

# **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

# **JAC Online**

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## **In This Issue**

### **JOURNAL OF AGGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY**

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**Editorial Introduction - 'Find Your Fight' page 3**  
Captain Heather Dolby, guest editor

**While Women Weep page 7**  
Lieutenant James Harvin

**Finding My Fight page 8**  
Captain Curtis Kratz

**My Fight page 10**  
Lieutenant Joshua Keaton

**Pressing On and Staying Strong in Jesus page 11**  
Captain Ashish Pawar

**Run With Endurance The Race Marked Out For Us page 14**  
Shelley Henderson

**Why We Fight page 16**  
Captain Brandon Mason

**A Miracle In Belmont page 17**  
Major Pete Costas

**Helping People Find Where They Belong page 19**  
Jennifer Hess

**Authentic Christian Community page 21**  
Lieutenant Leo Killion

## **Editorial Introduction – ‘Find Your Fight’**

by Captain Heather Dolby, Guest Editor

In the fight, say, does your heart grow weary?

Do you find your path is rough and thorny,

And above the sky is dark and stormy?

Never mind, go on!

(1987 Salvation Army Songbook #805 by Richard Slater)

### Finding my fight: what I've learned about pressing in and staying strong.

When presented with the auspicious opportunity to be a guest editor for the Journal of Aggressive Christianity, the Lord quickened to my mind a theme to which I've given much thought over the past few years. The Fight.

Mainly because I long to read more about this topic from those who are the practitioners... those who are the Fighters, those who are in the arena day after day getting dusty and dirty and pouring out their lives as worship unto the Lord, tearing hell's throne to pieces and winning the world for Jesus.

So, naturally, this has been a fantastic opportunity for me to invite some comrades whom I esteem in the Lord, to write about their experiences with Jesus along the warfare journey, allowing me to catch a glimpse of their Fight and then to glean from what they've learned about pressing in and staying strong. Within this edition, you'll only find pieces from people that I know personally, have fought alongside in the Salvation war and trust to have my back in prayer. In my estimation, they're the real deal.

My invitation to participate in JAC looked something like this: *“The big idea is that within you and the other collaborators that I've reached out to, there is a mission, intentionality and purpose to how you are spending your life. The fight God has called you into - and that there are truths we have learned along the way about who we are, who He is, developing staying power, recognizing pitfalls, learning to persevere and anything else that Holy Spirit brings to mind... I'd love to read what you have to say. It doesn't need to be theological or fancy and impressive - just authentic. And I love your authenticity.”*

Something curious took place though, as I sent messages out to dozens of my comrades in the field. Many answered with an unexpected sort of response:

*I wish I could, but I'm deep in the struggle myself and don't know how to get up out of it. I'm overwhelmed by what life looks like right now and actually could use some support. I started to write something, but I can't finish it – God seems too far away. I'm pressed and I feel like I'm being crushed. I'm sorry to disappoint you. I can't write anything.*

Now, I'm no expert at spiritual warfare, but neither did I just fall off the turnip truck...these are mature, seasoned, trained-up ministers of the Gospel I reached out to,

who by all appearances seemed to be pressing in and living victoriously. How is it that such a significant portion of my invitees responded in this way?

I think back to the lines of SASB (1987) #806.  
In the fight, say, does your heart grow weary?  
Do you find your path is rough and thorny,  
And above the sky is dark and stormy?  
Never mind, go on!

I believe the author is encouraging us to not allow our circumstances, emotions or thoughts distract us from the goal of pressing in and staying strong in the Fight, until we see victory – either on earth or in glory with Christ. That's a great encouragement, because anyone who is following Jesus along the narrow way knows that it ain't easy! In fact – it's a struggle, not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age. It's a Fight.

I know that song was written in a different time (1886) but its wording has always rubbed my modern mind the wrong way, so that "never mind, go on" somehow morphs into 'Suck it up, buttercup" which is a hard pill to swallow, seeing as so many believers seem to be suffering silently. What I often hear from the field about the Fight as it manifests in everyday life, is that many find themselves battle-weary. We are weak and heavy-laden. For a multitude of reasons.

And yet, as the submissions began to arrive in my inbox, I saw evidence of the myriad of strategies the people of God can put in place to push back from battle-weary into being battle-ready.

Many of us have leaned in to an authentic spiritual community with whom we can share life and burdens and prayer rather than bearing it all alone.

