

Something More

by Commissioner Alison Walter

Sitting on the beach during summer holidays, I had a chance to chat in relaxed circumstances with a Salvation Army bandsman. He is exemplary in attendance at band practices and meetings. He practises daily, so he is skilled in musicianship and, having been brought up in a Salvationist home, we would call him a good Salvationist, together with his wife and two children. But his 'inner man' was spiritually hungry. "After 39 years," he said, "What have I got?"

Although God works in many different ways to call us into a vital relationship with Himself, there are definite similarities or steps in our spiritual pilgrimage. First, there seems to be a realization of spiritual drought and then a seeking to see if there is, indeed, "something more." When one is convinced that there is, then comes the time of decision when one asks, accepts, and believes. Then, under the Spirit's tuition, there is a daily conversation with God which leads to a change of lifestyle in a continuing, maturing process.

The sense that something was missing from my Salvationist testimony became real to me between the ages of 15 and 18. It was when I heard clear preaching on holiness and began reading books and asking questions of both my contemporaries and my elders that I realized what that 'something missing' was. In different generations different words are used to describe it. For me it was 'the blessing of holiness'.

Today I usually speak of being 'filled with the Spirit'. But I agree with General John Larsson who suggests that we might again use the early Army term of 'full salvation' because, although we often speak of salvation and holiness as two separate experiences, both are open to us because of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When I had gone through the stages of hungering for something more, and being convinced that what I needed was both available and promised, I knelt alone by my bedside and, with the help of a little booklet called *A LADDER TO HOLINESS* I made a commitment of my life to Christ. There was no question that I had been converted 11 years earlier, but I had grown up physically since then and my spiritual development had not kept pace. I did not experience any great emotion, but I was sincere and knew that I wanted only what God wanted for me and was willing to forego anything that did not meet with God's approval.

Having made that commitment once and for all, I pointed to the promises in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 and thanked God for doing the work of sanctification in my life. For a few days I had no inward assurance of the fullness of the Spirit, but I kept thanking God for what I believed He had done in accordance with His promise and then, as I was telling my girlfriend about my commitment, a wonderful knowledge that He had indeed accepted and sealed my offering came over me, and I knew I had been sanctified!

What does this 'something more' mean in everyday practical words rather than in theological terms? I will try to tell you what it has meant in my life over these last three score years.

There were obvious things in the beginning. I found a new reality in my personal devotional life, as Paul promised would happen in 2 Corinthians, chapter 3. At that time I was a bank teller, and I would spend my lunch hour in a nearby park, delighting in reading the Bible and talking with God in prayer. How well I remember the strength that came to me through reading Psalm 27 before I opened a letter which I had guessed would contain unpleasant news for a teenager.

My service in the corps became a joy rather than a duty. Several pleasures and habits I had been beginning to enjoy, although I knew they were questionable for Salvationists, were dropped without any sense of loss. I had a new direction to my life and a new satisfaction.

A Spirit-filled life is attractive, and the 'experience' is contagious. I spent that summer with a number of other young Salvationists. Most of us came alive spiritually together, and I can look at corps right across Canada today and point out those good friends of long ago, still happily and reliably serving the Lord.

But what of long-range, continuing effects of the blessing of holiness? Two verses in Psalm 118 put my description of a sanctified life in a biblical, picture-language. Verse 19 asks God to 'open to me the gates of righteousness'. To me that depicts the seemingly narrow entrance into the beautiful life of holiness. Gates are narrow, and we cannot carry through with us any selfish ambitions or concealed doubtful actions if we long for righteousness. Yet once we commit ourselves in glad and binding abandonment to the doing of God's will, we find the truth of verse five, which says, "The Lord answered me, and set me in a large place." Surprisingly, the narrow gate of righteousness lead to a large place of opportunity for service, self-fulfillment, and development.

Because my whole being has been securely tied at the centre to Christ and His will, I have felt able to venture out in all directions to study, investigate, and relate, for the Holy Spirit empowers or restrains me inwardly, as promised in Jeremiah's vision of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:33).

It reminds me of the tennis practice ball I used years ago. On an elastic string, but securely fastened to a central rock, it could be hit in any direction for it would safely return to the centre when it had reached the end of the safe periphery. What wonderful freedom and liberty I have – freedom from traits of character that would pull me down and liberty to grow in the likeness of Jesus, into the image of God which was His original plan for mankind – all this through the power of the Holy Spirit, and the result of walking in obedience to and dependence upon Him.

Because I had been brought up in a Christian home and became converted as a child, there were no drastic changes in my lifestyle. It was, rather, a change in motivation. There was a cleansing of the inner life, and the result of this has been a transparency or openness in my living. Because every action is lined up by the plumb-line of whether or not it pleases God, I am not tied (too much, anyway) by the fear of what others think or say. The time I arise, the way I spend my free time, the way I work at the office or at home, how much I get accomplished each day, are open to everyone's view. My thoughts and actions are quite open to question and discussion, for they are under my Master's jurisdiction, and therefore I am happy and relaxed in my lifestyle. This way of living has been tested in the cloister-like setting of the training college and a boy's secondary boarding school in Africa where, naturally, we all seemed to live on top of one another.

One other attribute of the life of holiness stands out in my mind, and that is peace. Consistently throughout the years I have found that the Holy Spirit will not allow broken relationships in my life. If there have been disagreements or harsh words, I have not been able to spend many hours before I have had to be the activator in the process of reconciliation. No price is too much to pay for the peace of the Holy Spirit who acts as umpire in my life (Colossians 3:15).

Then there is peace in my work. Since my ultimate goal in life is to please God and work for Him, no job or position is too lowly, for there is no task where we cannot witness for Him, either in word or in doing gladly the set work, for Jesus' sake. There is also peace from a restless spirit and a craving to justify oneself when maligned. God will prove our righteousness (Psalm 37:6), and it is to Him that we must answer (Romans 14:4). Although by nature I am a 'worry-er', I find that searching in the Scriptures for promises that speak of my immediate concern, brings peace to my anxious, edgy spirit.

Do you say, you make it seem all bright and rosy, so simple and easy! Once the initial dedication has been made there is no need for struggle and defeat. But we are all human, and there have been times when I have made the wrong decisions or dabbled in things that were not helpful or had to work hard at keeping a right attitude or when busyness has made me physically exhausted and therefore spiritually weak. But the Holy Spirit has always gently prodded me, and the knowledge of peace I had been missing has always quickly brought me back to a renewed submission and dedication.

So my path has been one of a need, a seeking, a claiming, and a daily walking. I would say to the bandsman I met on the beach, "It's obvious that the Lord has led you to the first step, for you have a sense of 'something missing'. Do press on till you prove for yourself that there is 'something more'.