

TRANSFORMED LIFESTYLE

“Live as citizens who reflect the Good News about Christ.” PHILIPPIANS 1:27 (NOG)

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-8 (NIU)

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons . Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:27 (NOG)

“Live as citizens who reflect the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come to see you or whether I stay away, I’ll hear all about you. I’ll hear that you are firmly united in spirit, united in fighting for the faith that the Good News brings.”

INTRODUCTION

Do you realize that we have the extraordinary privilege of being Citizens of the Kingdom of God? Philippians 1:27 (NOG) tells us that we are to “Live as citizens who reflect the Good News about Christ.” I want you to be aware that there is a path to citizenship available to everyone. God grants this special honor to all those who put their faith in Jesus and accept His remedy for sin; those who respond are accepted into His Kingdom. In fact, they are made Citizens of the Kingdom of God! What a privilege! Think about it!

No, we don’t get papers or a passport to hold in our hands. But we do get the assurance that comes from the One who knows everything about us, loves us, claims us, guarantees our future, and tells us to “rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20 NIV). Compare that to living without that assurance, outside of His love, not having a place in the Kingdom of God, living unsure, lost, and alone!

How else could The Salvation Army have a mission in 128 countries, except that we are united as citizens of the same Kingdom? We understand that the country of our birth isn’t what gives us a placement in God’s Kingdom, it is our spiritual transformation. The message of our worldwide Salvation Army mission is Jesus, and we work together to bring others into His Kingdom. This is the amazing message that we are able to share with others, when our lives reflect the Good News.

Paul understood this difference between citizens and non-citizens. He said "... there are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them ... all they want is easy street ... they hate Christ's Cross. But easy street is a dead-end street ... all they can think of is their appetites." But then he says, "There's far more to life for us. We're citizens of high heaven!" (Philippians 3:17-21a MSG).

Yes, we too are citizens of high heaven! You have spiritual brothers and sisters all around the world. And as we move into the coming weeks of preparation for our Word Services giving, I challenge you to consider your identity in Christ and how His worldwide mission is reflected to others from your life.

This morning, our Scripture will help us understand that being a citizen of high heaven is both a blessed privilege and a responsibility. It is our transformed lives that reflect the Good News to others!

I. A CITIZEN'S IDENTITY

What characteristic identifies a Citizen of the Kingdom? Simply put, it's how we live. Paul said, "Live as citizens who reflect the Good News about Christ." You heard it, "Live as citizens."

People who received Paul's letter could understand what he was saying about being a citizen. A great number of Roman soldiers had fought, and finally settled, in Philippi. Even though it was 1,000 miles away from the capital city, the soldiers understood they were still governed by the laws of Rome. Since they were Roman citizens, distance didn't matter. They considered themselves as Romans.

So, when Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian Christians saying that they were to live as citizens who reflect the Good News, it made no difference to them when they read it that the disciple was 1,000 miles away and in a Roman prison. And it made no difference that they were physically separated from Jesus. They understood who they were; they were citizens of the heavenly Kingdom with all the privileges and responsibilities of this citizenship.

You know, people can often tell where you are from, just by paying attention to you. Your conversations, your accent, the way you talk about the weather, sports teams, local landmarks, and popular restaurants all can tell someone where you come from.

(You need to localize what you have to say this section)—the Internet has similar "You know you are from ..." descriptions for almost every city or section of the USA Eastern Territory—from Puerto Rico to Kentucky to Maine. As an example, here we are using New Jersey.

People say that you can tell if someone is from New Jersey. How? Well, see if these statements are true.

You know if a person is from Jersey if ...

1. They can't pump their own gas.
2. They know the home stadium for the New York Jets and the New York Giants are in New Jersey, not New York.
3. They are surprised to learn that diners are not everywhere.
4. When people ask them where they're from in New Jersey, they answer North, Central, or South.
5. They tell you where they are from by stating their Parkway or Turnpike exit.
6. They make at least one jug handle to get to their destination.
7. They don't "go to the beach," but they "go down the shore."
8. They either live in an overpopulated urban area or basically in the countryside.

9. They only eat “subs,” rather than “hoagies,” usually purchased at WAWA.
10. They have been to Six Flags more times than they can count.

Sound familiar?

These regional differences are undeniable and just serve as an illustration for us today. We can also identify unique things about Christians—Citizens of the Kingdom. We are alike in so many ways, all around the world, no matter where we live. Remember, as citizens, our lifestyles are expected to reflect the Good News of the Gospel.

