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Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Learning to Trust
Daniel 3:1-30
March 11, 2018, Jeff Germo

Today we are going to fast forward through a whole bunch of history to look at one of the Major Prophets of Israel near the end of the Old Testament. For those of you who might be new to the Bible I am going to quickly explain to you how the Bible is divided up into its different parts so you can begin to make sense of it. And again, if you want some great teaching from a very gifted Bible teacher come on Sunday mornings at 9:00 and join Brian Down's class on Old Testament history.

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The first five books of the Bible are what is called the Pentateuch, which comes from two Greek and Latin words that simply mean "five books." The Jews call this the *Torah*, made up of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Genesis is about the beginnings, starting with creation and the fall of humankind and God initiating a plan to redeem the *shalom* that was lost at the Garden.

Exodus through Deuteronomy comprise Israel's deliverance from captivity as slaves in Egypt, to their wandering in the wilderness because of their disobedience and constant complaining, to God giving them the law so they would know how to love each other and God once they settled in the land God promised them to the west of the Jordan River.

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After the Pentateuch are some historical books, from Joshua through Esther. They take us from the conquest of the Promised Land to the period of the Judges, to Israel's monarchy, the exile of Israel by Assyria, and the exile of Judah by Babylon, to their freedom and return to Jerusalem to rebuild. If you have not read the entire Old Testament make sure you put some effort into reading it. It is foundational for understanding the New Testament.

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After Esther there is what we call Wisdom Literature, made up of Job, Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon).

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Finally, near the back of your Old Testament are the prophets. The Major Prophets are first, from Isaiah to Daniel. They are called "Major" Prophets simply because they are larger works than the minor prophets. There are five Major Prophets and 12 Minor Prophets. Each of the prophets spoke into the life of Israel at some point in their history.

After the prophets and before the New Testament there is what some scholars call the Silent Period. There were about four hundred years where we have no Scriptural writings between Malachi in the Old Testament and Matthew in the New Testament. However, those four hundred years were far from silent. God was at work behind the scenes preparing the way for Jesus.

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There is a very good website I found with a great interactive timeline to help you make sense of the entire chronology of God's Word. <http://timeline.biblehistory.com> It has Seventh Day Adventist roots, so there is some theology we would differ with them on, but the timeline is quite useful.

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Let me just remind you of the three threads weaving their way through all Biblical and universal history.

- 1. God is up to something - restoring his *shalom* that was lost in the garden.**
- 2. Satan is up to something - destroying God's *shalom*.**
- 3. We most naturally move away from God.**

As we live our lives, we need to remind ourselves of these three truths. Life won't make sense until we understand that these threads are continually at work all around us.

Today we are going to take a look at one account from the book of Daniel, one of the Major Prophets. Let's set the scene. As we noted last week, after the death of Solomon, in about 931 BC, the united Kingdom of Israel had a schism because of the prideful immaturity and weak leadership of Solomon's son, Rehoboam who was king at the time.

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Ten of the tribes formed the new Northern Kingdom, called Israel. Two tribes, Judah and Benjamin formed the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Over the next 209 years the Northern Kingdom of Israel continued to purposefully move away from God. Their slide down was steep and deplorable. Their kings led them to worship false gods, complete with human sacrifice. Some of the kings even sacrificed their own children. It was a dark and ugly time in the life of Israel.

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In 722 B.C. the Assyrians took the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel into exile. The king of Assyria brought people from other nations that he had captured into Samaria. The poorer Israelites stayed there and intermarried with them. The wealthier of them were taken to Assyria to mix and intermarry with the Assyrians. The Northern Kingdom completely disintegrated and never returned to their homeland. Their Jewish culture and faith in the one true God would be lost. It's a sad story.

The southern kingdom of Judah continued on for over a century longer. Many of their kings also led the people to worship other gods, and got involved in human sacrifice. There were some bright spots, however. King Josiah was one (2 Kings 22-23). He became king of Judah at the age of eight. When he was about twenty he began to purge the land of all pagan worship.

At the twenty-six he doubled his efforts when a scroll with the law of God was found in the Temple. He had never read it prior to this, nor had any of the priests because they were too busy worshipping pagan idols. He found out from the Torah that for many decades they had not been following God. He then dedicated all his efforts to destroying all facets of idolatry. He also got the people to celebrate Passover, which hadn't been taken seriously since the days of Samuel. He was, unfortunately, killed in battle by King Neco of Egypt. Judah was then subjugated by Egypt for a time until the Babylonians became the world superpower and dominated Egypt as well as many other nations.

In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 24) and took King Jehoiachin prisoner, moving all the treasures from the Temple and the palace to Babylon. He also took captive to Babylon the best of the soldiers, craftsmen, and artisans. Only the poorest people were in the land. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah to be king of Judah.

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Zedekiah subsequently rebelled leading to the Babylonians sacking Jerusalem and totally destroyed it in 586 BC.

Among the people exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were among the good looking and knowledgeable young people the king captured to groom as wisemen in his kingdom. That is where we will pick it up today. You can turn in your Bibles to Daniel chapter 3.

