



## Getting Close Enough

*"The spirit of Christ is the spirit of missions. The nearer we get to Him, the more intensely missionary we become." -- Henry Martyn, missionary to India and Persia*

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I had just lost \$1400 dollars in the space of half an hour at the Roulette table in Jupiter's casino on the Gold Coast. It was the last of my money and I started out the door for the lonely and long walk back to Brisbane. As I 'thumbed for a ride' (hitchhiked) many things crossed my mind all of which were of the negative variety. I was kicking myself, a stupid idiot that I was, losing my life savings like that. As I lit another cigarette on the way out of town I passed a double Decker bus with the words "Jesus Saves" written on the side. It was the gospel message in two words yet I failed to be impressed. God might save I thought but he wouldn't want to save me.

If only someone had of been there on that bus that night I might have come to know God a little sooner and I might have discovered the truth that God does love the broken and lost of this world and he can and will save them. If only someone had been close enough to reach out to me. If only that was to be my salvation story, saved by a missionary at 2am that morning on the side of the Gold Coast highway. Alas no one was there, no one made the sacrifice to be up at that hour of the night when the lost walked in darkness searching for redemption.

Recently in my devotions I read the story of *The Suffering Servant* (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) and I could not help but think about Jesus stepping in on my behalf. He paid the ultimate price for my mistakes so that I can personally know the love of God. As I contemplate this truth I asked myself what it would look like for me to volunteer to take on someone else's shortcomings. What would that sacrifice look like?

This is where mission begins for me, in my relationship with the God who saves. Often in our culture the driver comes from within the organised church, however I believe that our reason for mission is best driven from our relationship with Christ. That's how we read the first disciples responding, that's how the Christian Mission found its momentum and that's how Christianity in the Twenty-first century will best discover its passion. Jesus Christ is the model for the Christian life and to follow him is our motivation for mission. He intentionally came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) and our goal is to follow him.

Once we are motivated for mission we need to make sure we have the right message. Our postmodern era is heavily influenced by political correctness to the point that some Christians feel the need to water down the gospel. We need to be compelled by the Holy Spirit to make every effort to share the Good News (as we understand it from biblical truth, church tradition, experience and reason) in the milieu in which we live.

Without the right message we will fail to make any impact on our mission because the only way people can be saved is through God's amazing love and therefore our message has to be Jesus. And we must take this message to where the people are, where God is already working in their lives. We have to get close enough to make a difference.

Mission necessitates getting involved. It means that we have to get close enough to the people we want to share Jesus with. The early day Salvationist were well positioned for the mission because they lived in the same street, worked in the same places and bumped each other at every turn of life<sup>1</sup>. If the Booth's lived today Catherine would have spoken of incarnational living.

It is amazing how a transformed heart leads to the love for people who might have otherwise been overlooked. Do you find it exciting that when we take God's number one commandment seriously we find ourselves in situations where we can love **others** and point them in the direction of Jesus?

Let me share this story with you so that you may share my enthusiasm. Earlier this year God's spirit spoke, revealing his will for me to rent a room at a boarding house about a kilometre from where I worship. I had a real willingness to do this and within a couple of weeks I had rented a room and made arrangements to stay there one evening every week. The room was feral when I got the key and I agreed to help the manager to clean out the rotten food, soiled clothing and syringes<sup>2</sup>. My boarding house experience gave me a real appreciation for how some live and it also gave me an opportunity to get close enough to share with them about our loving God and his son Jesus. During the barbecues, the dart games, the State of origin series, the trips to Bunnings warehouse, Salvo stores and cafes, among the conversations in their new herb garden, the hospital, the court houses, and the chats over coffee in their rooms I was able to share prayers, bible readings, testimony and mini sermons in similar ways that I would in my corps on Sunday. Of course there was one strikingly obvious difference and that is that these people are still lost. They are in the process of being introduced to the one who saves and I have the privilege of introducing him. This is my mission and yours too.

Our mission is to get close enough to **others** and allow God to do his work through us. We can be a sign post for the lost and point to the one who saves so that **others** may also know the love of God. Like any good sign we need to be in the right location and be clear in identity and purpose.

In northern Chile, in the desert near Arica, we couldn't possibly miss [The World's Largest Coca-Cola logo](#). At 50m tall and 120m wide, this really is a massive Coke advert. Even better though, it's actually made from 70,000 empty Coke bottles!<sup>3</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Gary Bishop, *Darkest England And The Way Back In*. (2007) The Cromwell Press:Trowbridge, United Kingdom,p59.

<sup>2</sup> While this was the state of the room I moved into many others were in better condition. And the drug dealer who had vacated my room in a hurry was unwelcomed by the other residents, hence his sudden departure.

<sup>3</sup> <http://googlesightseeing.com/2007/11/14/worlds-largest-coca-cola-logo/>

This is a big sign but is it a good sign? We can clearly see what it is saying but its location is a little out of the way for most people to see unless you are skydiving in Chile. Perhaps the iconic Coca-Cola sign in Sydney is more relevant when you think of its purpose, its mission. As a Christian we can have the best motives and the appropriate message but unless we can get close enough to be relevant, we are going to fall short of effective mission.

This is the struggle for our Salvation Army today. As we discover who we are as Salvationists we will begin to close the gap that exists between what it meant to be a Salvationist in Darkest England and what it means to be Salvo in our 21<sup>st</sup> century context. "Every Christian generation needs to discover an ecclesiology which is both faithful to the gospel as revealed in scriptures and attentive to the particular historical context in which it finds itself"<sup>4</sup>.

We Salvationists need to know who we are. We need to explore our heritage, for their passion is our passion, and understanding our past will help to change the future. Furthermore, in view of the fact that Christ is our motivation, our relationship with Jesus is what will shape our mission and our mission will shape what our church meetings will look like. The Salvation Army worldwide became what it did today because of its mission to save souls, grow saints and serve suffering humanity. We are who we are – soldiers of Christ employed for the mission to get close enough to **others** and introduce them to the God who saves.

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<sup>4</sup> Phil Needham, *Community in Mission*. (1987) Campfield Press: St Albans, United Kingdom, p4.