Some have reached out to those who have education and training and medical strategies to deal with the grayness and darkness that creeps in, threatening to consume us.

Others choose to intentionally reflect on days gone by and become the storytellers of God – considering the parts that our sacrificial service has played in the whole world redeeming and then pausing to savor and celebrate those moments, allowing God to nurture our spirit through this discipline of reflection and celebration rather than rushing madly on to the next thing... and then the next... and then the next...

Many have chosen to nurture their creative health alongside of the spiritual, physical and emotional health, finding innovative and even psalmic ways to express Gospel truths, share testimony and even wrestle with God as Jacob did... with holy discontent.

You see, what I want to read about is what we are learning as soldiers on the frontlines about pressing in and staying strong while enduring the spiritual warfare that comes with following Jesus Christ. I mean, I know what *I'm* learning and applying spiritually in my own life, but I want to know what *you're* learning and applying too because I want to be equipped to stay strong in the Fight. There are truths we have learned along the way about who we are, and about who He is. We've learned through the struggle how to develop staying power, how to recognize pitfalls and we've persevered when the going got tough. Like really tough. Like, 'out of the frying pan and into the fire' kind of tough.

Perhaps we've learned more from the times we didn't have the staying power we wanted, from the times we totally missed (or ignored) the pitfalls and just didn't have it in us to persevere one more day.

We are learning that Jesus mercifully reaches out and draws us back to Himself, restores us, gives us a firm place to stand and even a holy do-over. We find our Fight once again.

So, what is Jesus saying these days?  
What is Holy Spirit's anointing teaching us?  
How can we be battle-ready?

Surely, we must stay close to Jesus but also, we must be willing to learn from one another, even through articles like these.

Worship leader Jason Upton says: *"In the company of Jesus, there are no experts. There's only beginners, and necessary followers. Because in the company of Jesus, nobody knows where they're going."*

I laugh out loud every time I hear that quote! None of us are experts, no matter what it looks like from the outside in or social media. Following Jesus means living a surrendered life- so I give up the right to go my own way, to do my own thing, and even to know where I'm headed, all for the delight of staying close to Him and knowing His sweet friendship. I believe you do too!

Now, while I don't know *exactly* what He's up to, and I don't know *exactly* where He's taking us, I DO know where He loves to be... at the frontlines of the Fight. In the middle of the stormy sea. Chowing down with the most scandalous sorts in town. Lifting the needy from the ash heap. Reaching out in love to the unlovely. Breathing life into the dead and dying and restoring them to life in fullness. Just as He restored and is continuing to restore us. And He calls to us to join Him. Join Him in the Fight. The glorious Fight of love.

When we press in to Jesus, we find that those old Songbook Fight songs start to make sense.

The same words that the enemy weighs me down with when I'm stuck in my own thoughts, consumed by my feelings and overwhelmed by my circumstances Holy Spirit can use to stir me up in my spirit as I'm leaning in to my Lord and pressing in to the Fight:

*To the front! the cry is ringing; To the front! your place is there;  
In the conflict men are wanted, Men of hope and faith and prayer.  
Selfish ends shall claim no right From the battle's post to take us;  
Fear shall vanish in the fight, For triumphant God will make us.*

*No retreating, Hell defeating,  
Shoulder to shoulder we stand;*

So whether you could have written something for me had you received an invitation or you feel as though – like others - you would've had to decline, there's so much in this issue for us to read and reflect on.

You're not alone in the Fight.

Shoulder to shoulder we stand.

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness.

He knew what He was getting into when He called you, and He called you anyway.

## **While Women Weep**

By Lieutenant James Harvin,

While women weep as they do now, I'll fight.

While little children go hungry as they do now, I'll fight.

While men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight.

While there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, I'll fight

While there are believers who remain solely in the church pews, I'll fight!

While so called Christians lack love, I'll fight.

While followers of Jesus remain in the stands of life and don't enter the trenches, I'll fight. While men and women paint false images on social media platforms instead of living in truth, I'll fight.

While suicidal thoughts plague our kids, parents, and even pastors, I'll fight.

While bombs are being placed in churches around the world, I'll fight!

While having melanin continues to be a barrier in our nation and around the world, I'll fight. While human trafficking is still in existence, I'll fight!

While Meth, Percocets, and Xanax invade our school systems, households, and relationships I'll fight.

While mass shootings are becoming as common as a cold, I'll fight.

While people place more faith in a flag than they do Jesus, I'll fight.

