



SMALL GROUP MATERIAL



LOVE IN ACTION –  
SALVATION ARMY  
LIVES

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I remember a testimony time during a meeting I observed as a child (most probably from the back row with my mother persuading me to remain quiet by supplying endless amounts of paper and colouring pencils) when an elderly Brigadier (an old Salvation Army rank), complete with bonnet and walking stick, gently rose to her feet. I remember dismissively thinking, and probably saying, 'Here comes another story about a bus journey or a charity shop.'

There are stories in Salvation Army history that have the capacity to inspire: incidents, projects, people's lives that have not just demonstrated Salvationism, but in many cases helped to define it. We may, at first glance, look at Salvation Army history and imagine it to be mostly quirky tales of singular individuals. We are probably aware of our Founders' story, possibly some of the early missionary work, but beyond that it is possible to neglect all of the black-and-white photographs and scratchy recordings and speeded-up film footage.

Do we dismiss it too easily as I had that Brigadier? She was Brigadier Vi (Violet) Merritt and I'll never forget the testimony she gave that Sunday evening. She told us of God's faithfulness in protecting her, time and time again, as she crossed the borders into Communist Czechoslovakia carrying Bibles and songbooks for her friends. Maybe it only appealed to me as a young boy looking for adventure – but then why wouldn't all the stories I'd read or heard be retained in my memory? It was because of this woman's selfless and reckless dedication to doing God's will, and God's ongoing involvement in the story of humanity through some of his more surprising vessels.

Over the next month, each week you and your group will look at a different figure from Salvation Army history. Our movement's vision is simple: to 'Love God and Love Others'. Each of these lives shows us something of what that love looks like in action. We'll explore values of idealism, audibility, simplicity, realism, compassion, inclusivity and visibility.

### WEEK 1

CATHERINE BOOTH – IDEALISTIC/AUDIBLE

### WEEK 2

CAPTAIN THELMA GUNDERSON – SIMPLE/REALISTIC

### WEEK 3

MAJOR RANDIVE – COMPASSIONATE/INCLUSIVE

### WEEK 4

LIGHTS IN DARKEST ENGLAND – VISIBILITY

## CATHERINE BOOTH (IDEALISTIC/AUDIBLE)

### WELCOME

This week we're thinking about Catherine Booth and how her idealism and audibility shaped the way she loved.

### GAME – WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

Split your group into teams of 2-4 depending on your numbers. Each group will need a piece of paper and pen. Name people in popular culture that will be familiar to your group trying to ensure they represent a breadth of roles so as many young people as possible will be able to participate. You could include: Marcus Rashford, Billie Eilish, Tom Holland, Rishi Sunak, Amelia Dimoldenberg or anyone you think a number of them will know well.

As you name each person, the group has one minute to write down as many facts as they can about that person. At the end of the minute, compare answers. A team receives one point for each (true) fact they have that the other teams don't.

Finish the game with Catherine Booth. If your group doesn't recognise the name or is struggling for any facts, feel free to let them Google some information. You may want to award a prize to the winning team.


### WORD

**Background:** Your group may already know something of Catherine Booth, or she may be a stranger to them. Spend some time talking about who she was and her significance. You may be able to use some of the facts they found out in the previous game or use the information below.

Catherine Mumford was born in 1829. As a young adult she suffered from poor health and spent much of her adolescence reading, writing, and developing her thinking on many issues. She was known to have an unusually intense Christian character: passionate and convicted. Her thinking on many issues was formed during this time – most obviously her stand on drinking. As a young woman Catherine was a supporter of the national Temperance Society. This movement sought to reduce the sale of alcohol in Britain because of the devastating effects it was having on families and wider society. This was the foundation of The Salvation Army's decision to include, in its Soldier's Covenant, a promise to abstain from alcohol. Total abstinence, rather than moderation (which most churches subscribed to), seems the most effective answer to the tragedies caused by alcoholism.

