



Prayer  
Network

# *Prayer* **MATTERS**

**JANUARY 2026**

# Happy New Year

A very happy New Year to you, and welcome to our first Prayer Matters of 2026.

We're starting this year with something a bit different. Two years ago we began praying around the UK and Ireland (UKI) Prayer Rhythm, which gives a theme to pray for each day. Since then we've prayed for each theme over 100 times! That's pretty good going, so thanks for being part of it.

This month we're taking a break from the usual rhythm, and we're spending a month focusing on the 'Blueprint for Better Choices' presented by our Territorial Leaders Commissioners Jenine and Paul Main. It's designed to be a tool to evaluate how decisions are made in the UKI Salvation Army, and a call for all of us to embrace a culture of spiritual discernment, putting prayerful attentiveness to God's voice right at the heart of all our planning and decision making.

It's a bold and exciting idea, and it isn't likely to happen without a lot of prayer. So we're getting the ball rolling, so to speak, with a month of prayer around themes of listening and discernment.

We have chosen nine different characteristics which help us discern. We will spend a few days on each characteristic, using a mixture of prayers, reflections and action suggestions. A few months ago the Territorial Prayer Furnace did some listening around this subject of discernment, asking God to show us what obstacles we might face. We identified several different things which we felt God was warning us to be wary of, and have incorporated these in days entitled 'Hard Ground' – a phrase which will appear a lot this month in the [Covenant Sunday materials](#). Hard Ground refers to those parts of ourselves where unhelpful attitudes tend to lodge, so these days will feature prayers of repentance.

Interspersed through the nine discernment themes you will find prayers based around the five focus areas which appear in the Blueprint document. If you'd like to read the whole Blueprint for Better Choices, you will find it [here](#).

We will be back to our UKI prayer rhythm in February. Thank you for going on this unusual prayer journey with us in the meantime. We hope you find it enriching and life-giving.

May 2026 be a year when you experience the presence of God like never before.

Blessings,  
Lyndall Bywater and the UKI Boiler Room Team

# Part 1 - Trust

‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.’

(Proverbs 3:5-6, *New Living Translation*)



## Thursday 1 January: The Resolution to Trust

Happy New Year, and welcome to a rather different Prayer Matters! For the month of January we’re pausing our usual UKI Prayer Rhythm to explore the subject of discernment – recognising where God is at work and knowing what God wants to say to us. Our Territorial Leaders have recently shared their vision of a Salvation Army which is intentional about fostering a culture of discernment in all our decisions, ensuring that every step we take is guided by thoughtful reflection and collective wisdom. What might that look like, and where do we start?

These words from Minnie Louise Haskins’ poem ‘The Gate of the Year’ are an excellent place to start.

‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’

And he replied:

‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.’

(Excerpt from ‘The Gate of the Year’ by Minnie Louise Haskin)

Lord, we begin this new year by putting our trust in you. Lead us forward, we pray.



## Friday 2 January: Hard Ground – Fear

When we start digging deeper in our life of faith, it isn’t long before we come across blockages or hard places in ourselves. As we dig the ground of learning to trust in God, one of the blockages we might encounter is fear – fear that our trust will end in disappointment.

The Bible tells us that ‘perfect love drives out fear’ (1 John 4:18, NIV), so today let’s keep reminding ourselves that we can completely trust the one who loves us completely.

Why not memorise a Bible verse which reminds you of the love of God and repeat it to yourself as often as you can today.



## Saturday 3 January: Focus Area - Being a prophetic voice

Creator God, who spoke light and life into being, we thank you that you speak to us; we thank you that you speak through us. We pray for The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland, that you will show us how to be a prophetic voice, echoing in public and private your just and righteous intentions for the whole of creation. May we choose to do the things which reflect your holiness. May we choose to speak up for justice and reconciliation. And may we always remember to care for this creation which you spoke into being by your Word.