While the church continues to be a country club for the self-righteous and pious, I'll fight!

While we remain dead bodies underneath our polyester or tropical wool uniforms, I'll fight! While there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight.

I'll fight! I'll fight to the very end.

## **Finding My Fight** By Captain Curtis Kratz,

Finding my fight! What I have learned about pressing in and staying strong.

As I read through 1 Corinthians 15:58 – it seems easy enough. Be immovable.

But how do we withstand the tidal waves of doubt, despair, judgement and hate when it seems that everything around you works from its very core to move you off of this place?

In the year 1990-something (forgive my Goldberg reference) I had finally decided to follow Jesus. In MORE than just a, “I want to hang out with my friends at church” kind of way, but rather a “I want this Jesus to be real to me” kind of way. The struggle for me, was that I did not know how to do this with a group of people who already THOUGHT I was a believer.

I was already carrying my Bible to school. Does that sound impressive – that I was carrying my Bible to school? Well, honestly, I was pretending to be what I was not. The time had come when I could not play anymore, the decision had to be made, my pride or God.

This is where I Found My Fight the very first time. I was drowning under the tidal wave of popularity, the tidal wave of what people thought of me ( I still am occasionally bowled over by this one) the tidal wave of popular culture, and the tidal wave of the man-made happenings inside the church. They were doing their best to wash me away.

It was in that moment I decided that God would be my God and I would let His Son do the work in me. This is where the story really begins. In my home church we had a Sunday School teacher that I admired deeply. He decided he did not like the legalism of the church so he began to church hop. Was there temptation to follow? Perhaps. Thankfully for me, I came to understand my place was not with him but where God had called me to stand firm. Immoveable. Was the legalism of not being able to dance at a festival function a silly rule? Yes, but let’s be honest, don’t all the churches run by man have something in this breadbasket? This was really the first time I felt like Curtis stood firm and declared “I will follow Jesus.”

I learned that the secret of not being swept up is to constantly root yourself in Christ. I already mentioned that I had succumbed to the tidal wave of image, pretense and what people thought of me on more than one occasion. Jesus taught me that the secret to standing firm is digging your roots deeply into the soil of faith, where those righteous seeds are planted. I thank God that He planted me in the good soil.

But faith is more than standing still and taking the hurricanes that come, it is also a battle of going forth. In each of our personal stories, whether we recognize it or not, we



all have stormy seas. It could be the waves of self-doubt, or waves of pride. It could be the tidal wave of lack of faith or the wave of weariness.

When it rains outside sometimes I decide I do not need an umbrella especially if it seems to be just a light sprinkle. However, if I am not careful that little sprinkle can become a downpour and my clothes would be all wet, it's hard to see and before long I'm miserable and trying my best to make my way back home. In the same way, every battle must be fought with the appropriate armor, and there is a strategy to pressing in and staying strong in these spiritual battles.

When I consider my faith journey and look back through the eyes of the past, surrendering to Jesus and standing firm for Him is the best choice I have ever made.

As a young man I decided my path was leading me to college and I chose a school that was not only far from home but also held a set of denominational beliefs that was different than I was used to.

I found myself surrounded by people I did not know, who did things very differently from what I was used to. The tidal waves were strong, urging me to give in and many people in my same circumstance gave up and went back home. Thank God – He held me fast. He rooted me down deep in that soil of faith and planted me in the midst of some of the greatest people I have ever known. This choice to stand firm, find my fight and press in molded me into a vessel of God that has the ability to navigate rough waters, even when the world is upside down.

And yet, the sea is still stormy! Even after all these years the tidal waves still come to try and drown me in uncertainty and doubt. So how do we stand firm in the fight? For me it has always been a simple choice. It's a choice – I will stand firm where God has planted me!

I will rely on the truths He has taught me!

I will be immovable in His Kingdom!

I will trust Him in the midst of the stormy sea when the world seems upside down!

There have been some days where the waves have tossed and rolled me and left me bloody and on the ground asking myself, how will I get back up from this? The beauty is, that there has always been someone God has provided who stretches out their hand to me, lifting me up and drawing me in and then encouraging me to stand firm once again. To find my fight. To get back in the ring, to not give in to the tidal waves that come but to press in and stay strong. Because when we live life this way, we win. We Win. Waves are going to come, but I follow the One who calms every stormy sea and so the victory is ours! Holding on to that truth, there is no doubt that I'll fight. I'll fight for every last dark soul without the light of God until my breath is gone and God calls me home. But I don't fight alone – and neither do you. My brother and sisters, let us find our fight together, press in and stay strong it will be amazing what God will do!

