I... will live by the truths of the word of God expressed in The Salvation Army's eleven articles of faith.

Problem after problem was the scene my wife and I faced during the birth of our second child. He was in the neonatal intensive care unit for more than a week. Therapy, blood tests, results, new treatment and, of course, prayer were our daily routine. Our prayer was, 'Lord, if you save his life we will set him apart for you and your ministry.' Because of this experience we thought of naming our son Nazirite, but as we Mizo have a tradition of altering people's names, this choice could have taken a rather comical turn. So we named him K. Lalchhanhima (delivered/saved by God).

In the Bible we find a few examples of Nazirites, like Samson (Judges 13:5), Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:13-15). Nazirites were people separated for God who made a choice to enter into a relationship with him, living a covenant life by keeping certain vows and laws (Numbers 6:1-21). For some, the commitment was limited to a certain period of time (Numbers 6:5-8). The consequences of prematurely breaking the vow or law can be seen in Samson's life (Judges 16:17ff).

Covenant life is a biblical concept. The word covenant is found almost 300 times in the Old Testament (Hebrew berit) and more than 30 times in the New Testament (Greek diatheke). There are numerous studies on its terminology, nature, rites, etc. For our purpose, it would not be wrong to say that a covenant is a sacred agreement between God and an individual or a group of people. It is a set of conditions and promises initiated by God, offering to enter into a binding relationship with him. If we obey God's conditions and keep the covenant we are his people (Jeremiah 31:33). If we choose not to keep the covenant we may suffer the consequences of our disobedience.

Covenants that we see in the Old Testament – like the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant and others – seem to be time-bound as we have a new covenant through the coming of Jesus (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 8:6-13). The covenants made in Old Testament times were
sometimes broken by God’s people; at the same time, there were renewals and ratifications (Exodus chapters 32-34). God made a covenant with the people of Israel because he loved them (Deuteronomy 7:7-8), and the new covenant was made possible for us because he was willing to forgive our wickedness (Hebrews 8:12). Thanks to this offer, we have the opportunity to become God’s people.

Regarding the covenant life of a Salvationist, it would not be fair to state, 'I will live by the truths of the words of God expressed in The Salvation Army's eleven articles of faith,' without knowing what this life is all about (later articles in this series will tell us more about this).

As a part of the worldwide evangelical Church, the Army draws its articles of faith from the Bible. When we declare and sign them we enter into a covenant community, as stated in its introduction:

*Having accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and desiring to fulfil my membership of his Church on earth as a soldier of The Salvation Army, I now by God’s grace enter into a sacred covenant.*

By being faithful to the conditions laid down in this covenant, we belong to God’s people. Each of us enters into a lifelong relationship with him, agreeing to become his covenant person. Unlike the Old Testament covenants or some Nazirite vows, it has no time limit. Living our life within the conditions set out in this covenant, creates a safe zone and ensures the continuity of remaining one of God’s people.

**FOR REFLECTION**

- When people leave The Salvation Army, can we say that they have broken God’s covenant?
- List possible hindrances that can lead you to disloyalty to The Salvation Army. Do you think that your words and deeds can be hindrances for others?
- What do you need to do in order to remain as one of God’s people?

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