

SPIRITUALLY ALIVE

“Whether I come to see you or whether I stay away, I’ll hear all about you.” PHILIPPIANS 1:27 (NOG)

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11 (MSG)

“So this is my prayer: that your love will flourish and that you will not only love much but well. Learn to love appropriately.

You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush.

Live a lover’s life, circumspect and exemplary, a life Jesus will be proud of: bountiful in fruits from the soul, making Jesus Christ attractive to all, getting everyone involved in the glory and praise of God.”

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

Reports, reports, reports. Did you know that our corps (center), has lots of reports to complete? There are statistical reports that keep track of how many people came to meetings. There are also membership reports. Do we have more or fewer senior soldiers than last year? We have budgets to prepare and social service reports to submit. These reports tell how many families we’ve helped and how many food baskets we’ve given and how many hospital patients we’ve visited. On and on it goes. We do these reports to properly fulfill the responsibilities of our ministry, and all of it is important.

But what is the most critically important report we can give? I can tell you that nothing compares with our testimonies. They tell how our lives have been redeemed by the power of God. Our testimonies are powerful stories that tell others how God is at work—right here. When we testify, we give evidence that we are spiritually alive.

If I were to tell you all about a World Services gift that changed the life of a child in Africa or Mexico or some other part of the world, I know you would be blessed. If many souls were being won to the Lord in a nearby corps, you would want to know all about it. We are all encouraged by such reports.

When Paul wrote his letter to the people of the church in Philippi, he was in jail. He wasn’t sure if he would ever see them again, but he was thrilled to receive reports of the growing ministry in that city. Even though he was in jail, he could still celebrate. Why? Because the church was precious to him and the reports revealed that the church was alive, faithful to the message of Christ, and active in its mission. They were spiritually alive! That is what gave Paul joy.

The Scripture for today is reminding us that Citizens of the Kingdom are spiritually alive and activists for the cause of Christ. We are influential and our faithfulness to spiritual principles is going to make a difference in the lives of people around us.

Let's not be content to send reports to our headquarters with just the required facts and figures. Let's accept Paul's words as our challenge, to make it known that we are spiritually alive. Paul said, "Whether I come to see you or whether I stay away, I'll hear all about you" (Philippians 1:27 NOG). Let these words be our call to action.

I. CALLED TO ACTION

You are called to share your light. It's like the children's song we sing, "This little light of mine" You know how it goes, "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine," and "Hide it under a bushel, no," and "Shine all over (name of your city)."

This song comes from the words of Jesus. He told His followers, "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

We have been blessed by receiving the Gospel, but it was not given only for our own joy. Catherine Booth explained God's intent for us when she wrote, "God will say ... if I have put my candle in you, it is that it may shine for somebody else's benefit."

We can model this. We can do this. After all, our Salvation Army is an activist movement, always looking for ways to share the Gospel. It has been said that we are "Saved to Save" and "Saved to Serve." Our approach has never been to sit quietly. Here are words from a Salvation Army song that perfectly describe this activism:

*Soldiers of our God, arise!
The day is drawing nearer;
Shake the slumber from your eyes,
The light is growing clearer.
Sit no longer idly by,
While the heedless millions die;
Lift the blood-stained banner high,
And take the field for Jesus.*

Are you ready to be the light of the world? You must find ways to shine! You are called to be visible. Remember, Paul said, "I'll hear all about you!" Let's make that statement true of our corps (center) today. Let's do more than post something nice on Facebook or tweet on Twitter. Let's make a move to advance the Gospel as a result of our being spiritually alive. We must be visible.

We have been challenged to personally carry out "The Whole World Mobilizing" theme, which we have been implementing in the Army. After all, the General challenged us by saying that we need to get out of our buildings and into the community. He's reminding us that, if we are to be witnesses in our neighborhoods and to the ends of the earth, then we shouldn't sit and wait for people to come to us. That's a call to action and visibility, right?

In Pakistan, an Army flag that commemorates "The Whole World Mobilizing" theme was carried throughout the territory by Salvationists. The flag visited all 132 corps, all the centers, and the headquarters.

In the Caribbean Territory, news came from the Guyana Division's Georgetown Citadel Corps, saying, "We believe in sharing the word of God in many ways so that we can mobilize with others around us." The young people from Georgetown Citadel put their words into action by listening to the concerns of the homeless; cleaning up neighborhood areas; being friendly with people passing by; sharing tracts, brochures, and pamphlets, and looking for opportunities to spread the Gospel.