## **My Fight**

By Lieutenant Joshua J. Keaton

My Fight!

My Fight is when I heard “You will never be a Salvation Army Officer.”

My Fight is battling depression.

My Fight is when I am working hard to simply maintain.

My Fight is when you're sitting in the ER and they can't hear your child's heartbeat.

My Fight is when your wife looks to you for comfort.

My Fight is when you feel hopeless yet God says “son I've got you.”

My Fight is when I see a young person being bullied.

My Fight is when through the chaos I continue to press forward.

My Fight is knowing that I'm not in this alone.

My Fight is for the least and the lost.

My Fight is not against flesh and blood.

My Fight is FAITH, HOPE, and LOVE.

My Fight means that have to persevere even when I am weak and tired.

This is my FIGHT.

## **Pressing On and Staying Strong in Jesus**

By Captain Ashish Pawar

When I first made the decision to become healthy, I decided make the gym a regular part of my routine. At the beginning I was a slightly nervous, as I was not aware of how to correctly use some of the machines and or how to properly and safely lift the weights. I was also surrounded by all these fit and buff people who were happily showing off their muscles, all these things certainly added to the anxiety I felt.

It didn't stop me going to the gym though, as I would show up anyway and just pretend I knew how to do all the exercises appropriately. I didn't think that anybody would notice, yet one day, someone did notice. One of the trainers was watching me and made sure to come over to me as I was signing out. In a very gentle manner, he said, "I see you working out hard each time you come to the gym, but would you mind if I gave you some suggestions that could help you get more out of your workout"? So I put my pride aside and told him I would appreciate his help.

One of the tips he gave me was for the overhead press. He told me that the position of your hands on the bar on the machine is incredibly important. He went on to say that one of the first things you have to do is to keep you forearms vertical. This will help you have much better control of the bar and you won't struggle so much when pressing it out in front of your chest or above your head. He said where you place your hands is what will give you a position of strength.

Don't worry this article is not about bodybuilding or going to the gym but instead about some life lessons I have learned when it comes to pressing in and staying strong.

The first lesson I learned is that I don't need to be fake, and I don't need pretend that I know it all. I discovered that it is totally to put my pride aside and seek help. I have learned through my own personal life experiences that when I put my pride down and I fess up to not having all the answers, that is when God is able to step in. Friends, it is not only okay to admit you don't know everything but it is actually the superior option. Being able to admit that you don't know how to deal with a situation or that you need help is a great start and will help you in your walk with Jesus. Pressing on and staying strong in Jesus is not easy, but learning to be real and vulnerable is an essential first step.

A second lesson I learned is that having a strong position matters when you are pressing in. One thing we all have in common is that each one of us will experience tough times at some stage in our lives and sometimes those tough times will feel like they are strong enough to take us out or at least make us bow low. For some of us these tough times are caused by other people and the way they hurt us or for some it might just be life circumstances cause us pain. For some of us we may struggle with anxiety, depression, fear. Some of us may have addictions and habits we cannot overcome and some of us may just be caught up in sin that has caused us great pain.

The question I have been asking myself is, what is a strong position we can take when life is not working out the way we want. How can stand strong or brace ourselves when life throws us curveballs, sadness and pain? I don't want to simplify or be insensitive to some of the things people go through, as some of us are in some real and deep pain and some of us need to ask for help from others or seek counselling and I encourage you to do that. Yet there are some of us who need to take on a position of strength so that we can press in and on and stay strong even when life throws us these curveballs. It might sound like a typical Sunday school answer, but the answer is Jesus. He is our strong position and strong hold. In him we have strength and he will help us to lift the heavy things in life. Please know today Jesus has not forgotten about you, He knows you by name and the things you are going through so don't give up, get in your position of strength, press on and stay strong.

A lot of times I hear people talk or preach about Jesus being our strength and power, which is so good, but I hear little about what it takes to press in. I don't hear what we are to do with our pain suffering, darkness and loneliness. It can be so hard to press through these very difficult times. Often we may also feel like we are the only ones trying to press in and trying to stay strong. In these days of social media, we see everything through a filter, we hardly get to see and know the struggle and pain. We tend to use social media to hide our true self and only use it to share our victories in life or to show a carefree life. We hide what is actually going on for us. I think we all are guilty of hiding our true selves and instead pretending everything is great. This is not healthy or a real representation of life. If we want to press into Jesus during these hard times, the first thing we need to do, is be vulnerable and real with ourselves, our friends and family and with Jesus.

