



The Salvation Army Canada and Bermuda Territory



*A resource
attuned to the
needs of the
times for those
who choose to
decide, act and
speak with moral
clarity and
conviction.*

➤ *Family*

**Small Group
Bible Studies**

A Word to Small Group Leaders from the Editor

The following small group studies have been inspired by The Salvation Army's Position Statements for the Canada and Bermuda Territory and are designed to accompany them. This series has been a vision of the Social Issues Committee for some time now and, in 2006-2007, one "lucky" Cadet was sent to The Salvation Army Ethics Centre and asked to make this vision a reality. This cadet was me and, under the direction of Dr. James Read and Sharon Jones-Ryan, this booklet and the studies by various authors contained within it is the result.

The authors of these studies are all people of faith who have felt compelled to understand the issues surrounding their particular study in light of their faith. They have placed the Position Statements in one hand and the Scriptures in the other and, in the end, developed studies designed to help others see the intimate connections between the two. As The Salvation Army's first doctrine states, "We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice." It is with this doctrine in mind that these studies have been developed and I wish to thank all the authors for their time, effort and hard work.

The initial feedback from this project has been positive; these studies are making people more aware of the important ethical issues facing our world and how Salvationists are responding. I realize that some readers may not agree with the Position Statements or with the perspectives expressed in these studies. Such a result does not make me unhappy; raising awareness is not the same thing as compelling agreement. Therefore, it is my hope that these studies will allow those with differences of opinion to appreciate the views of others while, at the same time, having an opportunity to express their own views. Seeing that this happens in respectful and productive ways could be a challenge to group leaders.

To that end, I plead with those leading these studies to accept the responsibility of diligently exploring these issues beforehand and preparing for the difficult questions that will no doubt arise. This will take time and effort - discernment will be needed - but it will certainly be worth your effort and helpful to those you are leading.

Thus, it is my hope and prayer that these studies will be used by Christian leaders to help those in their care learn more about the difficult issues of our day, understand them in light of faith, and respond to them appropriately as faithful followers of Christ.

The Salvation Army Ethics Centre 2007

Cadet Bramwell Pearce

The Family - A Small Group Study

By Cadet Barbara Stanley

Football practice was over and Denny was sore from head to toe. He walked slowly down the rows of ageing apartment buildings, each drab gray in the fading winter sun. Coming to his own building, he pushed open the heavy aluminum door and began to walk slowly up the two flights of stairs. Nothing caught Denny's attention—until he reached the second floor landing. Shivers ran up and down his body as he heard through the apartment door the all too familiar sounds of his mother screaming.

As a boy growing up, Denny could never find a place safe from his father's anger. He had tried hiding under the house, and his father found and beat him. Another time he had crawled into the narrow space between the refrigerator and the kitchen cabinet to hide, but his father discovered him and kicked him into the corner. Too many nights, his mother would meet him at the door, and the family would drive around town, waiting for his father to get so drunk he finally passed out.

This had to stop. Now, his eyes red with fury and his adrenaline pumping, Denny tore his father off his mother. He hit him twice in quick succession. Then with years of burning memories giving him lion like strength, he lifted his father and threw him through the second story window.

The deafening sounds of shattering glass, his mother's screaming, and his father's crashing from an aluminum canopy down to the yard below echoed inside the room. Denny, ran down the stairs and over to his father, who was already sitting up in the yard. Grabbing his father by the front of

his shirt, Denny pulled him up and with cold fury spat the words into his face, "If you ever touch any of us again, I'll kill you!"

Shortly after this incident, Denny left home for good, but no matter how far he traveled, he never escaped its memories."¹

Questions for Discussion:

1. What do you know about Denny's family simply from reading this story?
2. What might you be able to **guess** about how Denny feels towards his mother, father, and himself?
3. Without some healing in Denny's life what might he carry with him in terms of his belief system? For instance:
 - a. Life is _____
 - b. Loving relationships are _____
 - c. Trust is _____

Reading: Position Statement

Read the Position Statement on the Family (see appendix A) and discuss the following questions.

¹ Gary Smalley and John Trent, *The Gift of Honor* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 12-13.

Questions for Discussion:

Using the position statement as a spring board for discussion, ask the following questions of the group.

1. What *values and morals* did Denny learn in his family?
2. Without love and respect in his family, where are the places that a child (or Denny) will search for *security and wellbeing*?
3. At what point does Denny's life (or any person's life) become his own responsibility, rather than the fault of poor parenting?

Readings from the Scripture: The Gift of Honour

Reading the following passages from the Bible: Deuteronomy 5:16, Ephesians 6:1-4, and Proverbs 19:26, 20:20.

Questions for Discussion:

Is it possible to honor parents even when...

