12:8).

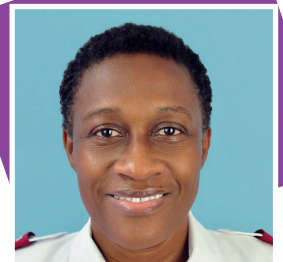


Dear Father, give us the wisdom to accept the promise and reassurance you gave us through your word, that we belong to you, and you love us eternally. Amen.

MAJOR MARIE DAVIS

CARIBBEAN

I was born in Jamaica, and alongside my husband Major Desmond Davis, I have been a Salvation Army officer for 22 years and together we parent our two children, Abigail and Jeremy. We serve as corps officers for the Havendale and Kintyre Corps in Eastern Jamaica, and I hold the additional responsibility of Divisional Secretary of Women's Ministries. I enjoy making new friends and watching the great sport of track and field.



FIELDS OF COMPASSION: LESSONS FROM RUTH

RUTH 1:16

CAPTAIN MARTA GOVERNO

'But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God"' (Ruth 1:16).

INTRODUCTION

Ruth is my favourite book in the Bible. I've read it and preached on it many times and I must admit that every time I do I learn something new! I love this book because I think it mirrors a lot of what Jesus (and the New Testament overall) taught us regarding caring for others. So, thinking about people with disabilities, what lessons can we learn from Ruth and the other characters?

1) WILLINGNESS TO CHANGE/LEARN (CHAPTER 1)

Naomi is left widowed and childless in a foreign place. Although she is not what we would call 'disabled', we must remember that, in her time, her condition would make her very vulnerable. So, she decided to go back to her hometown Bethlehem, even though she would still be vulnerable there. Both of her daughters-in-law could have easily stayed with their families, but Ruth chooses to go alongside her mother-in-law.

'IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE ARE WILLING TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR WORLD AND TO CHANGE OUR WAYS TO BETTER HELP THEM.'

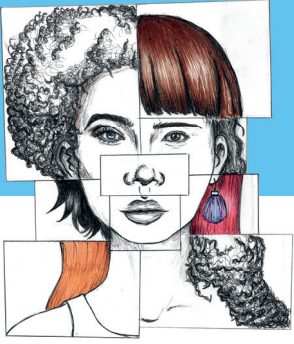
In this action lays our first lesson: Ruth's willingness to change/learn. When thinking about people, especially ones with disabilities, it is important that we are willing to learn more about their world and to change our ways to better help them! Do we truly understand how hard it is for someone in a wheelchair to enter a building that has no access ramp? Or for the elderly using a walker to get on a bus?

In the same way Jesus came into our world to live our ways. Sometimes we need to step out of our 'bubble', as Ruth did.

2) CARING BEYOND DUTY (CHAPTER 2)

Israeli law was concerned about the vulnerable people in its society. Many laws protected them (orphans, widows, the poor...). Nothing was surprising about the fact that they deliberately took measures to help this 'fringe' of the population. For example, during harvest, the workers would not pick up the leftover grain so the poor could come after them and glean it.

This is what Ruth does for her and Naomi to have food, and during this time she meets the next character who will provide us a lesson: Boaz. He owns the field and, as any good Israelite, lets people glean the leftover grain. Nevertheless, Boaz goes beyond his normal duty and he tells his foreman to give Ruth extra grain, leaving more behind for her.



DISCUSS:

- * How much do you know about the challenges for people with disabilities in your community? How could you better understand them?
- * Having in mind what we have learned about the book of Ruth and the supporting verses, how can we, as Christians, set an example of caring for people with disabilities?
- * How can we make space for people with disabilities to serve?

Many times we feel that we do 'enough' for the disabled in our community. Perhaps we donate money to a charity or we volunteer for some events. But are we willing to go beyond this? How would it look if we, like Boaz, go the extra mile to make sure people receive what they need? Ruth and Naomi were two widowed women in a society with no opportunities for them, like so many disabled people in society today.

3) PAYING THE PRICE (CHAPTERS 3 AND 4)

Once again using the law, Naomi realises that Boaz could help them even more by redeeming their property and marrying Ruth. When Boaz knows about this possibility, he makes sure all the right steps are taken, promising Ruth he will take care of this business. For Boaz, words are commitments: on the same day he said it to Ruth, he did it. After he married her, they took care of Naomi and had a baby.

Boaz was not only 'talk' as he was willing to pay the price to help Ruth and Naomi, not only with grain but by changing his own life to make sure they had the support they needed. Helping people is not just about giving them something (money, food, etc), it's about realising what else we can do to change their situation. People with disabilities may not have their limitations changed, but they can have their circumstances changed! Our words need to be commitments as well. Sometimes we need to give up our comfort zone to accommodate the needs of those around us.

Supporting verses: Philippians 2:3-4; Galatians 6:2.



Dear Lord, we are sometimes guilty of living our lives alienated from the needs of the disabled in our communities. Please give us a heart that is willing to learn, care beyond duty and pay the price. Amen.