Jesus is not only with you when you need to be strong but He is with you through the process of pressing on. You and I cannot press on our own, it is only through the power and presence of Jesus. This realization in itself is so freeing.

I remember in my first year of Officership I spent a lot of time trying to fit in, always trying to look like I knew what I was doing, keeping busy, and continually trying to have an answer to the problems. Things began to pile up on me, emails, budgets, staff issues and I felt like I was under intense pressure. Some Sundays I was only able to preach out of emptiness.

There was one particular week that I recall that was just so difficult. It took a huge toll on me and that Saturday as I was preparing for the sermon, I was just not able to write. I was completely blocked and empty and all I could do was pray and cry out to the Lord. I was in such turmoil and I didn't feel right in my spirit. Instead of preaching that Sunday I called my brother in Christ, Bryan Farrington, who is such a man of God and I asked if he could preach. It was a last minute request, but one that he accepted and that Sunday Bryan preached an incredibly powerful word from God, one which was directly meant for me. Sometimes pressing in means pressing into other godly people and allowing them to hold you up.

Scripture says in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly,” and I can testify that there are times even now for me that I know the enemy is attempting to kill and destroy elements of my life. Times when he is trying to destroy my marriage, bring discord into my family and times he is trying to rob me of joy and peace but I am reminded over and over again whom I belong to (Jesus!) and my strong position in Him and I choose to press in and stay strong.

I took my daughters with me to the car wash recently. The car became covered in soapy water and then these giant brushes started to wipe down on the car and there was a lot of noise. My youngest daughter started screaming, “I want to get out!” “Please stop this!” My oldest daughter wanted to soothe her little sister and exclaimed, “Don't worry. We are going to get out of here. See, Daddy is with us.”

Can I please encourage you, if you are in the middle of a storm, some kind of crisis, if you are in spiritual darkness, and life is not making any sense, please hang in there because your Father is with you in the middle of it all. Scripture shares with us these verses:

“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty  
“I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”  
“Surely He will save you from the fowler's snare and the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings, you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart” Ps. 91:1-4

Be encouraged today, friends.

## Run With Endurance The Race Marked Out For Us

By Mrs. Shelley Henderson

### Run with Endurance the Race Set Before Us

Fifty-three years ago, God looked at me growing in my mother's womb and, being the Great Provider, sprinkled a little extra faith and hope into my being. That extra bit of faith and hope is why I am here today.

Depression was not recognized when I was growing up, at least, not in my family, and certainly not in the high school where I attended. Maybe I just hid the grayness well as I struggled to find my place.

After graduation, I went to college for a few years and married a guy I knew from high school. Surely, I thought, I would find my place in the world and the grayness would go away. It didn't. Instead, pieces of myself were stolen one abusive day at a time.

The marriage lasted 22 years until the night of my grandfather's funeral, when my husband tried to kill me and then turned the gun on himself.

My life wasn't all bad. I had four wonderful children. My parents and brothers were great people. I found love again with a strong, beautiful man who would help me pull my fragmented family back together. I loved my church, I had good friends. I found a job at The Salvation Army where I learned and grew.

I worked hard to keep details of my life hidden; to push the gray away; to be useful; to find joy; to help others. My battle cry was Isaiah 6:8. *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"* **That was my fight.**

The tools I used for my fight were masks: great enthusiasm! a huge smile! fiery passion! Anything to keep me moving forward and to help me stay positive so I could overcome the doubt and fear that were trying to cripple me.

My life was a race from the scary monsters in my past. I ran hard. I ran long. Finally, in 2016 I ran smack into the monsters that were chasing me. I could no longer think, or read, or write. I couldn't remember anything. I was only 49! I was way too young for Alzheimer's. I was too old to develop Attention Deficit Disorder. I thought I was losing my mind. Finally, I mustered the courage to tell my doctor, who referred me to a psychiatrist for testing.

"You don't have ADD or Alzheimer's," the psychiatrist said to me. "You have major depression and PTSD."

For the first time in years, I cried. The reality of my life hit me. What happened to me was not okay. I had been deeply wounded over many years. I could banish the gray shadow that hung over me for so long.