In 1860 Catherine first began to preach, in a time when it was unheard-of for women to be allowed such activity. In some more liberal churches women could occasionally pray out loud, but that was considered the absolute limit. Catherine's first sermon, in Gateshead Bethesda Chapel, was so compelling that it changed her husband William's view on female teaching completely. Catherine built up a reputation as a brilliant and passionate speaker. However, within the time's narrow-minded church society there was general outrage that a woman should be allowed such freedom in ministry. It was scandalous. Catherine met each protest by preaching with greater frequency and enthusiasm. Throwing caution to the wind she won many over, convinced only by her ability, and she became a celebrated speaker. Catherine did not preach only to the Christians, the well turned-out-in-their-Sunday-best, regular church attendees. She also went into brothels and factories and the back streets of Victorian London and preached the good news to those who needed to hear it most: those who were broken and downtrodden by the world around them.

Because of Catherine, women in The Salvation Army can be completely fulfilled in their ministries – not just as officers, but as soldiers and members, able to do anything.

 **Read: Galatians 3:26-29 and Romans 12: 1-3**

**Ask:** What do you think Paul means when he says, 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female...'

He implies that gender is not an issue for the new covenant, for being one of Christ's followers. In Acts 1:14 it says that all the believers were together, just before Pentecost unfolds. The women are included in everything – all were praying, all were anointed with the Holy Spirit, all were speaking in other tongues. This new Ecclesia (church) made no division between men and women. At that time in Jewish society women were not allowed past the outer courtyard of the Temple. This was a revolution.

**Ask:** Although Paul said this almost 2,000 years ago, what do you think the significance of this was for Catherine Booth? How did this shape the way The Salvation Army serves? How is it significant for us today?

*For Catherine, it was her deep understanding of the Bible, the work of Jesus and the teaching of the early Church that compelled her to speak where traditionally women couldn't. Her decision to make sure she was heard had a huge impact on the Church and society. Here, a discussion about whose voices we need to make sure we hear, and the impact amplifying those voices could have, might be helpful.*

 **Discuss:** Romans 12:1-3 in *The Message* paraphrase reads:

'So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out.'

**Ask:** What do you think these verses mean? How do you think they impacted Catherine as she founded The Salvation Army with William?

 **Discuss:** Catherine Booth once said:

**“We Christians see around us, everywhere, men and women under the influence of false ideas, given up to selfish indulgences and practices which enslave them, rendering real happiness impossible for them.”**

Here Catherine was primarily talking about alcohol, but also refers to issues such as gambling, money, and smoking.

**Ask:** What are some of the other 'false ideas and selfish indulgences' we see around us? How do you think these things 'enslave' people? How do they get in the way of 'real happiness'?

**Leader's note:** *You may want to talk about issues such as social media, unhealthy relationships, drugs, pursuit of wealth/fame.*

**Ask:** Bearing in mind Catherine's quote and the Romans 12 verses, what are some of things we could do to pursue a full life for ourselves? How could this impact the way we love the people around us?

*This is an opportunity to talk about how living a life as a follower of Jesus impacts our everyday lives. You may want to talk about spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading and prayer, but also how our ordinary decisions about how we spend our time, energy and money impact us from the inside out.*

*If appropriate, you may want to have a conversation about The Salvation Army as an abstinence movement and why it's part of the Soldier's Covenant to avoid alcohol, tobacco and other intoxicating substances. While there may be disagreement in the room on whether this is right or wrong, understanding the reasons for it may still be helpful in thinking about how we practically demonstrate love for the people around us.*

### WORSHIP

Play 'Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)' by Chris Tomlin. Whilst the music is playing, on one large piece of paper in the middle write down some of the things that are 'enslaving' the people around you (or even the young people themselves) and in the wider world. You can also encourage the group to think bigger – anything that gets in the way of God's ideal for the world and its people such as conflict, hunger and trafficking. Encourage the group to pray for freedom for those caught up in these situations.

### WITNESS

One of Catherine's most famous quotes is: 'To better the future we must disturb the present.' Catherine believed that the world could be so much fairer than it was, that freedom and fullness of life was a possibility for every person. Catherine was determined to use her voice to be part of the solution, despite the obstacles in her way.

Give each young person a copy of the above quote (download the printable template or create your own!), or just a piece of paper if that's not possible. Ask each of them to commit to use their voice to show love to someone they know or a group of people that are struggling. Ask them to write that commitment on the quote as a reminder and encouragement to speak up and create the disturbance necessary to bring about change.