CAPTAIN MARTA GOVERNO

SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

Captain Marta is Portuguese and serves as a Salvation Army officer in the Spain and Portugal Territory where, at the time of writing, she was Director of the Adult Daycare Centre in Porto. She is married and has a seven-year-old daughter. Teaching is one of her favourite parts of ministry. When she needs to recharge and reconnect with God she loves to be by the ocean, so beach holidays are her favourite.



RACE AND CULTURE – DIVERSITY: A CHANNEL OF GOD'S GLORY AND HONOUR

ROMANS 15:7

MEBLE VILIKA BIRENGO

'Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring Praise to God' (Romans 15:7).

There is no better space to feel the challenges of diversity in culture, race, difference than growing up as the child of Salvation Army officers. I remember packing and unpacking every three years when my parents received their marching orders, and being forced to adopt, connect and move on as quickly as possible. However, this was not the most challenging part of the moves. That challenge was finding myself in unfamiliar cultures with social expectations and struggling to find the right balance between being young and the desire for freedom to do what was usual to me, while living in unusual cultures.

'AS GOD'S PEOPLE WE MUST PRAY FOR THE OPENING OF OUR SPIRITUAL EYES TO SEE LIFE WITH GOD'S LENSES.'

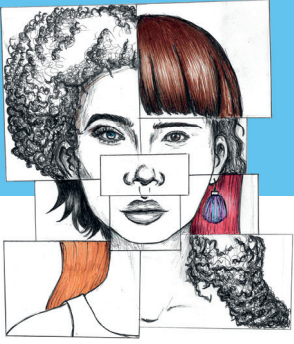
As an adult, I have experienced this degree of diversity in different scenarios. I lived in Bangladesh for two months on the border with India, mentoring a team of young people as we influenced responses to community development. As a young black woman, with long curly braids and a Kenyan accent, I was distinctly 'visible' in the eyes of the community. I remember walking to home visits and children climbed trees to catch a glimpse of me. Most of them had never seen an African before and crowds followed everywhere I went. This might sound like a story that we read in books, but the reality and the power in that moment in relation to the theme of others, race and culture is quite significant.

As Christians, we need to discern God's purpose for his people who we see as different. We need to appreciate the values of diversity as God commands. Romans 15:7 is a core reminder to accept one another with the foundation for praise and glory to God. Have you ever thought of others in this way? That the diversity in worldviews, different races, our concept of 'difference,' our own beliefs and spiritual interpretations exist for God's glory? I have read this verse several times and find an angle to it that refers to our own beliefs about others.

We must realise that our perception of others reflects who we are from the depths of our being. I am reminded of the ripple effect when you throw a stone into water – each ripple is connected to the source. There is a correlation between our actions as believers when you think of Romans 15:7. Young people of this generation are growing up with a different understanding between their own cultures and the global culture of race, independence and technology. As much as ethnocentrism exists, to them race, culture and 'difference' are seen as opportunities for celebration and connection.

What about you? What do you believe about yourself that you realise Christ has accepted you for? Does it change the way you see others? Does it influence how you treat those different from you? In what ways has your acceptance of others given glory to God? Are you the source of a ripple effect that impacts change in God's people, for God's glory? Or are you contributing to the creation of further disconnection and separation of God's people because they are different?

I believe as God's people we must pray for the opening of our spiritual eyes to see life with God's lenses – the beauty of different races, cultures – and create platforms for praise and worship because of this uniqueness. I have enjoyed the beauty in the distinctive social interpretations of diverse cultures portrayed in food, dance, costume and songs which crown our meetings. Romans 15:7 reminds us to appreciate this diversity more, considering others as God's pathway for praise and magnifying his holy name. It is all about him.



DISCUSS:

- * How different am I from the people I work with/minister to? Do they praise God because of my uniqueness?
- * In which ways am I praising God because of the diversity of people around me?
- * What does Romans 15:7 teach me about God and his desire for the ministry he has called me to?

We must advocate and lead these pathways of worshiping God through diversity, speaking confidently about the culture of the world and be diligent to transform the current injustices linked to race and cultures to which we do not belong. As a black woman I have experienced some stigmatisation because of the colour of my skin, but I have also been celebrated because of the colour of my skin. My experience in Bangladesh had nothing to do with racism but had everything to do with God's praise and name being exemplified because of my difference. I never once thought I was a black girl, but I knew God had sent me to Bangladesh because I was different, and it is that difference that was needed for God to be seen and witnessed by his believers in that place.