### **My fight changed and so did the tools I used.**

Through intensive counseling and EMDR, a PTSD treatment that separates emotions from horrific memories, I began to bring the dark, hidden corners of my life into the light. Through medication and counseling, splashes of color replaced the gray. Self-sacrificing behaviors were swapped with self-care tools of love, acceptance, and health. Excruciating step by excruciating step, I walked the path to wholeness.

Isaiah 6:8 continues to be my battle cry. *Service! Others! Usefulness!* My fight is stronger, more vibrant, more focused. Instead of sprinting away from scary monsters, my race is a race of faith. *...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Hebrews 12:1*

I still go to counseling. I still take medication. They are perhaps a forever part of my life, and I am okay with that. I am grateful God gave me the life-giving tools I needed so I could continue my fight.

It is by the grace of God and His gift of hope and faith that I am here to share this with you. Through it all, the good and the bad, I see God's hand in my life. Saving me. Pulling me. Always giving me a lifeline when I need it the most. It is not for myself that I share my story, but to glorify Him and, by some chance, be useful anyone who needs to know they are not alone.

*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10*

## **Why We Fight**

By Captain Brandon Mason

When we started it was Heart to God, hand to man,  
But each day I question, was this part of the plan?

Look outside the window, the world's falling apart,  
Greed, apathy, depression, and it breaks my heart

We are at critical mass about to explode,  
Morals, decency, and Love begin to erode.

My pillow soaked with tears and I can't sleep at night,  
Your voice whispers to my soul - this is why we fight!

So I rise with His peace, and wave His banner high,  
Come hell or high water, I won't stop till I die.

Others... who might be down, remember Christ brings hope,  
For the last and the lost at the end of their rope.

You're not alone on your journey, in that dark place.  
Remember He loves, He cares, just look to His face....



## **“A Miracle in Belmont”**

By Major Pete Costas

*Psalm 100:5 New King James Version (NKJV)*

*“For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting,  
And His truth endures to all generations.”*

“The Salvation Army” casts various mental images for most people. One of those images is of a group of uniformed Salvationists standing on the street corner, playing brass instruments, beating a bass drum, singing hymns, and preaching the Gospel.

That vivid image was very real one particular Sunday evening as I led a small group of Soldiers and Bandsmen from the uptown Charlotte Temple Corps on Poplar Street, over here to the corner of Belmont Avenue and Harrill Street to conduct our weekly Open Air Service.

The Belmont neighborhood was pretty rough back in the 1980’s, but William Booth, had said “Go for souls, and go for the worst,” and that’s exactly what we were doing. The reputation of the Belmont neighborhood didn’t fail us that evening.

On the street corner opposite from where we were set up, there were three or four middle aged men who were drinking heavily and doing a pretty good job of heckling us and laughing at everything we did. The more we sang and played, the louder they got. But we kept the faith and played on.

Our Corps Sergeant Major, Charlie Collins, preached that evening about the Prodigal Son and the Love of the Father, and gave an invitation for all prodigals to “Come Home.” We were curious when one of our hecklers staggered across the street towards us, and fell on his knees at the bass drum we had turned on its side to use as a make-shift altar.

I knelt down beside this gentleman, asked his name, and began to pray with him. His snot, and slobber puddled on the drum head and were soon mingled with his tears of remorse and conviction. Albert Johnson had “Come back Home” to his heavenly Father!

Mr. Johnson stood up from that drum completely sober. His eyes were clear. His face was clean. There was not even the stench of alcohol on his breath or his clothes. He had come back home to God, but he wasn’t yet home where he belonged.

I asked Mr. Johnson where he lived and he said, “*Just around the corner; up on Pegram Street.*” I offered to drive him home, but he told me he couldn’t go back home, that his wife had kicked him out. I said, “*Let’s go talk with her.*”

We pulled up in front of his house and walked up the front steps. I noticed through the screen door that the front door was already open.

We stepped onto his front porch together, and as soon as the first floor board creaked under our feet, the screen door burst open and there stood an angry wife who looked like she was about to explode. Peeking out from behind her were the large brown eyes of a six year old daughter who looked scared to death.

In an instant, however, Mrs. Johnson's angry face softened. Her jaw dropped. Her eyes flooded with tears, and for a moment she was paralyzed with bewilderment and could only manage to say, *"My God, my God, my God."* This loving, praying wife, and this sweet little girl had just had their prayers answered.