One 18-year-old girl from the corps shared, "Being the youngest in my family and the only one who is a Christian brought challenges due to all the negative remarks about my faith. But I always wanted to make a difference in my life. When I accepted Christ and enrolled as a soldier, I was released from all my worries and frustrations about my past and my out-of-control thoughts. I'm also challenging all Salvationists to mobilize in their country and bring more people to Christ."

Did you get that? She was confident enough to say, "mobilize your country!" She shares the vision; a grand vision that assumes we will be people of action.

So, are you going to find a way to be an active Christian? Will you let God's light shine through you? This morning, let Paul's hopeful words, "I'll hear all about you," serve as your call to action!

II. CALLED TO EFFECTIVENESS

You are called to action, to deliver God's Word, and to do it effectively.

When something is done well, you are likely to ask, "How did you do that? Tell me all about it." The internet and Facebook are full of ideas, recipes, and suggestions for projects. You can even watch do-it-yourself videos on almost anything you might want to do—and do correctly!

In sharing the Gospel, the most important message in the world, we need to be concerned that we are effective. Catherine Booth didn't like the phrase "delivering a sermon." More than just the delivery, she was concerned with getting the message deep into the souls of people. She said, "God has made you responsible, not for delivering the truth, but for getting it in." So there has to be more than busy activities in our corps (center). We must also ask, "Are they effective? Do they accomplish their purposes?"

We don't want to just be busy Salvationists. We want to be effective, spiritually-alive Salvationists. Are you going to respond to God's call and be an active Christian? Will you really care to get the message into the hearts of people? Are you going to respond with all your might and strength? Are you are going to give it your best? After all, how else can we represent Christ?

Let's be honest and look inside yourself. Do you hesitate here? Do you feel uncomfortable when you face the fact that, as a Citizen of the Kingdom, you have a responsibility to others? Just in case you hesitate to give your best, listen to what William Booth had to say.

" 'Not called!' did you say? 'Not heard the call,' I think you should say. Put your ear down to the Bible, and hear Him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin. Put your ear down to the burdened, agonized heart of humanity, and listen to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell, and hear the damned entreat you to go to their father's house and bid their brothers and sisters and servants and masters not to come there. Then look Christ in the face—whose mercy you have professed to obey—and tell Him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish His mercy to the world."

An inspiring challenge!

Take a step back from the inspiring words and look deep inside yourself. In your heart of hearts, do you wonder what you can really do? The answer goes back to being spiritually alive.

What if we could see into your spiritual life? Would we notice how important prayer is to you? Would we sense your desire for other people to come to Christ? Would we see that you are desperate to share the news that has been such a blessing to you?

Or would we see your disclaimer that would read, “I see what you are saying Lord, I hear your call. But I can’t do all that, it’s not really for me.” If you wrote or said or felt that, you would be counted among many people who have responded the same way.

For example, Paul was religious, but couldn’t accept the Good News of Jesus. That is, until the Lord stopped him in his tracks and said:

“... ‘I am Jesus, the One you’re hunting down like an animal. But now, up on your feet—I have a job for you. I’ve handpicked you to be a servant and witness to what’s happened today, and to what I am going to show you ... I’m sending you off to present my offer of sins forgiven, and a place in the family, inviting them into the company of those who begin real living by believing in me,’” (Acts 26:15–17 MSG).

Paul’s objections were overcome and God sent him on a mission.

Do you know of any other people who objected when they learned what God expected of them?

How about Moses? When God sent him to free the people of Israel, God told him, “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.” But Moses’ immediate response was, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else,” (Exodus 4:12–13 NIV).

There was also Gideon. “Then the Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go with the strength you have, and rescue Israel ... I am sending you!’ ‘But Lord,’ Gideon replied, ‘how can I rescue Israel? My clan is the weakest in the whole tribe ... and I am the least in my entire family!’ The Lord said to him, ‘I will be with you ...,’” (Judges 6:14–16 NLT).

God said to Moses, “I’ll give you the words.” To Gideon, God said, “I’ll fight for you.” So, let me ask you this; after getting through their doubts and worries, were they effective in carrying out the mission God assigned them? Yes, they were!

What do you think God will do for those of us who are unsure about ourselves, even though we also hear His call to give our best and to be “sold out” to the gospel of Christ? What will He do for those of us who want to be effective? He will give us the word, He will fight for us, He will prepare the way, He will equip us.