I recently visited the USA over Christmas and saw snow for the first time. The beauty of it in the trees, fields and driveways was stunning. I admired the lawns that were covered with snow, and some families had Christmas lights through the green trees covered in snow. As much as the winter clothes made me look like a muffin, it was nothing compared to the beauty I saw. I stopped to pray and give thanks to God for the opportunity to see a new world and to experience what my American friends see. To them it was normal, but it was a God-given opportunity and experience for me. Such magic from God that placed worship in my spirit and a testimony to tell my Kenyan friends. I have also seen a similar expression when I have hosted friends in Kenya and taken them to the giraffe centre. The awe and glow in their faces is priceless and their testimony to how God's creation is amazing, reminds me to pause and appreciate what is normal to me.

This lesson in Romans 15:7 is one that we must embrace, reminding us to accept our differences of race, cultures and tradition. In our difference, Christ still accepts us. Knowing this, should we judge anyone?

Think about your life, your work and the diversity of people God has given you. God has deliberately placed you where you are. He has placed diversity around you for his glory and the manifestation of his supremacy.



Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I thank you for the revelation of your word, that all your creation and the beauty of diversity and difference is about giving you praise, glory and honour. I pray for wisdom to channel this blessing and revelation to those who look upon me for guidance. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

MEBLE VILIKA BIRENGO

KENYA EAST

Meble Vilika Birengo is Learning and Impact Specialist with the International Social Justice Commission. The seventh child of the late Majors Daniel and Mary Birengo, she is a soldier at Nairobi Central Temple and has a passion for spiritual and leadership development. She is a trombonist, mezzo soprano and a resident conductor at the Kenya Conservatoire of Music in Nairobi. She has a BSc in Leadership and Management, and an MA in Monitoring and Evaluation.



OTHERS AND ACCESSIBILITY

LUKE 14:13-14

MAJOR NANCY HELMS

'But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous' (Luke 14:13-14).

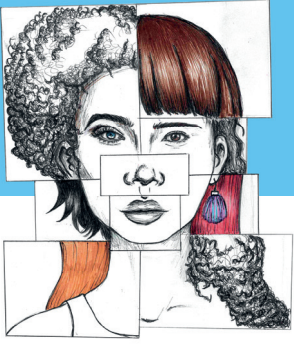
'MANY ARE MISSING FROM THE TABLE IN GOD'S KINGDOM BECAUSE THE CHURCH HAS NOT PROVIDED ACCESS.'

It probably won't surprise you to learn that individuals with disabilities make up the largest marginalised population in the world and in the Church. It's been a critical social justice issue since before Jesus walked this earth, and it's a matter he addressed with intensity and intentionality, over and over in the Gospels. He often reminded his listeners to make space in their lives for the others of this world – the excluded, silenced, isolated and rejected.

We probably all know individuals in our communities with disabilities who are lonely, silenced and yearning for a place of belonging. In Mark 10:46-52 we read of one such person calling for help while being ignored, hushed, and pushed to the margins by those who had no time, patience or mercy. Bartimaeus, from Jericho, was blind, and his disability automatically marked him as an *outcast*. He did not belong – anywhere. Like many with disabilities in that day, he had his usual spot for begging, just to survive. On one miraculous day, his spot on the side of the road would prove to be lifechanging and life-giving.

Mark 10:47 says, 'When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"' By calling him 'Son of David', the blind man affirmed his belief that Jesus was the Messiah. His plea irritated those standing around, who obviously thought he was out of place. They did their best to hush him, but he persevered and shouted even more, "'Son of David, have mercy on me!'" Jesus stopped! 'Call him', he said (Mark 10:49). The disciples called him over – leaping to his feet he went to Jesus. Jesus asked him the simple question, 'What do you want me to do for you?' (v 50). In faith, Bartimaeus gave him a simple response, 'Rabbi, I want to see' (v 51). He could have asked Jesus for anything, but he asked for the one thing that would provide inclusion and belonging. Jesus healed him, and he followed Jesus on the road.

Most people would say that the physical healing of his sight was the most significant event that took place during that encounter. Let's consider that Bartimaeus being able to join the crowd and follow Jesus was perhaps the most significant event of that moment and in his life. It was probably the first time in a long time that he wasn't an outcast, put to the side. He instantly had accessibility to those in his community who had previously rejected him. The restoring of his sight meant he could belong. Imagine the emotional and spiritual healing he experienced in that moment. It makes one wonder how many people today with disabilities would like to join others and follow Jesus but have not been provided accessibility by those in the Church.



DISCUSS:

- * Can you name individuals with disabilities in your church community who have a prominent seat at the table? Can you name people who are missing?
- * In what ways do we inadvertently quieten people with disabilities? How can we give them a voice?
- * Who do we know with a disability that we can ask the question, 'what do you want me to do for you?'

In Luke 14:12-14, Jesus addresses the Pharisees. They loved to have the seat of privilege and invite prominent guests to their banquets. Jesus looked around the table and noticed how the guests picked the places of honour. He told the host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Many are missing from the table in God's Kingdom because the Church has not provided access.

Debie Thomas, in an article entitled, 'Table Manners', says, 'When we dare to gather at Jesus' table, we are actively protesting the culture of upward mobility and competitiveness that surrounds us. There's nothing easy or straightforward about this; it requires hard work over a long period of time. To eat and drink with God is to live in tension with the pecking orders that define our boardrooms, our committees, our church politics – and that can be tiring. But it's what we're called to do – to humble ourselves and place our hope in a radically different kingdom... Where we sit speaks volumes, and the people whom we choose to welcome reveals the stuff of our souls.' Consider how you can provide emotional and spiritual healing to 'others', by providing places of belonging.

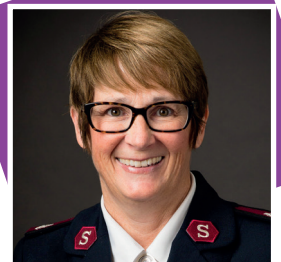


Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as we turn our hearts to you, help us to turn our tables to others.

MAJOR NANCY HELMS

USA WESTERN

Major Nancy Helms is a mother of four, grandmother of four, a lover of the sea, connoisseur of chocolate, and a constant work in progress. She is a Salvation Army officer currently serving as Territorial Spiritual Formation Resource Officer and Territorial Disabilities Ministries Director in the USA Western Territory. Her second child, Cameron, who has disabilities, is her biggest hero in life and has played a pivotal role in her understanding of inclusion and belonging in the world and in the Church. He has shown her that the only thing that really counts is faith expressing itself through love.



FRUITFUL DISCIPLES

1 CORINTHIANS 13:5

MAJOR RACHEL KANDAMA

'Love...does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs' (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).

Selfless love always considers others. If we applied the principle of selfless love within our families, our homes would be free of conflict and would honour Jesus Christ who did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

A life that is withdrawn from service to others will eventually lose its meaning. God created us to serve, he has wired it into our hearts to want to be useful and have a purpose that is bigger than just living for ourselves.

'One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer at three in the afternoon. Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

'Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So, the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God' (Acts 3:1-8).

How many people do you encounter each day who are going through challenging times and are just hoping someone will notice and offer to help?

The first thing Peter did was to stop and had the man look up at him and John. This act placed the man on an equal position with them. Friends, if you seek to be a fruitful disciple you must reach out to others personally and must have a spirit of inclusion, disregarding one's status or race.

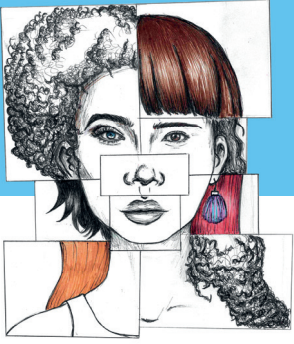
The next thing Peter did was to tell the man that although he did not have money, he would offer him what he had. What did he have? He had Jesus Christ. What is it that we have that we can offer to others? We can be in a position that Peter and John found themselves in of not having gold or silver, but we have Jesus within ourselves whom we can share with those that have not yet accepted him as their personal saviour.

PERSONAL MINISTRY TO OTHERS

The events of our lives, even our everyday affairs, must not be seen as without importance; they contribute to the way God wants to use us.

Sometimes we feel as though we don't have enough to give, but all that considering others requires is willingness and obedience, so that we can value other people's needs above our own.

The events of life are tools and agents of the Almighty so we must think, trust and act accordingly. It also requires our mind to move in God's direction and totally depend upon him. In Kings 17:8-16, the widow trusted God even with the little she had left. Out of her act, God gives her an abundant supply: 'She...did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah' (verses 15-16).



DISCUSS:

- * How many lost souls do you work with and never take the time to tell them about Jesus?
- * Have you considered that before God meets your need, or that in meeting your need, he wants to use you to meet the need of others?

God uses these daily encounters to get our attention, to change our values, character, priorities, pursuits and to change our sources of trust for security and happiness. Let's never lose sight of the fact that the same events that test us often become the means by which God is able to use us in ministry to others. Elijah's need became a means of meeting needs in the lives of the widow and her son.

'IF YOU SEEK TO BE A FRUITFUL DISCIPLE YOU MUST REACH OUT TO OTHERS PERSONALLY AND MUST HAVE A SPIRIT OF INCLUSION, DISREGARDING ONE'S STATUS OR RACE'

This serves to remind us that we are not here for ourselves, but for others too.

Christlikeness means that even in our pain we are to think of others and how God may want to use us. We can find ourselves in a society that is focused on what is best for me, regardless of others. It's all about what's best for my career, my happiness, my security, my significance. Considering others requires that we don't just look at our own needs but the needs of others as well.

Jesus calls us to follow him into a life of serving others.



Dear Lord Jesus, help us to have the right spirit as your disciples in reaching out to people without discrimination. Help us to have a heart that prioritises others first, for many are the times we have overlooked the need of others. Lord, help us to live according to the standard of your love as we endeavour to serve others. Amen.

MAJOR RACHEL KANDAMA

ZAMBIA

Major Rachel Mwiinga Kandama was commissioned in the 2005 Visionaries Session.