There are a few stories in the Bible of certain people who seemed to do everything right. Daniel is one of those, along with his buddies, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. There is a danger when we read these narratives about these giants of the faith that we will come away with a single, one-sided story and be left

with an incomplete picture of who these people were. What we can tend to do is make them the main characters in the story.

You may have heard sermons about Daniel or his three young companions with an exhortation to be like them. There are lots of problems with this. First and foremost, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are not the main characters in the story. Who is? God is — always!

Secondly, when we look at a single sided story like that we negate the struggle or the character development that preceded the event. We have no idea how many times these guys failed. We don't see the painful things they had to endure when their family and fellow Jews were ravaged by the Babylonians. The only stories we have of them are ones of victory and success.

This really is quite unusual in Biblical narratives. Normally we see the warts and failures of even the greatest leaders in the Bible. You just need to look at the insecurity of Moses, the idolatry of Aaron, and the moral failure of David. And in the New Testament the relational struggles Paul had with John Mark and Barnabas, and the immaturity of every one of the disciples of Jesus. In those stories we see a more complete story. We see some successes, but we also see a whole bunch of failure.

How many of you have heard sermons about how great some Biblical character was and then leave feeling bad about yourself because you aren't like the way these characters were depicted? You have failures. You fall short in so many ways. You aren't the perfect leader or the perfect parent, or the perfect husband or wife, or the perfect disciple of Jesus, or the perfect anything. Nor am I. There is a very real struggle we have to go through to grow more like Jesus. It takes a long time and a lot of hard work and cooperation with the Holy Spirit as he chips away at our rough characters.

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Walking with Jesus is not about the arrival at a destination called perfection in this life. It is about the journey with Jesus and learning from him, in the struggles of life, how to love God and others better. Remember the words of Jesus that I quote very often.

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Matthew 11:28–30 (NLT)

28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

How many of you would say you are carrying some heavy burdens right now? I know some of you are in the middle of some very heavy stuff. You are tired of the struggle. You didn't think the life of faith was supposed to be this hard. The truth is, it is. That is why we need faith in the God who is bigger than our struggles.

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The struggle in our story is how we grow. It is how we are shaped.

We are going to take a look at three young Jews who walked closely with God. We are going to see their victory. What we won't see is the struggle it took to get them to the place where they would be willing to do what they did.

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Daniel 3:1–30 (NLT)

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue ninety feet tall and nine feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 Then he sent messages to the high officers, officials,

governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to come to the dedication of the statue he had set up.

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³ So all these officials came and stood before the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴Then a herald shouted out, “People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king’s command! ⁵ When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments, bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s gold statue.

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⁶ Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.” ⁷ So at the sound of the musical instruments, all the people, whatever their race or nation or language, bowed to the ground and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

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⁸ But some of the astrologers went to the king and informed on the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “Long live the king! ¹⁰ You issued a decree requiring all the people to bow down and worship the gold statue when they hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments.

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¹¹ That decree also states that those who refuse to obey must be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up.”

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¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. When they were brought in, ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up?

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¹⁵ I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?”

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¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. ¹⁸ But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”

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¹⁹ Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. ²⁰Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

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²¹ So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. ²² And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in. ²³ So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames.

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²⁴ But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, “Didn’t we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?” “Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did,” they replied. ²⁵ “Look!” Nebuchadnezzar shouted. “I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!”

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26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire.

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27 Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn’t even smell of smoke!

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28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king’s command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

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29 Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!” 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.

I want to focus on how the “three amigos” responded to the king when he said they would be thrown into the fire if they didn’t bow down and worship his statue.

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16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. 18 But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”

“You can do whatever you want to us. We are going to do the next right thing and trust God because we believe God is able to save us, and even if he doesn’t, we will not bow down to worship your idol.”

That is faith. They did the right thing. They refused to bow down. They trusted God. Even so, they still got thrown into the fire. But God miraculously saved them from the heat of the furnace. When Nebuchadnezzar looked in the fire he saw four men instead of the three.

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25 “Look!” Nebuchadnezzar shouted. “I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!”

Bible scholars believe that the fourth figure was either an angel or the Son of God, a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. Remember in John 8 Jesus was having a great argument with a bunch of people who were accusing him of being demon possessed. They sarcastically asked him if he was greater than Abraham, who was the father of the Jews over two thousand years before Jesus. Here’s how he answered them:

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John 8:58 (NLT)

58 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I Am!”

So, whether or not it was Jesus in the fiery furnace with them, or an angel, it was God who rescued them. What was the result?

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28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king’s command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

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29 Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!” 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.

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They did the right thing, came out of the fire unscathed, got promoted, and the king even started to worship God.

It would be easy to conclude from this that if we will just do the right thing, everything will turn out great for us. It doesn't always happen like that, does it? We know that from experience. Sometimes we do the right thing and we get burned badly.