## Part 2 - Openness

‘Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.’  
(Romans 12:2, NIV)



## Sunday 4 January: The Resolution to be Open

Author Ruth Haley Barton has written much about how Christian communities can listen to God together, and one of the first things she mentions is a commitment to being transformed:

‘A community that is dedicated to spiritual transformation provides the environment in which discernment takes place.’

(Excerpt from ‘Finding God’s Will in Community: Exploring a process for corporate leadership discernment’ [www.transformingcenter.org](http://www.transformingcenter.org), 2005)

Lord God, help us to open our hearts and minds to you. As we pray for transformation in the lives of others, help us surrender to your transformation in ourselves and in our own corps. Show us what we need to let go of, in order that we might welcome the new and different things which you are doing.



## Monday 5 January: Hard Ground – Busyness

Sometimes it's tempting to make decisions based more on our own busyness than on God's will. Opening our heart and mind can't usually be done on the fly; it needs time and space in prayer, to allow the Holy Spirit to show us what's really going on in us.

Gentle Spirit, forgive us when we slip into survival mode, doing whatever it takes to get by, or cramming as much into our days as we can. Help us find ways to step aside from the activity and to be still in your transforming presence.



## Tuesday 6 January: Practising Openness

Is there something you're finding it hard to be open to God about – perhaps something in your personal life, your family or your corps? Make some time today to pray slowly through this reflection.

- 'Above all, trust in the slow work of God. We are, quite naturally, impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability ... and that it may take a very long time ... Only God could say what this new spirit gradually forming within you will be. Give Our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.'  
(Excerpt from *Hearts on Fire* by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin)

An action:

- What are the things in life that you hold most tightly? Perhaps family members, achievements, possessions, roles, status, your preferences, being in control, other people's opinion? These are just some suggestions to get you thinking. None of these are intrinsically good or bad; they're just things that matter greatly to us.
- Once you've identified a few things, find an object to represent each thing on your list. Then get a label or post-it note and write on it: 'I put this in the hands of God.' Stick the label to the object and notice how it feels to hand that person/situation over to God. Do the same for all the objects you've chosen.

An action:

- Praying with and for each other is one of the best ways to grow love, to hear each other's voices and notice the presence and activity of God in our lives. Make time for intentional and focused prayer – not just ticking boxes, but really hearing each other, interceding for each other and sharing the answers when they come.

# Part 3 - Community

‘Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.’

(2 Corinthians 13:11, *NLT*)



## Wednesday 7 January: The Resolution to Grow Community

If we are to develop a culture of discernment, whether in our corps or the wider Salvation Army, it will be a work of community. Leaders may have important things to say, but we only hear the fullness of God’s message to us when we hear a range of different voices. The prophetic voice of The Salvation Army will be purer and stronger if we are hearing God together.

Gracious God, teach us togetherness, that we might hear your whole word to us, and that we might speak that word with boldness. May our planning and decision making truly come from the collective wisdom of a Christ-centred community.



## Thursday 8 January: Hard Ground – Self-sufficiency

‘It’s quicker and easier to do it myself than to ask anyone else.’ Have you ever heard yourself saying those words? There’s an African proverb which says, ‘To go fast, go alone; to go far, go together.’ We discern and decide better when we don’t go it alone, especially when our decisions affect others.

Lord, forgive us when we take short cuts in the important work of discerning your will. Help us when we lack the courage to ask others what they think you are saying. Give us a holy determination to share the work of listening.



## Friday 9 January: Practising Community

Use these questions to reflect on the spiritual health of the team or church community you belong to:

- How does your team or community make time to recognise and respond to the presence and activity of God?
- How does your team or community make sure that it isn’t just the loudest voices which dominate, but that every voice is heard?
- How does your team or community make room to strengthen relationships, build trust and grow a culture of love?



An action:

- Praying with and for each other is one of the best ways to grow love, to hear each other's voices and notice the presence and activity of God in our lives. Make time for intentional and focused prayer – not just ticking boxes, but really hearing each other, interceding for each other and sharing the answers when they come.