She has served in corps, training college, THQ and divisional appointments. She is currently serving as the Territorial Youth and Candidates Secretary.


Rachel holds a diploma in social work, and is married with three children: Kalinda, 17; Joshua, 7; and Emmanuel, 3. She likes singing and dancing to gospel music.



HOPE IN DIFFICULT TIMES

JOB 1:1-3, 13-22; JOB 2:1-13

MAJOR ROBYN BLACK



Job had a good life, with 10 children, good friends, lots of servants, good health and great wealth. One day he lost it all. Actually, he did not quite lose everything, his beloved wife was still at his side. You would hope that she was some comfort to him. But Job's wife said, 'Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!' (Job 2:9).

She was not a very encouraging person! Perhaps we should have compassion for Job's wife, after all, she also had lost her children, her home and her wealth. She may have been reacting against God because of her own pain.

Job also had three friends to support him. The first thing they did was to sit with him in silence. 'Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was' (Job 2:13).

When someone we know has experienced grief, especially an unexpected, very tragic loss, we may wonder what words of comfort we could possibly bring. But we don't have to say anything. Like Job's friends, the ministry of just being present is very powerful. Listening to a person's story of pain and anguish shows that you care. Being comfortable with silence gives space to listen for the whisper of the Holy Spirit.

The next thing Job's friends did was to encourage him: 'Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees' (Job 4:4).

They were saying 'I know things are bad now, but remember how much you helped people in the past'. When ministering to a person who is very downhearted, it may be helpful to remind them of times in the past when they were fulfilled and when God was working through them to help others. Sometimes remembering past times can bring comfort and encouragement. It can remind us that life was not always difficult and there is hope for the future.

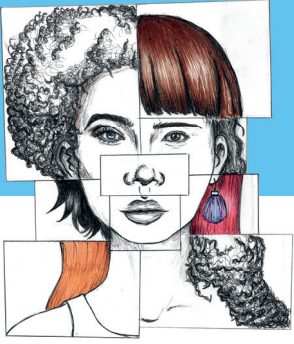
Then Job's friends gave him some advice: 'But if I were you, I would appeal to God; I would lay my cause before him' (Job 5:8).

Job's friends tell him to appeal or pray to God. When we minister with people who are discouraged or depressed, we have the wonderful riches of heaven to call upon. We might gently remind our friend that they can 'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you' (1 Peter 5:7). Many times prayer has brought comfort and peace to a person experiencing worry, anxiety and discouragement.

In the meantime, this was Job's reality: 'When I lie down I think, "How long before I get up?" The night drags on, and I toss and turn until dawn...I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning' (Job 7:4, 16).

Job is experiencing disturbed sleep, tossing and turning, intense grief, lying awake, worrying about his situation all night, wanting to be alone, feeling life has no meaning or purpose. These can be some of the symptoms of grief, loss, depression or anxiety. Many people experience these symptoms in the course of their life. Job shows us how to deal with these difficulties.

Even in his despair, Job does not give up on God. Even though he feels like his life has no purpose at that moment, Job holds on to God because his life depends upon it. Speaking about God he says, 'Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him' (Job 13:15).



DISCUSS:

- * Discuss the responses of Job's wife and friends. What was helpful? What was unhelpful? How could you help someone going through difficult circumstances, when they are very downhearted?
- * Do you have a friend who is in the middle of very difficult circumstances at present? Could you pray for them and appeal to God on their behalf?
- * Perhaps you have experienced anxiety or depression, and felt that life has no meaning? Is there someone, a trusted friend like Job had, that you could speak with and pray with? Remember, God wants us to cast all our burdens on him, because he cares for us.

Job knows where hope comes from. Many people experience pain and disappointment in life, and sometimes they lose hope in God. They think that God does not care about them and their circumstances. But when we read the gospels, we see Jesus is often moved with compassion for people. When we see Jesus weeping at Lazarus' tomb, we see the reflection of God who feels our pain. Though we experience despair and anguish this does not mean God does not care. Our pain means we are living in a sin-sick and broken world, and God is also heartbroken by it.

Whilst he was still in the middle of his devastating circumstances Job said, 'I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God' (Job 19:25-26).

This is such a statement of faith – whatever is happening in my life, I know that my Redeemer lives! And even if this mortal body is destroyed, I will live with him. God has used Job's life to minister to people going through the darkest of times. He will minister through our lives, even in our darkest times, if we hang on to hope in Jesus.

'WHEN WE MINISTER WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED OR DEPRESSED, WE HAVE THE WONDERFUL RICHES OF HEAVEN TO CALL UPON.'

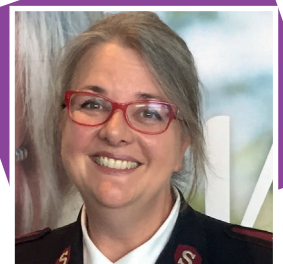


Heavenly Father, we are grateful that you know us and you care for us. You are our hope because we know that our Redeemer lives! Amen.