How about making a list of things that are true about Citizens of the Kingdom? Working from one prepared by Pastor Gordon MacDonald, let’s say,

You can tell if people are Citizens of the Kingdom if they ...

1. Are devoted to Jesus and ready to share their faith
2. Allow the Bible to guide their view of the world
3. Seek God’s direction faithfully
4. Worship with a humble and dependent spirit
5. Are building healthy personal human relationships
6. Seek to reach outside of their church group
7. Sense a personal “call” and gifting from the Spirit
8. Are merciful and generous to all and work for reconciliation in our world
9. Are faithful in the midst of suffering and overflow with thankfulness

Citizens of the Kingdom have so much in common. For example, visiting a Salvation Army corps in Africa or Mexico is a different experience from worshipping at corps here at home. Yet even when travelling, you will feel “at home” in the Army as the Gospel is shared. You’ll learn how the mission is moving forward and see how the people you meet reflect the Good News.

Are you a Citizen of the Kingdom? How can you tell? Your lifestyle as a Christian makes your identity obvious. You are to be a follower of Christ, at all times, in all places, and in all cultural settings.

II. A CITIZEN’S LIFESTYLE

Are you living as a Citizen of the Kingdom? Let’s get practical and honest about the lifestyle that honors the Gospel. Paul says, “Live as citizens who reflect the Good News about Christ,” (Philippians 1:27 NOG).

The word is live. It is great to serve God when we are at the corps or center. But when we read Scripture, we realize that it’s every day—it’s all the time—live! Here is the challenge, to live with the understanding that you are a Citizen of the Kingdom 24/7. There is never a time when you are not a citizen!

If you will face this challenge, you’ll get somewhere. It is about embracing your privileges and responsibilities as Citizens of the Kingdom, and it’s reflected in your lifestyle.

I like what Paul advised his friends in Philippi to do. He said, “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life,” (Phil. 2:14–16 NIV).

Can we reflect the Good News in our lifestyle? Can we shine like stars? I would think that you want to.

There are times when “shining like stars in the sky” seems possible, especially when we are joined together in our Christian community. For example, when we hold a congress or commissioning, we seem to sense the importance—our mission is big, visible, and clear—real spiritual victories are won. These events stand out as milestones in our lives.

Yet there are times when people who are genuinely fulfilling the expectation that we will “shine like stars” seem to be overlooked.

At a conference of pastors, someone asked the question, “Can you remember one sermon that so greatly influenced you that it actually served as your ‘call’ to the ministry?” Everyone stumbled at their answer before finally agreeing that a number of sermons surely contributed to their ministry, rather than a particular one. The follow-up question was, “Is there a Sunday school teacher who greatly influenced your life?” Every one of those church leaders could vividly remember the influence of a Sunday school teacher, or several teachers, who had made a difference in his or her life.

Do you think those Sunday school teachers realized what they accomplished? It is unlikely. But these answers remind us that fulfilling the expectation that we will “shine like stars,” will usually be accomplished, one person at a time, by people who are living a faithful life.

Do you understand that the Gospel can shine through you when you are faithful? Song 1003 says it well.

*“O Lord, whose human hands were quick
To feed the hungry, heal the sick,
Who love by loving deed expressed,
Help me to comfort the distressed.*

*What is divine about my creed
If I am blind to human need?
For you have said they serve you best
Who serve the helpless and oppressed.*

*Lord, may your love translucent shine
Through every loving deed of mine,
That men may see the works I do
And give the glory all to you.”*

Give the glory all to God! While Citizens of the Kingdom “shine like stars” in big events, the day-to-day expectation for Citizens of the Kingdom is about integrity and faithful service. This might be accomplished as a Sunday school teacher or through many other areas of service. It might involve the way they care for their partners in mission in World Service giving. It is a citizen’s lifestyle—God’s love shining through every loving deed.

So what about you? Remember, before we shared the words *shining like stars*, what did the Scripture say? We are to live without “grumbling or arguing,” becoming “blameless and pure ... without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” With this kind of lifestyle, you “shine” as you “hold firmly to the word of life.”

This is a great word for us. If you are going to reflect the Gospel, you must take the advice to refrain from grumbling and arguing. If Christians are going to be shining examples, like stars in the sky, they must avoid

anything in their life that detracts from the Message. Remember, we are to live as citizens who reflect the Good News.

Being a Citizen of the Kingdom will engage you in a lifestyle that is better and more fulfilling than anything else this world offers. Remember, you are a Citizen of the Kingdom 24/7.