## Saturday 10 January: Focus Area– Courageous Discipleship

Lord Jesus Christ, you have been calling disciples throughout the centuries. Now we hear your call to us, The Salvation Army in the UK and Ireland Territory, to be your bold and faithful followers whose lives embody and enact the grace of God in every aspect of life. Give us courage to attend to the deepening of our inner life, to make room for the work of your Spirit, and give us courage to invite others to encounter you, as we obey your call to make disciples of all people.

## Part 4 - Intention

'I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward – to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.'

(Philippians 3:12-14, *MSG*)



## Sunday 11 January: The Resolution to be Intentional

Today is Covenant Sunday in the UK and Ireland Territory. The theme is 'Break Ground, Bring Hope', and it's an invitation to be courageous about our discipleship.

'Courageous discipleship isn't loud or showy. It's about being energised by faith, a quiet, steady force that moves us to act with conviction, even when the path ahead is uncertain. It's the slow work of spiritual formation, rooted in grace, shaped by Scripture, and deepened through prayer and community. It's about seeking what God wants, not just what feels comfortable or familiar. And it's about having an outward focus, stepping beyond ourselves to notice, to serve, to respond.'

(Adapted from the 'Break Ground, Bring Hope' Covenant Sunday 2026 Resources: [www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/key-dates/covenantsunday2026](http://www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/key-dates/covenantsunday2026))

Lord of love, pour out your Spirit on us afresh today, that we might be intentional in our life of discipleship, choosing to break up the hard ground of our hearts and to bring hope.



## **Monday 12 January: Hard Ground – Neglecting God’s word**

Father God, forgive us when we have tried to discern your will without taking time to read, study and meditate on your word given to us in the Bible. Forgive us when busyness or boredom have thwarted our intention to truly root our day-to-day life in the Scriptures. Forgive us too when fear of disagreement or controversy have made us hesitant to discuss your word in our communities. Give us the grace and perseverance to do the work of discerning together what your word is saying to us.



## **Tuesday 13 January: Practising being Intentional**

- When we decide to take a step forward, explore a particular spiritual practice or take up a new discipline, we usually do it to benefit our own growth. But what if we were to consider our team or church community when we make those decisions?
- What does your team or church community need to grow in? Which practice or discipline might you start doing (or start doing more of) to help the whole community to grow?

An action:

- Being intentional doesn’t always come easy to us human beings. In his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard puts it like this:

‘The general human failing is to want what is right and important, but at the same time not to commit to the kind of life that will produce those results.’  
(Excerpt from *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard)

- We humans might find it difficult, but nature has many examples to inspire us. Take some time to watch video footage of animals and birds going about their daily business, and see what they have to teach you about being intentional.



# Part 5 - Intuition

“But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days,’ says the Lord. ‘I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbours, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, “You should know the Lord.” For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already,’ says the Lord. ‘And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.’

(Jeremiah 31:33-34, *NLT*)



## Wednesday 14 January: The Resolution to Value Intuition

The word ‘intuition’ might suggest something rather opaque, even a bit mystical, but the root of the word is simply ‘inner teaching’. Through the course of our lives we learn things through experience, things others teach us, achievements, mistakes; and through our relationship with God we store up insight which is vital in the work of hearing God. Like the coal that comes to life with the flame, so the Holy Spirit ignites the deep stores of knowledge and understanding within us and turns them to divine wisdom.

Almighty God, we marvel that you would write your words and your ways on our heart. Help us to value our intuition. Teach us to recognise the knowledge deep within us which the Spirit is bringing to the surface. Show us how to pool our collective wisdom to help us discern, for ourselves and for our communities, what you are saying.