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## CAPTAIN THELMA GUNDERSEN (SIMPLE/REALISTIC)

### WELCOME

This week we are looking how The Salvation Army lived out its values of simplicity and realism. The gospel can be complicated to fully understand, but it can also be very simple to live out. To warm up your group: together, on small pieces of paper write as many different ways of showing love (simple ones, and keep it clean) as you can – the more the better. Fold up the papers and put them in a bowl. Give each person 60 seconds (adjust the time depending on the size of your group and size of your list) to pick a piece of paper and act out as many as they can. They can only move on once someone has guessed what they are doing. The winner is the person who has the most correctly guessed actions.

### WORSHIP

As part of your worship this week, cook a meal together. Simple – in fact you may already do this as part of your regular small group gathering. However, on this occasion spend some time just enjoying being together, to chat, relax and enjoy the food. It may be the first time you've done this as a group; if so, why not consider doing it every week?


If cooking together isn't an option, find another way of sharing food and mindfully sharing in conversation as you do.

### WORD

#### WHO WAS THE BRONX ANGEL?

Captain Thelma Gundersen was a Salvation Army officer in the United States. Around 1965 she was recognised for her service at the Bronx Corps in New York with a TV spot, then a three-page article in *The New York Times* (the article can be found here, but you will need a *New York Times* subscription to read it – <https://www.nytimes.com/1961/05/21/archives/sinner-will-you-let-him-in-for-the-salvation-army-and-captain.html>), and finally, a chapter in the book *A Hundred Years' War* by Bernard Watson. This chapter does not describe her as anyone supernatural, with heroic powers. Rather, it paints a picture of someone quite ordinary, yet somehow radical (it is worth a read if you can find a copy – ask your corps officer as they might be able to help). The Bronx was a place full of poor-quality apartments that only those who were struggling would inhabit. Consequently, because of its time, it was a melting pot of ethnicities, all struggling to get a foothold in the 'country of the free'.

Captain Thelma stood out as 'romantically attractive' against these drab and hostile conditions. She taught songs to children, helped women learn English, supported teenage girls through their early years as women, taught laundry, cooking and good personal hygiene. At Christmas she cooked turkey, at Thanksgiving made pumpkin pie, and rice and beans for Lincoln's birthday. All this was motivated by a simple desire to love, and through this to show God's love. Her actions were determined by recognition of the reality of the Bronx: the hardship, struggle and depression that surrounded her, and her realisation that small acts of kindness and love could slowly and surely transform this.

 **Read:** Depending on your group numbers, either look at these passages together or split the young people into groups and assign them one or two passages each.

\* Proverbs 3:27


\* John 13:34-35

\* Matthew 6: 1-4

\* Romans 12:9-13

\* Matthew 25:25-40




 **Discuss:** If you have split into smaller groups, ask each one to discuss and then feed back on what they think the main point of the passage is and what it says about loving service. If all together, take each passage and discuss in turn.

**Ask:** After hearing the passages, what kind of picture does this build of what it means to act, serve and love as a follower of Jesus? You may want to map some of the key words, ideas and phrases on a large piece of paper.

 **Read:** Shane Claibourne, in *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* says,

**“ ‘But what had lasting significance were not the miracles themselves but Jesus’ love. Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, and a few years later, Lazarus died again. Jesus healed the sick, but eventually they caught some other disease. He fed the ten thousands, and the next day they were hungry again. But we remember his love. It wasn’t that Jesus healed a leper but that he touched a leper, because no one touched lepers.’ ”**

 **Discuss:** What point do you think Shane is making here? Maybe take some time to talk about 'ordinary radicals' that you know and examples of people making a difference with seemingly simple actions. This could be things the group have seen or heard of, or even moments they have been a part of.

If time allows, invite the group to talk about situations they know of where there could be a simple solution they or the wider church/corps could offer.