Just look at the twelve disciples of Jesus. Everyone of them, aside from John who was exiled on the Isle of Patmos, was martyred for their faith in Jesus. They did the right thing and were killed for it. Jesus did the right thing and was crucified. Many of the prophets in the Old Testament did the right thing and went through some pretty terrible experiences. Just doing the right thing and trusting God will not necessarily give us an easy outcome.

Doing the right thing and trusting God will, however, ensure that we are leaving the outcome to him who always does what's best. Last week I said that If we continually do what we know God would disapprove of, we open the door for Satan to work in our lives. We are essentially bowing down to whatever idol we think is more important than God, and then our lives are opened up to the enemy of our souls.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's statue, choosing to accept whatever outcome would result from their obedience to God. They knew, if they chose to give in to fear and bow down, they would close themselves off from the blessing of God and open themselves up to the power of the demonic in their lives. They could have followed the path of least resistance, but that is rarely the way to real freedom and growth. Freedom and growth always come from responding well in the hard stuff in our life. It's doing the next right thing and trusting God and then trusting God again with each step and doing the next right thing.

What God wants to do in each of our lives is teach us to trust him. Do you know what a crucible is? Here's how the dictionary defines a crucible:

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crucible | **'kru:sɪb(ə)** | noun

“a ceramic or metal container in which metals or other substances may be melted or subjected to very high temperatures.”

The crucible is a container that is able to withstand extremely high temperatures and hold molten metal without being damaged itself. Our life with Jesus is the crucible. Some of you are feeling the heat in your life right now. The temperature is getting turned up and and there are times you feel like you are not going to make it. Can anyone relate?

There is no one in Old Testament history that had it harder than Job. He lost everything. He experienced more suffering than we could ever imagine. Here is how he responded to God:

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Job 23:10–11 (NLT)

10 “But he knows where I am going. And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold. 11 For I have stayed on God’s paths; I have followed his ways and not turned aside.

God knows, better than you, what you are going through. He knows what you can handle. He knows where you are going and if you persevere through the trial, you will come out refined like pure gold. What do you need to do? Just do the next right thing and trust God.

Where do we learn to trust? We learn to trust God in the crucible of life with Jesus. Unfortunately, we don’t learn when life is easy. I so wish we could. In order to learn and grow and build our faith muscles the heat needs to be turned up so all the dross can be burned out. That is how we grow. It’s the only way.

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James 1:2–4 (NLT)

2 Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. 3 For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. 4 So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

This is how we grow. The only way we mature is if we persevere through the hard stuff in our lives and allow God to build our faith muscles.

The hard things you are going through right now, God does not want you to waste them. Hang in there. Persevere. Trust God as you are going through, but make sure you do the next right thing, and you will come out the other end stronger, with more faith and greater capacity to trust God for the next trial you have.

Jeremiah 29:11 is a verse that is often quoted to encourage people that God has ordered their future so they don’t need to worry. It is however, many times, taken out of context. The context of this prophecy by Jeremiah is that God has sent Judah into captivity to Babylon. He said they would be captive for seventy years. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were among those captives. Jeremiah sent these words to them:

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Jeremiah 29:10–14 (NLT)

10 This is what the Lord says: “You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. 11 For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. 12 In those days when you pray, I will listen. 13 If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. 14 I will be found by you,” says the Lord. “I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land.”

So, even though, you are going through a very difficult time right now, God has not forgotten you. He says, “In your pain, in your desert experience, in your time of captivity seek me with all your heart and you will find me, and you will find rest for your soul.” That is what he is saying to every single one of us here this morning, no matter what we are going through. Fix your eyes on Jesus.



***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Learning Trust***

Daniel 3:1-30

Week of March 11, 2018

Objective of this study: To learn to trust God with more.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Jeremiah 29:10-14** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

Welcome (5 minutes)

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Daniel 3:1-30.
 1. What was the context of this passage?
 2. Describe the various characters in this narrative. What are they each like?
 3. What would it have been like to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego at this time? What would some of their struggles have been?
 4. What stands out to about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response King Neb?
 5. What stands out about King Neb's responses throughout the narrative?
6. Read Jeremiah 29:10-14.
 1. What was the context of this passage?
 2. What kind of response is God asking from the exiles?

Work (30-45 minutes)

Sermon Quote: “Walking with Jesus is not about the arrival at a destination called perfection in this life. It is about the journey with Jesus and learning from him, in the struggles of life, how to love God and others better.”

1. Divide up and read these passages. What do they say about how to respond in life's difficulties?
Matthew 11:28-30; Job 23:10-11; James 1:2-4.
 1. Share some things you are struggling with in your life right now. What can you learn from these passages about how to respond?
 2. Spend the rest of the time praying for each other.
 3. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
 - A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.
 - B. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
 - C. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
 - D. **Our missionary of the month:** Sandy Ewan in South Sudan

E. **Our missionary of the week:** : **Luc & Denise Tetreault**, Assistant Director of Fellowship International

F. **Local CR church:** Ocean Crest Salvation Army Church: Captain Keith & Violet Hopkins