## Thursday 15 January: Hard Ground – Insecurity

Creator God, you have been planting seeds of truth in us since the time you first formed us. Forgive us when we doubt what we know and write off the little understanding we have because we think it’s not good enough. Forgive us, too, when we dismiss the deep knowing which others bring, particularly when it seems to contradict our own experience. We acknowledge that we too easily belittle ourselves, lacking faith in our ability to hear you. Yet the psalmist tells us that yours is the voice which can strip a forest bare (Psalm 29:9), so we choose to trust that you can make yourself heard in our lives too. Instead of doubting ourselves, help us to relish the adventure of learning to recognise your voice.



## Friday 16 January: Practising Intuition

Use these questions to explore your relationship with your own intuition:

- Do you trust your gut instincts?
- If not, why not, and if so, why?
- How might you value this source of deep knowing, but also weigh what it is saying to you?
- When you think about the history of your church community, what intuition or deep knowing do you think that community has gained over the last few years?

An action:

- Have some conversations with people you trust this week about intuition. Share your experiences and thoughts with each other and notice what you learn in the process.



## Saturday 17 January: Focus Area – The most marginalised, most excluded

Loving God, who raised up a Salvation Army compelled by love and called to the least, the last and the lost, help us to remain unreservedly committed to those most in need. Help us to value people as more than just statistics, and show us how to really hear the voices of those we are seeking to help. When we have done our best to meet people's physical, social and financial needs, may we never shy away from offering the gift of the gospel for their spiritual needs. Gracious God, may we never be an Army of doers ministering to the 'done to', but may we rejoice in the privilege of being fellow pilgrims who bless each other and work together to transform the neighbourhoods in which we live.

# Part 6 - Other Voices



Read the story of Jesus meeting the woman at Jacob's well, found in John 4:7-27. It's the story of a highly unlikely conversation which happens when Jesus takes time to hear a voice he would never have heard if he'd done what was expected of him by his friends and his community.



## Sunday 18 January: The Resolution to Hear Other Voices

The phrase 'echo chamber' has been around for almost 100 years; but its meaning has shifted metaphorically in the past couple of decades, to refer to the way in which we human beings often only listen to voices which are easy and comfortable to listen to and say things we want to hear. Yet God often speaks to us through unfamiliar, uncomfortable and even unpalatable voices.

God of word and thought, help us to crack open the comfortable bubble within which we so often listen, both as individuals and church communities. Challenge us to search out the opinions of those we disagree with, believing that they have something to teach us. Help us find creative ways to open the conversation to those who might not think their voices count. And as we press on with the task of listening more attentively to the unheard voices, may we hear more of what you are saying to us.



## **Monday 19 January: Hard Ground – Avoidance**

Compassionate God, forgive us when we have chosen not to listen to those voices which might say something we're not ready or willing to listen to. Forgive us when we go for the easy option, when we do the things that are most expedient, most efficient, most practical, rather than taking time to listen to those whose needs might take us in a more uncomfortable direction. And forgive us when we cut corners in finding out what our local community would really like us to offer. Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen, even when listening is awkward or inconvenient.



## **Tuesday 20 January: Practising Hearing Others' Voices**

- We've probably all filled in those feedback forms where the questions are worded in such a way that you can only say good things about the product or service you're reviewing, leaving you frustrated that there was no way to say what you really wanted to say.
- How can we make sure that we're actively inviting people to be honest with us, even if we think we won't like what they say?
- How can we make sure we listen without being defensive or justifying ourselves?
- How can we stay open to the truth that God might be using different opinions and uncomfortable feedback as a prophetic voice to us?

An action:

Practise active listening

- Give time to the person you're listening to, so that they don't feel rushed or pressured.
- While they're speaking, engage your brain in hearing what they are saying, noticing their body language and sensing how they're feeling; don't just use the time when they are speaking to plan what you're going to say next.
- Don't be afraid of silence. That's often when you both hear the quiet voice of God.
- When they've finished, summarise what you have heard and ask them if the summary is accurate. That gives space for the person to correct you if your own interpretations have skewed what they've said.