## WITNESS

Many people will have heard of the Random Acts of Kindness (RAOK) concept. Simply put, people commit to small actions of kindness in the hope it will make a difference not just to the receiver of that particular act, but ripple out to have a larger impact. As this week is about simple and realistic acts of love, Random Acts of Kindness fit the bill perfectly! If you have contact details for your group, let them know that you'll be sending them a new RAOK each day for them to complete. If this isn't an option, ask them all to choose and write down an act for each day. You can find a list of 50 here – <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/kindness-and-mental-health/random-acts-kindness> But of course you can make up your own too!




# MAJOR RANDIVE (COMPASSIONATE/INCLUSIVE)

## WELCOME

This week we are looking at how love in action is compassionate and inclusive.

Play the connections game. Stand in a circle, one person with a ball of string or wool. That person chooses someone else in the group they have a connection with (such as: same class at school, sibling, favourite food) and, whilst keeping hold of the end of the string, passes the ball to that person. As you each find your connections, you will a) get to know each other better and b) build up a visible web of connections.

## WORD


 **Read:** In the western region of India is a city called Satara. Right in the centre of this busy city, by the main bus station and the central road, there is a field. In that field men come to find sex workers. For £2 a time these women sell their dignity, self-worth, respect, safety, and often, because of the prevalence of HIV/Aids, their lives. It is not a secret thing. This field is in full public view. Some visit the field just to watch others having sex, some to find a sex worker, most come to do both. Sex work has become acceptable in Satara; however, the women working as sex workers are regarded as disgusting. There is an ambivalence to it all, an institutionalisation of this dehumanising practice.

Major Randive is an unlikely hero. He knows each of the madams (older women in charge of the women working as sex workers) in Satara well, visiting them regularly to persuade the women to be tested for HIV/Aids and for them to allow their women's children to come to his school. He and his team spend time educating as many groups as they can about the dangers of HIV/Aids trying to prevent its spread.


One afternoon, whilst walking around the field in Satara, Major Randive was approached by a man who said he was looking for his sister who had run away from her marriage because of domestic violence. He was worried she was working as a sex worker now, in order to get by. Major Randive asked for her name, and quickly went to visit the madams he knew to locate the missing woman. Very quickly he found her. Whilst her brother wished her to return to her husband, so as not to bring shame on the family, she could no longer face the brutality of her husband. She said she would rather remain a sex worker and live in her tin shed with the madam. Major Randive found somewhere for her to stay, away from her husband and the field in which she was put to work.

 **Discuss:** What do you think about this story? What strikes you? Is there anything that surprises you?

Major Randive is not your traditional hero. He does not swoop into the situation, beat up the bad guys and carry all of the women to safety. Whilst his long-term goal is to see an end to sex work in Satara, the Major first recognises that teaching about HIV/Aids and general education are the starting points for changing his community, and that before even this is possible he must build relationships with people – even those the rest of society considers unworthy of friendship and compassion.


 **Discuss:** If you were Major Randive, what would your priorities be? What do you think are the main challenges he faces? Where do you think those challenges come from?


 **Read: John 4: 1-26**

 **Discuss:** What do you notice about how Jesus speaks with this woman? Compare this to Major Randive's story.

What we see in both of these is the importance of relationships: real connections to people that are not affected by judging or prejudice. Jesus knows the sins that the woman has committed before he meets her; we can see this from verses 17-18. Yet he shows her respect and love and treats her as a human. This is real compassion. The

woman is a Samaritan. At that time Jews and Samaritans considered one another enemies, and for a Jew to talk to a Samaritan was to make themselves as 'unclean' as they believed the other to be. She is also a woman of poor reputation, which is why she is getting her water during the heat of the day, wanting to avoid other people at the well by going at the most difficult time. Even just by being a woman, she was considered to be of lower standing and culturally she was not supposed to talk to a man alone. Because of these three factors, the story would have been incredibly surprising for anyone of the time. But in it we see Jesus modelling real inclusivity and compassion – looking beyond circumstances and man-made divisions to engage with the real, whole human in front of him.

 **Read:** 'People are longing for something better but no one is there to show the way.' – Major Randive

 **Discuss:** What does compassion and inclusivity mean to the group? Talk about any times they have seen this action or people who model these values. How did this make them feel? What difference did it make?