With God’s help, we hear a call to action and a call to be effective in spreading the Gospel. It starts with us. It’s about being a Citizen of the Kingdom who is spiritually alive. It’s time for us to share our testimony. It’s time for a vibrant report on our spiritual health.

This morning, let Paul’s words, “I’ll hear all about you,” serve as our call to effectiveness in sharing the Gospel!

III. CALLED TO ENCOURAGEMENT

Do you realize what is happening? Paul wrote to his church in Philippi to encourage his followers and to instruct them. But at the same time, he looked forward to hearing all about them so he would be encouraged too. This is how encouragement works.

It's the same for you. When you share your faith you encourage others and you also are encouraged. So go ahead and broadcast your faith. Give your testimony, put into words what God has done for you! It's real. It shows how you are spiritually alive!

We echo the prayer in Scripture, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," (Romans 15:5–6 NIV).

From Johannesburg, South Africa, Major Andy Murray reports, "Our kids' church (Sunday school) mobilized and conducted a march! As we marched, we dropped off groups at each block to pray for the people. As we marched, we met an older couple who came out to see what was happening. I was thrilled to see a small group of teenagers go over to them and ask if they could pray with this couple. The couple said yes, and one small teen slipped her hand into the older person's hand, and they prayed. Peace and reconciliation starts with one little (big) act!"

This took place many miles away from here, but isn't it still encouraging?

One of our officers gave his testimony and encouraged his people. He said, "Without the encouragement of the Church, its faithful teaching from the Scriptures, its atmosphere of love and grace, its challenges to grow and its opportunities to serve, I would not be where I am today. Don't underestimate the power of God through His Church. As a brother in Christ, I hope to see you in service today!" That wonderfully demonstrates how important encouragement is to each of us.

You are loved. Yes, we want to hear all about you, see your family pictures, your comings and goings, your children and grandchildren, and your school accomplishments, talents, trophies, and projects. They are all exciting. As a foundation underneath all of this, we want to praise God for the miracle He has done in your life. As you testify to this in your words and in your actions, we will all be encouraged!

APPLICATION

Let it be known that, as Citizens of the Kingdom who worship together in this place, we are spiritually alive!

Let it be known that we are actively seeking ways to spread the Word of God here and around the world. We are not going to sit back and just hope someone shares the Good News.

Let it be known that we will share the Gospel effectively, always moving forward with our mission in mind.

Let it be known that we will be Christian encouragers to our neighbors, here and around the world. By the way we live and conduct ourselves, we will report that we are spiritually alive!

This morning, I have reminded you that we are called to action, called to effectiveness, and called to encouragement. What is your response? Are you spiritually alive? Your personal testimony today will be a reflection of your experience of God's faithfulness. Yes, we want to hear your report today!

PRAYER SONG WITH CHORUS

506/950 "You Know that We Love You!"

SONG

680/38 "Those First Disciples of the Lord"

I'LL HEAR ALL ABOUT YOU

(Spiritually Alive)

PREPARATION

Bring a flashlight. If also available, bring small battery-powered lights for the children to use during the song.

INVITE THE CHILDREN TO GATHER

Did anyone here ever go camping? What happened when the sun went down? Could you see? What did you do?

(Allow for answers.)

Maybe your family had a fire near the camp site and you could see things from the light of the fire. Or maybe you had a lantern. Did you stay close to the tent or camper so you wouldn't get lost? Was it scary?

Maybe your mom or dad had one of these—a flashlight! That way, if you heard something strange you could ask them to shine their light to see what was making a noise. If you were the one who had the flashlight, you could help someone trying to walk in the dark. You could shine a light so they could see.

(If you have small lights, pass them out.)

There is a song we can sing that will help us understand how we can help other people and they will know that we love Jesus. It is "This Little Light of Mine."

*This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine,
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

Use motions. For example, have the children hold up their index fingers throughout the verse, unless you have small lights, in which case, the kids can hold them up.

Add verses (and motions) such as:

"Shine all over (your city's name)," and "Hide it under a bushel, no," and "Let it shine till Jesus comes."

Do your friends know that you are a Christian? There are things that some boys and girls worry about. But if you are kind to them, if you shine for Jesus like the song says, you will help them. When you shine for Jesus, we will know that you love Him, obey Him, and that you will help other people every day.