MAJOR ROBYN BLACK

AUSTRALIA

Major Robyn Black is a corps officer at Auburn Corps and an area officer in Sydney. Robyn loves people and loves Jesus, and believes there is no greater pleasure in life than ministering in Jesus' name.



A WOMAN'S POSTURE

LUKE 13:10-17

MAJOR SARAI ORTIZ



The movie *Inside Out* depicts the varied emotions of 11-year-old Riley: joy, discouragement, fear and anger. When she expresses discouragement, she is usually hunched over. Her outward posture reflects her inner mood.

Fear, discouragement, depression, the things we face and carry, often make us incline our position. We see this with the woman in Luke 13:10-17.

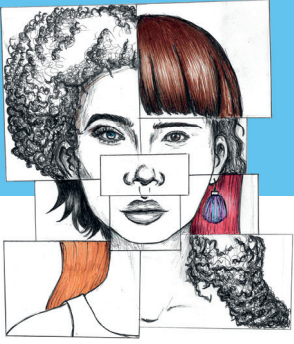
THE BENT WOMAN (LUKE 13:11)

For 18 years this woman was bent over, crippled by a spirit. Her physical posture possibly harboured feelings of depression, isolation, shyness and low self-esteem. How often have we felt that way when difficulties drown us, when we compare ourselves to others? But after 18 years, the time came for a glorious encounter with Jesus.

'THE RESULT OF DIVINE HEALING GOES BEYOND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING; IT IS SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALING.'

JESUS CARES FOR OTHERS (LUKE 13:12-13)

- A. Jesus 'saw'. Despite how many people were around Jesus, he saw this woman's need. We can be sure that God cares about us and sees our needs and is concerned with resolving our affliction.
- B. Jesus 'called her'. Although the Bible does not mention her name, he called her; that matters. When the Lord calls us, he knows us and has time for us in our daily worries. So let us rest in his omniscience: God knows everything.
- C. Jesus 'said to her'. In addressing her, he pays attention to a woman who was considered of little importance in those times. God speaks to us these days through the Bible, giving us comfort and encouragement in trialling times. Let us look to his Word to be filled with his strength.
- D. Jesus 'touched' her. He goes one step beyond seeing, calling and saying; he puts his hands on her. A touch that changed this woman's life completely. How many of us have felt that special touch of our Lord? Only by approaching Jesus will we be able to feel that touch. So, we too, can touch the lives of others for blessing.
- E. Jesus 'healed her'. She will no longer walk bent over; her posture changed, she straightened up, her countenance reflected joy and surprise, and she began to glorify and praise God. That shyness changed into joy, into song. The result of divine healing goes beyond physical well-being; it is spiritual and emotional healing.



DISCUSS:

- * Think about the miracles and wonders in your life, and times of answered prayer. When was the last time you thanked the Lord for all he has done?
- * Consider your posture. Is it a true reflection of your inner workings?

THE SELFISH AND ANGRY RELIGIOUS (LUKE 13:14-17)

- The synagogue leader was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. He had a self-centred stance. Some people will always refuse to open their spiritual eyes and will be opposed to God and his people.
- They practised the wrong values. It is more important to take care of others and their needs than to keep the Sabbath. Jesus said that if an ox or a donkey can be led to water on the Sabbath, then why shouldn't the woman be set free from what bound her?
- They were embarrassed. Jesus used strong words against his opponents: 'You hypocrites!' Jesus defends the position of this woman, shames the adversaries with authority, humiliates them in front of the people, 'but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing' (NIV).

Let's share with others about his wonders and miracles in our lives. Think how many wonders God has performed in your life: when he answered your prayer for healing, when he gave provision in times of scarcity, when he gave you a job. He protected you in that accident when he brought comfort amid adversity and gave you peace amid the storm. Have you recognised him? Have you thanked him? Have you praised him? If you still find yourself bent over, immersed in your worries and needs, I invite you to look up to Jesus, listen to his voice and feel his touch of love.



Father, I recognise your power and love for me; you call me by my name because you know me, you know my needs and concerns. You know my flaws, and yet you love and forgive me. Lead me to victory with the power that only you can give. I recognise that only you can provide me with peace, wisdom and companionship when I feel alone, and a future under your control. When I get up, may it be to praise you, to serve others and honour you with my actions, considering the one who needs to listen to you and be touched by you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

MAJOR SARAI ORTIZ

MEXICO

I have served as an officer with my husband for 25 years; we are part of the Messengers of God's Love Session. In my current appointment I serve at the Migrant Shelter in Tijuana at the north of Mexico border with the United States. I am a mother of four children who know Jesus as their Saviour and I am very happy to be the grandmother of two beautiful granddaughters. I was inspired by the life example of my retired officer parents and their 39 years of service.



GENEROUS REFRESHMENT FOR ALL!