## WORSHIP

Using the same wool or string you used in the welcome game, this time use it to think about people that those in the group want to particularly show compassion to. This could be individuals or groups of people. As people receive the wool, if appropriate and if they're willing, they should name who they want to remember and offer a prayer for that person or group before throwing the ball to someone else in the group. While the session helped us get to know one another better, this activity will help us remember our many connections beyond the group and remind us of the people that need our compassion.

## WITNESS

This week try to find out something new about someone you would normally keep your distance from. This could be a classmate who is very different from you, or even a whole group of people you would tend to avoid because you don't like them, understand them or agree with them. Try to find something you have in common, a new way of understanding or finding compassion for this person / these people. And remember: 'How wonderful it is to have a God who loves everyone!' (Major Randive).

# LIGHTS IN DARKEST ENGLAND (VISIBILITY)

## WELCOME

This week we are focusing on how The Salvation Army chose to ensure they were visible, and how as Christians we stand out against our society and can be seen demonstrating love for others. It is the last week of this series, so take some time to recap the values we have looked at and remember the people who exemplified them.

## WORD

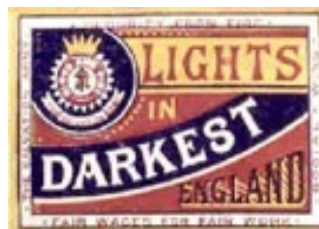
**The story:** In 1891 an investigation into the working conditions of London's match factories was undertaken by The Salvation Army, led by Colonel James Barker. Initially looking at workers' salaries, Barker quickly discovered that financial poverty was not the total problem. A disease known as *phossy jaw*, caused by working in unventilated conditions with phosphorous, was affecting many of the factory's workers (see Image 1). The effects of the condition were devastating. In response The Salvation Army purchased a derelict building in East London and converted it to a match factory. The salaries were twice what workers received elsewhere, but more crucially the working conditions were much safer because the matches were phosphorous-free, as William Booth emphasised as he opened the factory in 1891.

The matches (see Image 2) went on sale, and while the business didn't have great financial success, it did shift the conversation and shine a light in a previously dark place. The social response to this issue was put into the middle of the public arena by brave women working in the factories, and the support of an organisation with the profile of The Salvation Army prompted legislative action from Parliament and a greater sense of responsibility from other factory owners. Today almost all matches are 'safety matches'.


Image 1




Image 2



 **Read: Matthew 5:14-16**

 **Discuss:** These verses in Scripture are frequently used when we talk about Christian witness. Have you heard them before? What do you think they mean? Do you feel challenged or encouraged by them?

Some of the early Salvation Army's strength lay in its boldness and mobility. It was able to rapidly respond to social injustice, finding creative and exciting ways to change the society around it. Because of this, it was visible for reasons beyond the distinctive uniform! It could not help being seen, to stand out against the darkness around it.

 **Discuss:** How does your church stand out against the darkness that surrounds it? Does it? Do you recognise this Salvation Army from the past as the same one that exists today? Can you think of any examples of how it is or how it isn't? Can you think of any spaces where you would want The Salvation Army to be more visible? How could it do this? *What is your responsibility in making The Salvation Army the kind of organisation and church you want it to be?*

### WORSHIP

If safe to do so, give each person in your group a single (safety) match. Give your young people time to think about that match – the evil and the triumph of justice that is part of its history; how without something to create a spark, it's just a stick; the difference a lit match can make to its environment.

Then, again if safe to do so, ask each young person to light their match in turn, naming a place, person or situation they want to be light to. If you're not comfortable lighting the matches with your group, you could simply name the things or use battery-powered tea lights.

### WITNESS

Over the last four weeks, we've thought about what love in action looks like, particularly in The Salvation Army. Take some time to talk about who or what has inspired your group the most. Are there any issues you feel challenged to look at and take action on?

As a group, decide on one issue/topic that you would like to shine a light on. What is something you can do together to be the light that dark place needs? Make an action plan and do it!

At the Children and Youth Team, we'd love to know how you are making a difference. Let us know what you chose to do and how it went by emailing [childrenyouth@salvationarmy.org.uk](mailto:childrenyouth@salvationarmy.org.uk). We can make your work more visible; and who knows, you may inspire others the same way you've been inspired!