She immediately recognized her miraculously changed husband; the man she had fallen in love with; the man she had married. She flew into her husband's arms. Mr. Johnson hugged his wife and managed somehow to also pick up his little girl and the three of them stood there weeping tears of joy. Eventually, they walked into their home, still hugging and loving each other...a family reunited by the amazing grace of God.

But that's not the end of the story.

Over the years, I would occasionally share that testimony with people; with friends I could trust; usually to validate the effectiveness of the old fashioned Open Air meeting and to witness to the miraculous healing power of God. I was cautious with whom I shared it, because I knew how people could roll their eyes when being presented with a miracle.

Twenty-five years later, I received a phone call one evening from a young Salvation Army couple, Sergeants Rob and Heather Dolby, who were operating a 614 Ministry in Charlotte's JT Williams neighborhood off of Statesville Avenue. Rob and Heather called me to tell me that earlier that afternoon a volunteer had showed up at their Community Center on Julia Avenue; an attractive, well-dressed business woman who appeared to be in her early thirties, and driving a very nice new car.

Rob and Heather asked this young lady what led her to The Salvation Army. Why would she want to risk coming into the worst neighborhood in Charlotte to help The Salvation Army in its ministry? She told them, *"When I was a little girl growing up in the Belmont neighborhood, it was The Salvation Army that brought my daddy back home to me."*

*Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.  
For the Lord is good;  
His mercy is everlasting,  
And His truth endures to all generations.  
Amen!*

## Helping People Find Where They Belong

By Jennifer Hess

I heard my call before I knew what it was. I grew up watching my mother's mother, my Nana, preach at different churches across the country. For revivals, church singings, inside, outside, Washington, Florida, California, or South Carolina. I would be so excited to watch her, inviting as many friends as possible because I knew she would touch someone. After she passed, I found that I was longing desperately to hear one of her sermons, and that's when I heard it for the first time, "Why not you?" I thought nothing of it and went on with my life, for at that time I didn't feel worthy of much. However, the Lord didn't agree with my logic and when I started to attend a church called Crossroads Fellowship in 2017, He gave me a drive that I had never felt before.

I had been in and out of churches my whole life and usually involved with the music, hiding in the background as a drummer as I did with this church, but things were different. I didn't want to hide anymore. The Sunday school class I was placed in, were considered the future leaders of the church and I found that I wanted to do just that. I wanted to lead them into our communities, delivering socks, praying for those who needed it, and for those who may have never heard about the love of God before. I wanted to be a part of a church that had a group of people that wanted to do that same thing. This was My Calling – My Fight.

It was all frightening and exhilarating at the same time. However, the church never felt like home. I was involved. I was attending regularly. But something was off, and I didn't know at the time what it was. I became disheartened. So, I then drowned myself in work allowing it to pull me away from church, church friends, and God altogether. I became homeless again, and that's when it began to hit me harder than it had the first time. The songs that my Nana had written, that her and my mother had sung at so many revivals would flood my mind.

The community I was homeless in was the same community where my Nana had last lived, and I would hear those words. Every time I passed a church. Every time I thought of anyone in my family. "*Why not you?*" Louder and louder every time. "*Why not you?*" "*Why not you?*"

I began to answer with excuse after excuse. "I'm a bum", "I'm an addict". "Who would even listen to me?" "Who am I to bring the Word?"

The Lord showed me quickly that I was wrong.

I went to a friend from high school that lived in the community and begged her for help. She brought me to The Salvation Army Stringer Emergency Lodge in Anderson, SC and dropped me off. I remember being so determined but scared to death that this wasn't going to work. I had prayed for a chance to start fresh, so that I could work on finding a place where I belonged – so I could find my fight again. I didn't expect to find it so quickly!

When I attended The Salvation Army church for the first time on December 24, 2017, I did not expect to see, hear, or feel what I did. I instantly felt at home, welcomed, and loved. I saw two people working diligently to do this for everyone that walked through those doors. Waiting to do everything I said that I wanted to be a part of. Serving the community, bring the Word to those who might not even be looking for it, showing the love of God in ways not shown by others, getting to know the people that most ignore. And it was at that time that I knew I was in the church where God wanted me to be.

I was content but God had more.

He showed me that my excuses weren't viable excuses anymore. My officers, who were giving the sermons and leading worship, had lived similar lives, and they weren't the only ones with stories like that. Yet these people weren't letting the words of the enemy hold them back any longer. They were living lives and saving souls all for the kingdom of Jesus.