PROVERBS 11:25

MAJOR TRACY BRIGGS

“OTHERS” – IT’S A DESCRIPTION OF JESUS’ LIFE, AN EXAMPLE FOR US TO FOLLOW.’

‘Whoever refreshes others will be refreshed’ (Proverbs 11:25)

The Sea of Galilee is found in Northern Israel. This sea is alive with animals and plant life. People have been fishing from this body of water for thousands of years. It’s a sea of life. However, about 105 kilometres south is the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is roughly nine times saltier than the ocean. This salinity makes the environment so harsh that animals and plants can’t exist.

How is it that one teems with life while the other is known as the Dead Sea? The Sea of Galilee is fed from the north and in turn runs out into the Jordan River to the south. Water comes in, water goes out. However, the Dead Sea only has water flowing in and not out.

One sea receives and gives out. The other only takes.

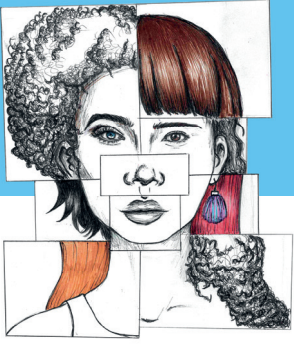
We are conscious of this truth with our bodies. If what I take in is more than the energy I use, then I know I have a problem. I’m going to put on weight and it could lead to high blood sugar, an unhealthy heart, high cholesterol etc. I need to be giving out, exercising and using my muscles. Then I will be healthy and strong. If I only take in, I get sick, but in giving out I get healthy.

In the natural world we see an inward focus brings death, darkness and sickness yet in giving out there is life, light and health. Not only is it a natural principle but it is a spiritual principle given to us from God.

We see this in its extreme in Jesus in Philippians 2:6-11: ‘Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’

‘Others’ – it’s a description of Jesus’ life, an example for us to follow. Time and time again we read it in God’s instruction to the Early Church, to those who would follow Jesus’ example in being concerned with others of all generations. Young, old and in-between, we are called to serve them all as Jesus did. Look at these verses: Philippians 2:4; 1 Corinthians 10:24; Ephesians 5:21; Matthew 20:28. ‘Others’ is living a radical life. It’s not easy. It’s counter cultural because we live in a world that is self-absorbed. So much self-interest, my rights, my entitlement, my comfort.

What a challenge for us to be ‘others-focused’. And yet there is a promise of when I refresh others, I refresh myself. One name God was known as in ancient days was El Roi – the God who sees. Our God sees us. And he promises to reward those who live for others (Psalm 149).



DISCUSS:

- * In what way have you benefitted from helping someone else?
- * What divine privileges did Jesus give up? What did Jesus give up for you? What was God's response?
- * What ways do you display selfish behaviours? How do you overcome these?
- * What is one way you can use your skills, knowledge, possessions, love or time for others of all generations this week?

Matthew 10:42: 'And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.'

Luke 6:35: 'But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.'

When we know and experience Jesus in our own life and as we care for others, we don't do it from a place of deficit but a place of security, richness, fullness and love. The Sea of Galilee overflows from its abundance and we can love others from a place of being loved, having hope and knowing we belong to God. For we have a God who sees us, and we will be refreshed as we refresh others.



Show me Lord Jesus those whom I may refresh today and help me to have the courage to act upon it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

MAJOR TRACY BRIGGS

AUSTRALIA

I have been married for 30 years to a Godly, fun, fantastic man. We have three beautiful children, two daughters and a son, and a lovely daughter-in-law and son-in-law. We have the most gorgeous 18-month-old grandson who is a true blessing! My husband and I have been officers for 27 years and we love serving God in ministry together. I am an area officer in Northern New South Wales.



INTERGENERATIONAL DIVERSITY

1 CORINTHIANS 12:27

CAPTAIN WILLEKE VAN DER WOUDE-VAN DE VENIS

'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it' (1 Corinthians 12:27).

This Bible verse is typically – and rightly so – used to explain why in church we need to be mindful of each other's Spirit-given gifts: everyone is valued and looked after, because their gifts are purposefully given to help the Church reach its fullest potential.

There are programmes with extensive questionnaires to help us find out about our spiritual gifts. For some, these programmes help to reshape their church's ministry, but for others it may have felt like a test with hardly any follow-up. The times I was part of such a programme, both as a soldier and a corps officer, I noticed that people who were eager to take such a test were often at least 30 years old. Those who were younger were asked, but often not encouraged when they forgot or could not be bothered (depending on who was talking about these younger people) to fill in the questionnaire. So, our 'vision' for the following years was mostly based on the input from people that did not represent our whole church community.

Rather ashamed, reflecting on this a couple of years later, I believe we can apply this Bible verse to the subject of 'Generational Diversity'. The body of Christ is not just the sum of its gifts, but the sum of all the people that have gifts.