For some Scripture and further thoughts on listening well, visit:

[www.crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/why-listening-is-the-most-critical-leadership-skill.html](http://www.crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/why-listening-is-the-most-critical-leadership-skill.html)

# Part 7 - Practicalities



Read the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand as it is told in John 6:1-15. In the midst of a chaotic situation, the disciple Andrew's practical approach to life comes to the fore as he goes looking for food and brings what he can find.



## Wednesday 21 January: The Resolution to be Practical

If you've ever run a household, booked a holiday, applied for a job, organised a group activity or tried to use a self-serve checkout, you'll know the value of being practical. If your friends call you a 'practical person', take it as a compliment. It means you possess a valuable blend of common sense, experience, logical thinking and efficiency. You know how to get stuff done.

Jesus, you were a carpenter's son. You understand measurements and mechanics. Thank you for those practical gifts which help us turn our dreams into reality: for understanding of finance; for strategy and planning; for critical thinking and problem-solving; for the minds which calculate and evaluate. Forgive us when we see being practical as somehow unspiritual. Challenge us to hear your voice as much in practical wisdom as we do through the other spiritual disciplines.



## Thursday 22 January: Hard Ground – Pessimism

The practical approach starts with concrete realities – like how much something costs, how many people might turn up, what the potential pitfalls and problems might be and what we need to do, logically speaking, to make something work. But that focus on the concrete can sometimes leave out the divine.

Heavenly Father, you know our needs before we ask, and you know our plans before we've made them. Forgive us when we allow the facts and figures to be the loudest voice in the room, when we don't trust you for the unseen, miraculous work you're doing in our midst. Forgive us when we limit ourselves only to what is humanly possible, letting pessimism shape our decision making. Lift our eyes to you, the one who can do all things, and teach us to season our logic with faith.



## **Friday 23 January: Practising Being Practical**

There's sometimes a tendency to define people as either spiritual or practical, and this can be particularly true when we're trying to discern what God is saying to us. The so-called spiritual people focus on what the Spirit is doing, and what possibilities might be opening up in the future, whereas the so-called practical people bring facts, figures and the wisdom of past experience. These can feel like opposite ways of seeing the world. But we need them both.

- How might we make sure that both perspectives are valued equally?
- How might we organise our conversations so that these different types of insight complement each other instead of cancelling each other out?
- How can faith and pragmatism bless each other?



## **Saturday 24 January: Focus Area – Children and Young People**

Lord Jesus, show us how to ensure that children and young people in corps, centres and communities can be active participants in the whole life of The Salvation Army, and give us the skills and tools to help them take responsibility for their faith journey. We long to see children and young people encountering and responding to God's love, and we ask you to help us enable them to participate in God's mission. Jesus, do a new thing in this your Salvation Army, and help us grow younger.

## **Part 8 - Curiosity**

'Jesus called a little child to him and put the child among them. Then he said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."' (Matthew 18:2-3, *NLT*)



## **Sunday 25 January: The Resolution to be Curious**

Children tend to be curious. If you've ever spent time with a young child and found yourself answering a hundred different questions, you'll know just how true that is. And in that regard, they have something to teach us. Curiosity is a vital part of discernment. If we're not interested in asking questions or exploring things we don't know, we risk not hearing God's voice and missing the things God wants to show us.

Loving heavenly Father, you welcome us, your children, to an adventure of discovery with you. When we feel like we've seen it all before, open our eyes to see what we've never seen. When we become jaded and cynical, open our hearts again to wonder. God of endless surprises, make us curious again.



## **Monday 26 January: Hard Ground – Ageism**

We think of ageism as a negative attitude towards older people, but it can go the other way too. In years gone by, children were often overlooked and excluded, the general view being that they should be seen and not heard. We don't live in those times any more, but we still have work to do if we are to get to a place where children and young people are fully honoured and included.

Jesus, who welcomed children into your presence with joy, forgive us when we sideline the youth and children in our church communities, leaving them to their own activities and assuming others will nurture them. Forgive us when we have preferred the older voices of tradition and safe ground over the younger voices of risk and innovation. Teach us how to make spaces where young people's voices are heard and respected.