The Lord opened doors for me when I thought they had all slammed shut in my face, so it was time to stop running and start living according to His will. I began to pray about the situation, and I heard my calling. God told me that being a Salvation Army officer is the plan He has for my life, and I accepted it with open arms. The things of my past were no longer a hindrance but achievements in overcoming obstacles, and I could use those to help others do the same.

My prayer for a long time was to find a place where I belong, now it is to help others find theirs.

## **Authentic Christian Community**

By Lieutenant Leo Marion Killion (PTG)

*This article was written in 2009 as an email where Lt. Killion reflected on his time spent at 614 Charlotte & The War College, and what community had taught him about fighting poverty, addiction, rejection and darkness with the love of God.*

I have lived in some of the most unwelcoming places in my life, but at the same time, with some of the most on-fire-for-God people I will ever meet.

Maybe you do, too - we live among folks, hang out with them, serve with them, worship together and even argue together, but at the end of the day God is using every moment of this authentic Christian community to build something good.

I've had experiences in my life that have been amazing. God has used people to touch my life and change me for the better. What can just one person do for a community? I'll tell you. They can do amazing things through the power of God.

I had a community around me growing up – most of us do... it's something you're born with, you always have it, and maybe it's a God-given group and they are good for you and good to you. Maybe your community is not like that at all.

When I went to The War College in Charlotte, North Carolina, my understanding of God-given community was blown out of the water. I came thinking that I was set in life, and didn't need to grow very much more to be like Christ. I was so wrong. I was SO wrong. I had a long way to go. It was coming to The War College that helped me to discover that it's not me that can do this work, but it is Christ through me - He needs to be seen in my life.

I also found out the truth – authentic Christian community hurts. It's hard to grow spiritually and through being together, Holy Spirit began to pull things out of me that no one (even me) had any idea were in there. So at the end of the day, I found myself surrendering to God over and over. Giving Him so much more than I ever thought I could. In turn I began to grow so much, emotionally and spiritually because God was being poured in even more as I surrendered and got rid of all that crap.

I find that this is only the start, for when God has done this for us, we can't help but go out and do the same for the people all around us.

Kids, women, men, the found, the lost, we pour into everyone.

So we can say authentic Christian community happens when God pours into us and we pour into one another.

We must not think once we leave that community that it's all over with - no, that would be foolish!

I am learning that we are ALWAYS a part of that community. Even if I go back to visit that place and I don't see people I once knew or if what we started or did is no longer there, I believe now and understand that the things we can see with our eyes isn't the whole story. What God has done through our community goes far deeper than what we can see.

What happens to those of us that go, when we have moved on? Well we were shown how to fight injustice, to build God's kingdom and to bring change to the body of Christ.

When you leave one place for another, it's easy at first to go out in that new place with your holy fire and do what you learned - bring justice, speak truth in love, show kindness. People are often thankful and maybe even some are thinking 'Wow, I wish I had what they had.' Then, all of a sudden, it hits you. The season has changed. The community you got used to everyday isn't around you. You are by yourself –no morning Pray the Bible, no Friday night Shabbat meals, no Prayer Room, and no one to debrief with at the end of the night that fought the same fight as you. It's a hard thing. It's also very common for those of us as we move around. How should we deal with it?

I'll tell you. The world doesn't need more cowboys but it DOES need community.

Cowboys go in and shake things up, look like the mysterious hero and then ride off into the sunset. Community is where you come in and share life and show love, teach the Bible, pray hard and fight alongside one another, building God's Kingdom. It's hard work. Maybe being a cowboy is easier and more fun and people like you better.

I think when we are really transformed by God's community something happens where we can't help it – we just start doing what we learned works - going out and pouring out into for Jesus. Because we know it worked in our lives. When we do that it's like we are always bringing that first community with us. So maybe you never really leave the The War College or 614 community - you just keep pouring out the godly things you learned from that first community and God grows you from there.

Here is something about community we should never ever forget, but we sometimes do. That authentic Christian community you came from? Well, you can always call on them, they'll always have your back, you can always have them pour into you, and you into them. No matter what they'll love me and no matter what I will love you, and press on with you telling you the truth in love, no matter what.

But what about that hole that we have left when we aren't with those people every day anymore?

Well, I'll tell you, don't worry about that. God will bring more people around you in community. He's faithful like that. And you'll find as time passes and you look back, that what you've done and poured out in all those places you've been will have made a difference in the lives of others, just like someone's life made a difference in yours.