To make this a little clearer, I would like to use the terms 'multigenerational ministry' and 'intergenerational ministry'. Adcock¹ explains that multigenerational ministry happens when all generations are in fact together in the same room but don't interact or mingle. Think about a corps when during the worship meeting the children go to their own gathering. Or, when after the worship meeting coffee and tea is shared and the people all seem to be connecting well, but when you look from a distance, you notice that the older people only talk with each other, the parents with those who also have children, the musicians with the musicians and that the teens sit somewhere in a corner minding their own business, etc. Now, intergenerational ministry encourages generations to intersect; people don't just stay with who they are most comfortable with – their own group and/or generation, but they have 'crossed the room' to talk to each other.

'WE NEED TO BE MINDFUL OF EACH OTHER'S SPIRIT-GIVEN GIFTS.'

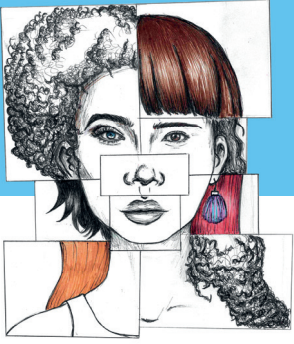
In the Bible, we can find multiple examples of intergenerational relationships:

- Paul who instructed Timothy to let no one despise him because of his youth but encouraged him to lead his community (1 Timothy 4)
- Eli who mentored Samuel after the latter needed explanation about who it was that was calling him in the middle of the night. Later, Samuel became David's mentor who – being the youngest son – wasn't considered worthy by his own father
- Naomi who instructed and mentored Ruth in the ways of the people of Israel. Ruth, a stranger from Moab, turned out to become David's great-grandmother

Instead of looking at the possibilities different generations can offer, we tend to focus on the things that threaten what our own generation holds dear. For instance: older generations spent years building the 'status quo' and feel threatened by those 'who come next'. Younger generations can view this attitude as an obstacle to progress and innovation.²

1 Adcock, G. (2020) The Essential Guide to Family Ministry (p. 105-p. 118)

2 Satterwhite, A.L. (28 May 2020) <https://outcomesmagazine.com/embracing-generational-diversity/>



DISCUSS:

- * Where do you identify your corps on the spectrum between multigenerational and intergenerational?
- * Looking at the mentioned starting places: what do you feel God is telling you to address first? Who might you need to have a conversation with to get this process started?

Throughout the Bible we see that God calls generations both to him and to each other. Should we not follow that example by caring for each other and valuing what each person can offer to the church community? When was the last time you reached out to a person other than your own generation and truly listened – without an agenda – just to get to know them? When was the last time you invited someone to learn from you – or to teach you?

Where to begin? Adcock¹ offers some starting places to consider in your desire to truly reflect 'the body of Christ, where each one of you is a part of it' (1 Corinthians 12:27).

STARTING PLACES:

1. **Gathering:** when and where are different generations in the same room? Try to make this a time of understanding, reaching out – producing a sense of being one body. Consider the Old Testament image of feasting: a shared meal where everyone is welcome as they are in effect reflecting a godly tribe.
2. **Building relationships:** connect! By talking to each other you gain more understanding of what it is like to be old(er) or young(er) in this day and age. What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ for you?
3. **Enhancing worship:** this is not about adding another or a different worship meeting. It is about creating a mindset to the whole of corps life and its activities: 'everyone, regardless of age, can access and feel a part of the "tribe" or community, able both to receive support when necessary and to serve for the benefit of others. It's about each member, from the youngest to the eldest, recognising they are part of community with others and having an opportunity to actively participate.'¹
4. **Leadership:** We need people from all generations in leadership. Authority can be a shared responsibility – all ages have much to receive and offer to each other. Get young people around the table. Don't just invite them to share their opinion occasionally, but get them making the decisions.

'God invites us to partner with him as he does infinitely more than we could ever conceive of on our own. You and I are not limited to our individual hopes and dreams, as exciting as those may be.' – Marcus Overstreet³

³ Overstreet, M. (13 July 2019) <https://ourbestdays.org/blog/generational-thinking>



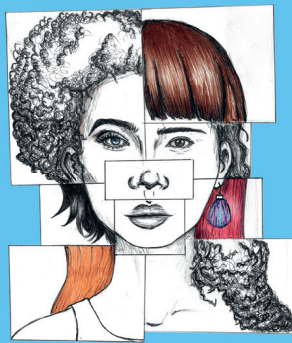
Lord, may you be glorified through the generations. Help us to see each other through your loving eyes. Amen.

CAPTAIN WILLEKE VAN DER WOUDE-VAN DE VENIS

THE NETHERLANDS, CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA

Captain Willeke has served as a corps officer and as a chaplain. She now coordinates the weekly programme in a corps/community centre in Amsterdam-East. Her three adult children are in university/college and still live at home. Willeke has a passion for people.





Produced 2023
The Salvation Army International Headquarters
101 QUEEN VICTORIA STREET, LONDON EC4V 4EH