- a. we don't feel like it?
- b. we think they were wrong?
- c. they aren't alive today?

Commentary:

The beauty of God's desire for us, as outlined in Scripture, is that we are often asked to give to others regardless of their response, their desire, and/or their participation. For example, we are called to:

- Forgive (Matthew 6:12)
- Love (Matthew 5:44-48)
- Pray (Matthew 5:44)

In the previous readings we are told to honour our parents and to do so regardless of their response. This commandment may sound difficult but it can actually be quite freeing once the work of God in this process is grasped. It means that our ability to honour does not depend on how people respond, but relies on the work of Christ in us, Christ stirring us up to do good things, and the love of God being poured into our hearts (Romans 5:5).

Often we misunderstand God's commands. Our ability to love, pray for, forgive and honour others does not depend on the other person! It does not depend on a likeability factor, their depth of repentance, or their request for our love, honour, or forgiveness. It doesn't even depend on that person being alive. It relies on the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives to do what we could never do on our own strength.

Further Reading from the Scripture: Honouring Your Covenant

Read the following passage from Ephesians 5:21-32.

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery and I am applying it to Christ and the church.”
(Ephesians 5: 31-32)

“Your love is your own private possession,” wrote Christian martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer to a young couple from his prison cell in 1943. “But marriage is more than something personal—it is a status, an office. Just as it is the crown, and not merely the will to rule, that makes the king, so it is marriage, and not merely your love for each other, that joins you together in the sight of God and man. . . . *It is not your love that sustains the*

marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love.”²

In the above Scripture, the apostle Paul draws parallels between the marriage relationship and Christ’s love-relationship with the Church. He gave himself for her, so we must give ourselves to our marriage partners and seek the best in one another, regardless of circumstance. This is what was promised in the marriage covenant and, if this covenant is to have any real weight, we should act accordingly.

This can be difficult at times but, again, the story of God’s love-relationship with His people speaks to this. For instance, the Old Testament shows over and over again a reluctant people who are stubborn, prideful, arrogant, selfish, obnoxious, and idolatrous and that’s just the book of Genesis! Read through the prophets and you’ll find that even the kings and priests are caught up in the abuse of power and the worship of other gods. BUT even the catastrophic events that lead to and include the exile show God’s gracious hand for a remnant to be sustained and the covenant to be maintained.

How hard is God willing to work at maintaining the covenant relationship?

Allow time for those in the group to share known examples from Scripture. Some of these include: God rescuing Noah and his family (Gen 7), God

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, quoted in Richard John Neuhaus, “The Public Square,” *First Things* 113 (May 2001): 67-88.

sustaining Joseph in order to rescue the descendants from famine (Gen 45), God rescuing Moses from the slaughter of babies so that he could bring freedom to the slaves (Exod 1), and God sustaining the Israelites with food and clothing for while they wandered the desert for forty years

Read Jeremiah 29 and count how many times God says “I will” do something for the people. Acknowledge together that God is always initiating the holding together, the binding of the relationship. The character of God is to say “I will”. Our character is revealed in our willingness to stay committed to the “I do” in our marriage relationship. God is a God of covenant who is calling us to remember and live out our own covenant relationships.

When we do this, when we allow the weight and responsibility of the word “covenant” to be the foundation of our marriages, then we become a reflection of the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every time that we exemplify godly character, godly wisdom, godly love, we live out the gospel of Jesus Christ for the world to see. When the covenant of marriage is honoured in spite of, or in the midst of, circumstance, emotions and loss, then the marriage is sustained not just for its own sake, but as a testimony to the culture.

What can we learn from God in the way that He does covenant?

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 again.

From what you can take from these verses, and from what you know about Christ and His Bride the church, draw as many lessons/parallels to marriage as you can. For example:

1. Christ's commitment to the Church is eternal, even when his people have strayed, His commitment to them has not. Our marriage commitment is a bond even when one has strayed.
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Worship:

Exercise A

Take some time to sing Hymn # 662. Then allow five minutes for a time of meditation and quiet confession. Provide the group with pieces of paper to write down any responses they might have to these statements. Depending on the cohesiveness of the group and its ability to share in a healthy way, you may decide to allow time to share what they wrote.

I confess Lord a time when I have not been eager to help my parent(s)

I confess Lord a time when I spoke words that did not build up my parent(s)

I confess Lord any bitterness or resentment that I hold against my parent(s)

Exercise B:

On a piece of paper write down a time when, in retrospect, you can see that God was pursuing a relationship with you even when you had failed God or ignored God.

1. What was happening in your life?
2. How did God reveal Himself to you?
3. What did you learn about God's character?

Mission:

Exercise A: The Gift of Honour

How can your small group engage in a process of bestowing honour on those around you?