## **Tuesday 27 January: Practising Curiosity**

- In her book *Atlas of the Heart*, Brene Brown writes: 'Choosing to be curious is choosing to be vulnerable because it requires us to surrender to uncertainty. We have to ask questions, admit to not knowing, risk being told that we shouldn't be asking, and, sometimes, make discoveries that lead to discomfort.'
- Is there anything you're curious about?
- Is there anything that puts you off being curious?
- How might more curiosity change the atmosphere in your church community?

An action:

- A child who's at peace with their parent or caregiver has no qualms about asking question after question, without embarrassment or restraint.
- Set aside some time for prayer on your own, either at home or out on a walk, and explore what it's like to fire questions at the One who made you and loves you, as though you were a young child. The questions can be about anything at all – the more varied and random the better.
- When you've done it, notice how it felt; whether it was fun or uncomfortable, or both.
- And of course, make sure you hang on to any answers God might have given you.



# Part 9 - Creativity

'The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make him known. They speak without a sound or word; their voice is never heard. Yet their message has gone throughout the earth, and their words to all the world.'  
(Psalm 19:1-4, *NLT*)



## Wednesday 28 January: The Resolution to Enjoy Creativity

When we explore the subject of discernment, we so often end up at words. We're asking in words, praying in words, thinking in words. But God speaks in far more ways than just words. God speaks through creation, and through our creativity too.

Almighty God, Creator of life, we thank you that everything you have made speaks of you. As we learn how to discern what you're saying to us, teach us languages we're not so fluent in yet: the language of beauty, the language of the senses, the language of silence. As we use our gifts to create things for others, may our creations communicate the message of your love loud and clear.



## Thursday 29 January: Hard Ground – Perfectionism

The pressure to get everything perfectly right is particularly real in the work of discernment. After all, if we're seeking to hear what God is asking of us, it's vital that we get it right, isn't it? Mercifully, when God speaks, it's not like a code which you have to solve in the perfect way; it's more like a series of words, nudges, impulses and noticings, all of which bring different parts of the message. That's why we do well to listen together. It's often when we unleash creativity that the message starts to become even clearer.

Gracious God, you hold all things together: the good and the bad, the pristine and the blemished. Forgive us when we forget that you don't require perfection from us. Forgive us when our need to get things right hinders our willingness to share what we've received from you. Forgive us when we stifle our own creativity through embarrassment or feelings of inadequacy. Help us to believe that, when we use our own creativity, we contribute to the work of hearing your voice.



## **Friday 30 January: Fullness of life**

- One of the core questions in the 'Blueprint for Better Choices' drawn up by our Territorial Leaders is this:
- What does the 'fullness of life for all with Jesus' look like for the people incorporated into this proposal or programme?
- God created us to have life – full, abundant life (John 10:10).
- When you make decisions, whether in your own life or the life of your church community, how does it shape your thinking to know that God wants everyone to taste that abundant life?
- If the one who brings forth life itself is at work in you and your church community, what incredible things might you dream of?

An action:

- One of the key questions in the 'Blueprint for Better Choices' asks us to consider what unique or distinctive contribution The Salvation Army might make.
- Is there something your church community is planning to do to connect with your local community? If not, is there something you'd love to see happen?
- Now imagine how this project (real or imagined) might turn out. Why does it matter that The Salvation Army is doing this? What can we bring that others can't? How might we work with others who have different gifts?
- Use your creativity to express this dream, whether in picture, in poetry, in music, in movement, or in a simple prayer.



## **Saturday 31 January: Focus Area – Growing leaders**

Lord of the harvest, we ask you to send workers into your harvest field. We particularly pray for the raising up of more leaders in The Salvation Army: leaders from every generation, gender and ethnicity; leaders with a breadth and variety of gifts, experiences and styles; leaders who know how to train and develop other leaders; leaders who value a culture of discernment, and who are committed to this vital work of seeking your will together.

