

CALLING THE COURAGEOUS...

to make a full surrender.

"Cracked Pots: Give Us Sincere Hearts"

A Reflective Devotional on Spiritual Self-Examination in Consecrated Living

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I bring thee, dear Jesus, my all,
Nor hold back from thee any part;
Obedient to thy welcome call.
I yield thee the whole of my heart.

*O speak, O speak while before thee I pray! And, O Lord, just what seemeth thee good
Reveal, and my heart shall obey.*

Perverse, stubborn once was my will.
My feet ran in self-chosen ways;
Thy pleasure henceforth to fulfill,
I'll spend all the rest of my days.

The doubts that have darkened my soul,
The shame and the fears that I hate,
O banish, and bid me be whole,
A clean heart within me create

O give me a heart that is true,
Unspotted and pure in thy sight,
A love that would anything do,
A life given up to the fight! (SASB, 422)

The word sincere comes from the Latin, *sincerus*. The prefix *sin* means without while *cere* means wax.

Pottery, as ubiquitous as plastic in our day, during biblical times was a major trade. Potters who made imperfect pots with cracks or rough edges would fill in these imperfections with wax to pass them off as high craftsmanship. However, careful potters utilizing the finest clay and techniques would scribe *sincerus* on the bottom to distinguish the vessel as perfect. To test the quality of the vessel a pot could be held to a flame where the heat and radiance of the fire would melt the wax and expose any imperfection. ειλικρινής (eilikrinēs) is the Greek word Paul uses in Philippians 1:10 to denote a pure or sincere heart,

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be **pure** and blameless for the day of Christ, filled



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with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11, ESV).

εἰλικρινής connotes that which is examined in the sunlight is determined to be pure and clear. In light of this I propose these questions: Do we Salvationists cultivate a life in the light of Jesus to be pure and blameless? And what difference does this mean for us?

A senior officer tells about meeting with his Divisional Commander at officer's camp. Another obscure and seemingly simple officer happened to walk by. "There is a man in whom there is no deceit!" exclaimed the DC. Intentionally echoing Jesus' one time observation of Nathanael in John's gospel,¹ the DC was pointing out this seemingly insignificant comrade had something in him that would escape human perceptions. Like Nathanael, this officer was a character who "tells it like it is." Nathanael seems everything but innocent at first, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46)². However, Jesus sees something more in him,

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." (John 1:47-48, ESV)

As Nathanael is held up to the glory of Jesus in this gospel it appears that Jesus has a favourable accommodation for him linked to his examination "under the fig tree." What exactly is the connection? Every religious Hebrew would desire to be described in this way:

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit. (Psalm 32:1-2, ESV)

¹ Nathanael is also listed with the disciples in John 21:2.

² Notably, Nathanael is correct. Hebrews would know the Messiah was to emerge from Bethlehem not Nazareth. It is his generalization and obvious prejudice that are on display.

It would be exactly under the fig tree where Nathanael would be seen before Yahweh, reading Torah.³ Jesus' word of knowledge highlighting Nathanael's whereabouts during a specific and memorable encounter demonstrates that Jesus himself is God. Nathanael again is encountering Yahweh, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49, *ESV*). Nathanael was invited to "Come and See" (John 1:46) only to find that Jesus had seen him and invites him to greater encounters, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:51). Just as Jacob at Bethel encountered Yahweh where angels "were ascending and descending" (cf. Gen 28:12), Nathanael will discover "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." And "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." (Gen 28:16 – 17). Sincerity begins and ends not with moralism but with encountering God. Indeed Jesus is "the gate of heaven," and "the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Nathanael's sincere heart is a result of his devotion and encounter with the One who sees all and forgives all. In the light of Jesus our imperfections and sins will be stripped away. In encountering the consuming fire of God our imperfections are clearly seen and we are left as clear, sincere pots: vulnerable, exposed but not burned.

The Salvation Army has a deep tradition of encountering Jesus in humility and personal searching. John Wesley was adamant that the grace of God is continually experienced and transformative in the Christian's life:

And at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit: there is a *real* as well as a *relative* change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel "the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"; producing love to all mankind, and more especially to the children of God; expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease, of honour, of money, together with pride, anger, self-will, and every other evil temper; in a word, changing the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, into "the mind which was in Christ Jesus."⁴

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* Rev. Ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 358.

⁴ Wesley, Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation" in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols., CD-ROM edition (Franklin: Providence House, 1994), 2: 158.

