

## Faith & Life – Celebration

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Hallelujah!  
Praise God in his holy house of worship,  
    praise him under the open skies;  
Praise him for his acts of power,  
    praise him for his magnificent greatness;  
Praise with a blast on the trumpet,  
    praise by strumming soft strings;  
Praise him with castanets and dance,  
    praise him with banjo and flute;  
Praise him with cymbals and a big bass drum,  
    praise him with fiddles and mandolin.  
Let every living, breathing creature praise God!  
    Hallelujah! (Psalm 150: 1-6, *The Message*)

He was five years clean from his crack addiction. Five years!!! Very few people can ever say that. He was so very proud of his accomplishment. We were thrilled for him and proud of ourselves for the efforts that we had made to help him get to this point. It called for a party.

There was going to be a Narcotics Anonymous meeting where he'd be receiving his five year medallion and he wanted people from Gateway to come and celebrate with him. So the day finally came. We decided to go out for dinner first and get the party started there. It was a gathering of staff and a couple people from the street, one of whom was severely mentally ill but as excited for our friend as the rest of us were. We ate a lovely meal together, full of laughter, engaging conversation, community, and joy. It was beautiful.

Then we piled into our van and headed to the celebration. We cheered as loudly as we could for him when they called his name and gave him his medallion. We marveled at how far he'd come from when we first met him until now. He was physically unrecognizable from the man we first met who lived under bridges and used crack as often as he could possibly get his hands on it.

When we see miracles like this happen, we have to party. This work that we do is brutally hard sometimes. We see a lot of people trapped in addiction, loneliness, homelessness, and despair. But once in a while we see glimpses of hope, of grace. When we see those glimpses it is crucial that we stop and take note. Finding times to celebrate keeps us motivated and encouraged to keep going. At Gateway every opportunity is taken to party and celebrate. The end of winter, Easter, Christmas, birthdays, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day – you name it, there's a party in honour of the occasion. Even with the weight of the shelter being always full of 108 men who have no home, the brutality of that reality is overcome by laughing and celebrating together. And there's been a lot of laughter!!!

Jesus loved to party. Even though life all around him was full of misery, poverty and fear, he stopped and enjoyed the little things. His first recorded miracle was to turn water into wine. He kept the party



going when it seemed it was winding down. He lounged at tables with tax collectors, prostitutes, Pharisees, and working class fishermen. He was part of the community and enjoyed the festivals and gatherings as much as anyone else did.

The words 'celebrate' or 'celebration' occur in scripture about 125 times right from Genesis to Revelation. It's biblical to party! Celebrations can be for reasons such as an act of worship (Ex 10:9), a festival of remembrance (Ex 12:14-16; Esther 9:20-22), a way to evangelize and share our faith (Acts 2:46-47), a form of gratitude (Neh 12:43), a way to practice Sabbath (Is 58:13-14), a way to mark milestones such as freedom from oppressors (Is 61:1-7), and something to look forward to when all is said and done (2 Cor 4:16-18)

Listing 'celebration' as an organizational core value makes The Salvation Army unique. Even though most groups take time to celebrate different milestones and occasions together, to be as intentional about it as to name it is as crucial to our identity is a bold and wise move. It affirms the value of a good party. (It even opens the door to budget for it without guilt.) Sometimes in this work I see people feeling guilty for celebrating when there's still so much wrong with the world. Jesus' comment that 'the poor will always be with you' (John 12:8) when the woman poured the very expensive jar of perfume all over his feet was to not to let us off the hook for trying to resolve poverty. It was simply to say to us all, "Take a break once in a while and enjoy the good things in life. There's always time to get down and dirty with the poor but for now come up for fresh air and enjoy a few moments of food and laughter together. Celebrate!"

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