III. A CITIZEN'S TRANSFORMATION

Now, I want you to take a little different approach as you listen to me in the next moments. You are being told to “Live as citizens who reflect the Good News of Christ.”

I want to talk to you, one-on-one. Everybody should be listening and hearing what I have to say. It is time to get quiet and personal and accountable to God. It may feel uncomfortable, but that's okay, do it anyway.

Here is what I want you to quietly think about.

Jesus, our perfect example, linked His life to His disciples. His prayer, spoken just before His suffering and death, revealed His deep relationship with His disciples and His Father, God. The disciples surely had their faults, but they were chosen to be with Jesus during His earthly ministry.

Here is what Jesus prayed, “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine.” Then speaking of His disciples, He said, “And glory has come to me through them,” (John 17:10 NIV). Did you hear that? Jesus said to the Father, “glory has come to me through them.”

Are you willing to consider the possibility of glory coming to Christ through you? I'm not talking about through the way you relate to Jesus, your lifestyle, your life choices, your calling and response, your devotion and obedience, your servant attitude, and your interactions with people.

We know—and God knows—if we are authentic. In the Old Testament, some people who pretended to be worshippers were told, “... you come and stand in my presence in this temple ... and say, ‘We are safe!’ You think you are so safe that you go on doing all those hateful sins!” (Jeremiah 7:9–11 NET). Speaking for God, the prophet revealed the Truth.

Today, the Holy Spirit will do the same thing. He will uncover the Truth. His convicting power is strong. He will speak to your heart, hold you accountable, and help you to be honest before God, right now. Are you authentic?

As you are quiet before God this morning, I ask you to allow Him to speak to you and allow His transforming power to work in you.

You have a public identity—the “you” you want others to know, the “you” other people think you are, the person you are when at church. Then, there is the person you are in your most private, personal moments. My simple question to you is, can Jesus, when speaking of you, whisper to His Father, “I am glorified through my disciple?”

To truly reflect the gospel of Jesus, a transformed relationship comes first. It is His grace and favor that are given to us. What a privilege, what a responsibility!

APPLICATION

We have looked at our first step of being Citizens of the Kingdom.

You cannot hide your true identity. Whether you are a Christian with a great depth of compassion or a careless pretender, your identity will show up. You can't help but reveal your true spiritual citizenship—which has nothing to do with the town, city, or country you were born in or where you live now.

Perhaps your identity can best be seen in your lifestyle. Are you authentic 24/7? Are you making decisions based on what God wants for your life? What are areas of weakness in your life that have necessitated an outpouring of God's grace? What prayer and discipleship discoveries are you making?

Can you hear Jesus saying this about you to His Father, "Glory has come to me through my disciple?" Can you imagine any better measure of living "as citizens who reflect the Good News about Christ," than His approval?

Today, we are Citizens of the Kingdom. I am challenging all of us to face the future with a transformed lifestyle that comes from an authentic relationship with Christ. In so doing, we will reflect Christ to the world around us. That is our mission!

PRAYER CHORUS

595/186 "In This Quiet Moment"

SONG

591/411 "I Would Be Thy Holy Temple"

WEEK 1 CHILDREN'S TIME IDEAS
**REFLECTING THE
GOOD NEWS**
(Transformed Lifestyle)

PREPARATION

Bring a mirror, one that is large enough so children will be able to see themselves. Be careful where you place it so it isn't broken during the activities. As an alternative to the mirror, use a camera phone and take "selfies" so the kids can see how they appear to others.

INVITE THE CHILDREN TO GATHER

Do you know what I am holding? A mirror—right!

If you look in a mirror, who do you see?

(Take time for all the children to look in the mirror and see themselves.)

You see yourself. You see yourself just as other people see you when they look at you.

Do you ever look in a mirror and make funny faces? Do you ever check to be sure your face is clean?

Does your mother or father spend time looking in the mirror? What do you think they are looking for?

(Allow for answers.)

Maybe they want to be sure they look good or that their hair is just the way they want it to be or want to see if their clothes look right. What do you think?

In the Bible, we are told that when other people see us, they should see someone who knows about Jesus. It's as if they will learn about Jesus by being with us.

When you look in the mirror, what do you see, besides your face? Do you see a person who loves Jesus and other people? Do you see a person who prays? If you can see that, so will other people. They will see Jesus in the way you act and care for others. We are supposed to reflect the Good News of Jesus. If we do it, we will have done what the Bible tells us to do.

So next time you look in a mirror, check how you look and then ask yourself, *Can I (the person in the mirror) show other people the good news about Jesus?*