The experience of God's grace is a yearning within to experience and participate in the love of God over pleasures of sin. It is no wonder then that Wesleyans cultivate a strict observance of self-examination. We do not encounter Christ with cowardice and shame but in the light and hope of being renewed into the image of God. Wesley and William Booth encouraged their people to pour over self-examination questions.⁵ The pure and blameless life is not one without error, ignorance or fault. Rather the Christian life is a continual trajectory to experience the love and grace of Christ. The necessary means of grace in pursuit of holiness is drawn into our soldier's covenant:

I will be responsive to the Holy Spirit's work and obedient to His leading in my life, growing in grace through worship, prayer, service and the reading of the Bible. I will make the values of the Kingdom of God and not the values of the world the standard for my life.⁶

By daily setting time for spiritual disciplines soldiers will be held up in the light of Christ. It is in this humble position that we realize our dependence upon his grace and our fellow soldiers. Wesley was sure that salvation worked beyond the individual. He emphasized the communal nature of this journey, "The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. 'Faith working by love' is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection."⁷ James too emphasizes the discipline of confession, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." (James 5:16, ESV). Where is the place for this in our corps meetings and discipleship programs? After our personal reflection do we have a "holy club" like Wesley; with fellow soldiers who can encourage and pray for us that we may be healed? Proper Christian living incorporates the whole person. Howard Snyder observes that the healing motif broadens a static protestant view of salvation:⁸

⁵ Included in the Appendix are both William Booth's and John Wesley's recommended examinations.

⁶ The General of The Salvation Army, *The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine*, (London: Salvation Books, 2010), 321.

⁷ Wesley, *Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems (1739) Works*. (Jackson) 14:321.

⁸ Albert Outler agrees that the linkage between sola fides and sanctification is unprecedented in Protestantism. While the Reformers recognized the linkage, Wesley accounted for a regenerative process between justification and sanctification. Outler, *Wesleyan Spirit*, 39.

Salvation-as-healing makes it clear that God is intimately concerned with every aspect of our lives; yet, biblically understood, it also makes clear that the healing we most fundamentally need is spiritual: Our relationship to God. Biblically grounded (and as Wesley understood it), the salvation-as-healing motif is no concession to pop psychology; it is an affirmation of who God is, what it means to be created in God's image, and what it takes for that image to be restored in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁹

Paul's self-defence in 2 Corinthians 4 stands against Christian allusions of a triumphant Christian over the world. Paul's treasured gospel capitalizes the gracious nature that God forgives, sustains and empowers the Christian in the midst of suffering in the world:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Corinthians 4:7-12, ESV)

We ultimately are cracked pots and God doesn't want us to hide our inadequacies or faults. There is tremendous power that is exclusive to Christianity in the forgiveness of sins and fellowship in the Holy Spirit that are only evident when the weak fallibility of our mortality is admitted and God's life-giving and regenerating power is evident in us. So may we be sincere about our true selves, not hiding our weaknesses but in courageous faith holding our lives up to the light of Christ so that his healing power may be revealed.

⁹ Howard Snyder, "What is Unique About a Wesleyan Theology of Mission?" accessed July 28, 2011, available from http://www.wineskins.net/pdf/wesleyan_mission.pdf

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TEST FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

The following are questions taken from *The Salvation Army ORDERS AND REGULATIONS FOR SOLDIERS, 1950 (Chapter 3, section 4)*:

1. Am I habitually guilty of any known sin? Do I practise or allow myself in any thought, word, or deed which I know to be wrong?
 2. Am I so the master of my bodily appetites as to have no condemnation? Do I allow myself in any indulgence that is injurious to my holiness, growth in knowledge, obedience, and usefulness?
 3. Are my thoughts and feelings such that I should not be ashamed to hear them published before God?
 4. Does the influence of the world cause me to act, feel, or say things that are unlike Christ?
 5. Do my tempers cause me to act, or feel or say things that I see afterward are contrary to that love which I ought to bear always to those about me?
 6. Am I doing all in my power for the salvation of sinners? Do I feel concern about their danger and pray and work for their salvation as if they were my children?
 7. Am I fulfilling the vows I have made to God in my acts of consecration or at the Penitent Form?
 8. Is my example in harmony with my profession?
 9. Am I conscious of any pride or haughtiness in my manner or bearing?
 10. Do I conform to the fashions and customs of this world or do I show that I despise them?
 11. Am I in danger of being carried away with worldly desires to be rich or admired?
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1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
 2. Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?
 3. Do I confidentially pass on to another what was told me in confidence?
 4. Can I be trusted?
 5. Am I a slave to dress, friends, work, or habits?
 6. Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?
 7. Did the Bible live in me today?
 8. Do I give it time to speak to me every day?
 9. Am I enjoying prayer?
 10. When did I last speak to someone else about my faith?
 11. Do I pray about the money I spend?
 12. Do I get to bed on time and get up on time?
 13. Do I disobey God in anything?
 14. Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
 15. Am I defeated in any part of my life?
 16. Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy, or distrustful?
 17. How do I spend my spare time?
 18. Am I proud?
 19. Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the Pharisee who despised the publican?
 20. Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold a resentment toward or disregard? If so what am I doing about it?
 21. Do I grumble or complain constantly?
 22. Is Christ real to me?

¹⁰ John D. Michael Henderson, *Wesley's Class Meetings: a Model for Making Disciples*, (Nappanee: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 118-19.



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