To children:

1. Allow a child to plan an outing or play-date with you.
2. Acknowledge when the child has spoken respectfully, truthfully, and kindly to you or others

To adult parents:

1. Cards of thanksgiving, sent at a time that is not a traditional holiday.
2. Unexpected phone call just to tell them about your day and ask them about theirs

3. Ask their advice on something important, and give weight to what they say

Exercise B: Honouring your Covenant³

1. Utilize the marriage covenant re-affirmation either in your small group Bible study, or in a church service. It can be used around Valentine's Day, marriage retreat, or a Covenant Day (see appendix B).
2. Utilize the Parent's Covenant as suggested above (see appendix B).
3. Utilize the Covenant Prayer for individuals in the group who are single and not parents (see appendix B).

³ See appendix for attached Covenants. These have been supplied by Major D. Skipper of The Salvation Army Mississauga Temple (2007).

Appendix A

Position Statement of Family

The Salvation Army believes the family, as the basic community in society, ought to be the principal way in which values and morality are nourished. In an environment of love and respect, children and adults find security and wellbeing. Here they are free to develop morally, spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally.

We believe that the family is ideally rooted in the biblical concept of a marriage covenant of one man and one woman. An enduring commitment to loving care reflects God's design for family life which allows no justification for abuse.

The Salvation Army acknowledges that families of all types struggle, and at times fail to be communities of love. In following the example of Jesus Christ, the Salvation Army, seeks to strengthen marriage and enrich family life, extending appropriate ministries of a caring Christian community to all people in all types of family relationships.

The Salvation Army, Canada & Bermuda, 2001

Appendix B

COVENANT RE-AFFIRMATION SERVICE

All God's people stand before the Almighty with pledges offered in response to God's promises. Today, we affirm our vows before God and in the presence of His people.

A Covenant is not a bargain with God nor a contract. It is a gracious agreement between God and His people whom He has chosen. In the Covenant, promises bind God to His people from whom He anticipates joyful obedience.

Pentecost was the day when God kept His vow to bestow the Holy Spirit upon all His people. The Spirit would abide with them and in them forever! He would enable them to be true to their commitments to Christ and powerful in their service in His name. The presence and power of God's Holy Spirit in the believer is essential to all of our covenanting.

(signature)

(date)

MARRIAGE COVENANT

We are gathered here in the sight of God and in the presence of these witnesses to celebrate these years of commitment to each other and in the holy estate of matrimony. We thank God for the love He has given us for each other.

WE AFFIRM our marriage vows with reverent thought, honest intention, and in the fear of God, pledging:

To have and to hold from this day forward
For better, for worse
For richer, for poorer,
In sickness and in health
To love and to cherish
'til death us do part.

WE AFFIRM the wisdom of God's plan for a man and a woman to be "one flesh" – finding their fulfillment in each other. We pray for God's presence to grace our marriage in the days ahead, so that we may faithfully keep the promises we've made. AMEN.

(signature)

(date)

PARENTS' COVENANT

O God and Father of us all
We look to you as the Giver of Life
The Lover of children and youth
The Helper of Christian parents

Enable us to affirm our determination to raise our children in a Christian environment and to protect our children from influences that may distort thinking or harm physically or spiritually.

Assist us to prayerfully encourage our offspring by word and example to make the commitment of their life to Christ a priority.

Keep us faithful in prayer as we lift up our children to you through every stage of their life.

Grant us the grace and love to be true to this covenant. AMEN.

(signature)

(date)

A COVENANTAL PRAYER ⁴

Father in heaven, I submit myself to your will and purposes for my future. I want your plans to be fulfilled in my life, whether they are the plans I think I want or not.

Lord, forgive me for the times I have blamed You for my loneliness. I know that you have been protecting me and others from the hurt and heartbreak a wrong relationship brings.

Lord, you desire for me to remain wholly devoted to and single-minded towards you. Pour your grace and mercy into me and mark me as yours alone. Teach me how to come into a covenant of intimacy with You like I have never been before.

Teach me to hear your voice and respond to every word of your love. Teach me how to love You, to bless You, to minister to You. Teach me how to come apart from the world and go with You into that secret meeting place that is just ours. Teach me how to receive whatever You want to give to me. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

(signature)

(date)

⁴ An adaptation of "Christian Singles Prayer" No pages. Cited February 27, 2007. Online: <http://www.adammeeteve.com/pages/gotoprayer.html>.

Resources

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*For more information
Please contact:*



447 Webb Place
Winnipeg, MB CANADA R3B 2P2
Phone: 204-957-2412 ✦ Fax: 204-957-2418
ethics_centre@can.salvationarmy.org
www.salvationarmyethics.org