

Rethinking Calling

YouthDownSouth interviews Major John Needham, a Salvation Army officer and the Divisional Commander of the Kentucky-Tennessee Division.

YDS: Please tell us a little bit about yourself – in particular please tell us your testimony.

JN: I was fortunate enough to be born into a family where grace and truth were the elements from which our nest was feathered. The Salvation Army became my church home and my relationship to God was a family affair. Then at the age of 15, I became aware of the fact that I really had no relationship with God because of my sinfulness. Fortunately, I had always desired to be close to God, so when it became apparent that I had to surrender my life fully to Jesus, a sense of brokenness and helplessness came over me. I cried out for God to come heal me and to make me whole. He did not hesitate but acted in that moment. I began to feel my life getting in sync with who I was created to be. A beautiful relationship has resulted, seeing me through all the stages of my life thus far.

YDS: Why are you a member of The Salvation Army?

JN: Salvationists can't hide. I like to keep my relationship with Jesus subdued, but being in the SA forces me to live it publically. The Army is very mission-focused and this helps me to continually walk in the Spirit.

YDS: How did you first come into contact with the SA?

JN: Fifth generation birth...it's in the blood.

YDS: What do you believe it means to "be called"?

JN: Sanctification means "being called out" by God for his plan. It is a mission term describing how God puts his disciples in action, gifting and empowering them through the Holy Spirit. It begins with an inner-God work which equips each follower to become a witness and messenger. Each calling is unique as each follower is unique. The similarity of every calling is that it requires faithfulness and obedience for our respective callings to become fruitful in the body of Christ and in the world for which he died.

YDS: Do you believe that you are called?

JN: Absolutely. My calling is where I find my life in Christ.

YDS: What are your top five Salvationists of all time?

JN: Joseph Korbel, Yen, Elisabeth Cottrill, Dorothy Langston, Arnold Brown

YDS: If you were to give words of advice to a young adult to figure out what God wants him/her to do in life, what would you say?

JN: (I'm assuming that the word "trip" is not meant to be there) Every individual must discern how their life can contribute to Jesus' mission, or what early Salvationists called the "Salvation War", and contribute in the way blessed by God. To live a blessed life is more about what we give God rather than what He gives us. Therefore, my advice to anyone seeking God's will for their life is:

*Read Scripture about those whose lives were blessed by God and draw parallels for your own life

*Pray by request to God to close and open doors of opportunity, breaking your heart when necessary.

*Speak to wise counselors to see if they confirm Scripture and Prayer direction.

*Step out in faith with accountability guards, evaluating whether that direction deepens your spiritual connectivity to God and the world

*Take into consideration the contribution of "wilderness" experiences and don't over-inflate the value of mega-production.

* Finally, daily ask God if he is pleased with the compass reading of your life. If he is, nothing else really matters.

YDS: What ultimately lead you to the profession you are in today?

JN: Running from officership actually helped me to discover it in God's timing. Many young Salvationists are annoyed by the presumption of others that they should be officers. Just be careful it's not God's presumption too.

YDS: What is the most successful thing you have accomplished as a professional?

JN: Remained faithful to my wife for 35 years, with a little help from my friends.

YDS: What is your take on ministry as it relates to your career?

JN: As an officer, I am a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The development of my officership from commissioning to present day has increased my capacity to love others as Jesus loves them. There are some times when career comes into tension with ministry, and I thank God that he has always given me clear guidance and excellent motivation to make the right choice.

YDS: What is your favorite Scripture verse?

JN: "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." Phil. 3:12b

YDS: If you could give words of wisdom to our readers, what would you say?

JN: When you have negative consequences, let the Spirit guide you back through the steps/actions which didn't work so that, in the future, you can avoid those negative consequences again.

John and Marty Needham are Salvation Army officers serving as the Divisional Leaders for the Kentucky and Tennessee Division in the Southern Territory USA. They have been married for 34 years and have three children: Stephanie Anne, with husband Chad and children Rex, Caroline, and Clay; Christopher Thomas; and Jonathan Lee.