MY RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS
LIVING BY FAITH TODAY
SERIES: A SOLDIER’S COVENANT (6)

I will maintain Christian ideals in all my relationships with others; my family and neighbours, my colleagues and fellow Salvationists, those to whom and for whom I am responsible and the wider community.

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue as he often did (Luke 13:10-17). He was in the middle of the meeting place, surrounded by men and with all eyes focused on him, when a woman came along. This was not just any woman – this was a ‘bent-over’ woman who had been doubled over from the waist for the past 18 years. She was unable to stand up straight and her eyes could only see the ground – permanently downcast.

As a woman, she was a ‘nobody’ – she had no power, no status, no importance and no business being there! As a cripple, she was a social outcast – considered sinful, unclean and a danger to others’ well-being.

Jesus saw her.

Not only did he see her, he stopped what he was doing, called her forward and said: ‘Woman [a title of great respect], you are set free’ (v 12). Jesus spoke the words of healing and then touched her. For the past 18 years people would have avoided her like the plague – both with their eyes and their embraces. She was a shunned woman – a woman on the margins – and yet Jesus saw her, called her into the centre of the religious community and gathered her into a healing God-embrace. Furthermore, Jesus publicly declared her a ‘daughter of Abraham’, at a time and in a place when only sons were worth mentioning. Not only was this woman physically raised up but also, by giving her this title, Jesus raised her social standing and granted her great dignity.

Can you imagine the scene?

- A woman bent over is now standing upright.
- A woman bound is now set free.
- A woman downcast is now full of joy.
- A woman bereft of human love and physical contact is now embraced.
- A woman from the margins is now in the centre of the male-only synagogue, dancing out her praise and worship to the God who ‘sees’ her.

Sacred, religious rules of keeping the Sabbath have been broken. The status quo has been upset.
If we are seeking to understand and implement ‘Christian ideals in all our relationships with others’, Jesus has something to teach us through this encounter with the bent-over woman.

Jesus did not come to set up a religion called ‘Christianity’. He did not come to set up a system of rules. He came to be in relationship with us and show us how to live in relationship with others.

Love God first, and love others like you love yourself, he said. It’s as simple and as difficult as that. We all know that ‘love’ is the primary Christian ideal for all our relationships, but what does that mean in real life?

- Love means we notice others – we truly ‘see’ them.
- Love stops what it is doing to encounter another person created in God’s image.
- Loving others means their life is better when you have been part of it, because love shows itself not only in words, but also in actions.

Jesus lifted burdens that weighed people down; he declared freedom for the captive and gave sight to the blind; he lovingly raised up the poor, the lowly and the vulnerable; he brought to the centre those who were cast to the side; and he granted honour and respect to those who were rejected, scorned and deemed as different, or ‘less than’.

If we are followers of Jesus, we will do the same. If love is central to our faith then so are relationships, as love can only express itself within this context.

The Bible tells us that, in the beginning, it was good. Relationships were whole and holy – God and mankind; male and female; men and animals; humans and the created earth. This was the world that God intended – a world of right relationships. A world that was not fractured, divided in two, with one side given higher value than the other – but a world of equality, mutuality and respect.

We know that sin has broken us and our ways of relating to each other. We know that is why Jesus came – to set the world right again. To show us that all people have dignity and worth because every person is created in God’s image. To remind us that all people are equal in God’s sight. To call us to give each person the respect they deserve. To reject all types of greed by returning to others what is rightfully theirs. To help us understand that we are to humbly serve and not ‘lord it’ over others’. God’s glory could be at stake here.

Irenaeus’s axiom, *Gloria Dei vivens homo*, says that the glory of God is human beings – the whole human race and every individual person – flourishing and fully alive. If this is true, wherever human beings are violated, diminished, oppressed, discriminated against or have their life drained away, God’s glory is dimmed.

Surely this has something to say in terms of how we relate to people around us, whether they are family, friends, colleagues, fellow Christians or people from the wider community.
In *Gaudium et Spes*, a document that gives an overview of the Catholic Church’s teachings about humanity’s relationship to society, we read:

‘With respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent.’

To truly love others, we must begin with the understanding that we are truly loved. God’s love towards us and all other people is perfect, unconditional and boundless. Join with me as I pray this prayer based on Ephesians 3:17–21:

*I pray, Jesus, that you will make your home in my heart as I trust in you. May my roots go down deep into your perfect love, God, so that I am kept strong. Holy Spirit, come and grant me the power to understand how wide, how long, how high and how deep God’s love really is – for me and for everyone I meet this day. Lord, you know this is beyond me – but I praise and thank you because you are able to do more than I can ask, or imagine or think. May all my relationships bring you glory. Amen.*

May our love for God and each other overflow as we keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. May the Christian ideals we live in our relationships bring God’s glorious light into our families, communities, countries and our world.

**FOR REFLECTION**

- Think about the relationships in your life. How would you describe them? Do your relationships glorify God?
- Read 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Consider the words of verses 4–7.
  1. What words are true for you in your relationships?  
     (For example: Am I patient and kind with other people?)
  2. What areas do you struggle with?  
     (For example: Do other people easily irritate me?)

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ENDNOTES


2 Tim Stafford, ‘When we all ache for justice in the world’ (http://aholyexperience.com)

3 Elizabeth A. Johnson states that hierarchical dualism – the dominant form of Western rationality – is the taproot from which many deficient patterns of thought and action originate. It divides reality into two separate and opposing spheres and assigns a higher value to one of them. (*Women, Earth and Creator Spirit*, p 10, Paulist Press, New York, 1993)


5 *Gaudium et Spes* (Ecclesiastical Latin, the joys and the hopes), chapter II ‘The Community of Mankind’, #29. This *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* was one of the four constitutions resulting from the Second Vatican Council. The document is an overview of the Catholic Church’s teachings about humanity’s relationship to society, especially in reference to economics, poverty, social justice, culture, science, technology and ecumenism. (http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm)