# Self-Denial - Why do we do it?

**Key verses Hebrews 13:13-16 -** ‘Do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased’ (v16)

## Introduction

Ask people to put their hands up if they like ice cream. What about cake? What about cake *and* ice cream? Pick out someone who responded enthusiastically to these questions. Do they think they could give up cake, ice cream and other sweet treats for a year?

This original Self-Denial suggestion was made by an officer offering to go without his pudding for one year. General William Booth thought this sacrifice was too great, but he liked the idea of people uniting together to deny having an everyday expense for a short time and donating the money saved to The Salvation Army. Self-Denial was born out of a desire to promote the message of Christ’s love and build his Kingdom. Since then, Self-Denial has proved to be an inspiration for thousands with this main purpose remaining vital. We live in a world that is far from fair and just. The Self-Denial Appeal material shows a glimpse of the impact our simple and sacrificial giving can have in providing much-needed support for other territories around the world.

As members of The Salvation Army, we are called to give sacrificially to support our work in other parts of our worldwide family, to enable them to do good work too in Jesus’ name. Our giving is a scriptural discipline that enables others to fulfil the word of the writer to the Hebrews to ‘do good and to share with others’ (Hebrews 13:16).

## Headings

So the writer says we should continually offer God a sacrifice:

### 1. ‘Sacrifice of praise’ (v15) - ***Do it willingly.***

* God loves a cheerful giver – our own attitude to giving is important.
* Is this in the right place in relation to other spiritual disciplines? It is not something ‘extra special’, but one of the personal spiritual practices on a par with prayer, reading of Scripture, obedience and love etc. Scripture does not teach that giving to God and his work is a separate act, but is an essential part of the whole spiritual life and lifestyle.
* One story Jesus told regarding generosity was about a widow who gave her last penny, without having anything at all to fall back on, except God’s promise to meet her needs as he did through Elijah and the widow at Zarapheth (1 Kings 17) who used her last bit of flour and oil to make the prophet some bread. And God kept the flour and the oil flowing. When we reach that point in submission to God’s will, he will not fail us and we will be released to experience the sheer joy of giving.

### 2. ‘The fruit of lips that openly profess his name’ (v15)– ***Do it***

### ***because you must*.**

* Many parts of the world have the freedom to confess Jesus’ name. But there are large chunks of the world where openly professing the name of Jesus is not permissible or is very restricted.
* Let our Self-Denial giving spur us to remember those of our own denomination and the Church of Christ generally for whom professing

the name of Jesus cannot be done openly.

* Our corps, our officers, our soldiers and our institutions are perhaps not always sustainable, but they are incarnational. By ignoring this, we fall into the trap of bringing a dimensionally reduced view of the human person that is statistically driven, or as somebody once said, ‘consumption machines’.
* So often around the world our officers and soldiers are living right among the people they are working with. They could live elsewhere and travel in, but they choose (feel they must) live where their people are, so that their lives ‘openly profess his name’.

### 3. ‘Do good’ (v16) - ***Do it because it is the right thing to do.***

* What is good? Is it good works? Is it good works done in kindness? Is it good works done in kindness with an understanding of how the other person is feeling? Or good works done in kindness with understanding and with respect and a desire to help the recipient to receive with dignity and become empowered to change their own future?

I wonder what the writer to the Hebrews had in mind with just that phrase ‘do good’? How we give / do good is almost as important as what we give/do. Do it with dignity. Do it to inspire dignity.

* ‘You cannot shave a man’s head in his absence’ (African proverb).You can’t do good to a person without being somehow involved with them.
* Too often we can place a few pounds or a few hundred pounds in an envelope and think that’s our duty done for another year. But the people you are helping are not ‘faraway people in faraway places’. They are our people, our brothers and sisters in The Salvation Army who, day in day out, work sacrificially to give their expertise and do good in order to empower people from all social backgrounds.
* We want the people we are serving to feel valued and empowered to develop their own lives – not just be the recipients of handouts from some church or charity or foreign nation. God values each person in this world equally, and our giving is part of the way in which we express this.
* Archbishop Tutu said: ‘Do your little bit of good where you are. It’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.’
* To ‘do good and share with others’ is about getting involved. It’s about giving thoughtfully as well as generously.

### 4. ‘…for with such sacrifices God is pleased’ (v16) - ***God is pleased***

### ***when we get it right****.*

The Hebrews writer says it so clearly: if God is pleased with our sacrifices, then we should do it as an act of worship to him.

**William Temple** (erstwhile Archbishop of Canterbury):

*‘Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness, nourishment of mind by his truth, purifying of imagination by his beauty, opening of the heart to his love, and submission of will to his purpose. And all this gathered up in adoration is the greatest of human expressions of which we are capable and therefore the chief*

*remedy for that self-centredness which is our original sin and the*

*source of all actual sin. “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy*

*him for ever.”* (Westminster Shorter Catechism)’

## Conclusion

So the challenge of Self-Denial is: ‘Is God pleased with what we are doing?’ Have we got it right in the light of what Scripture says? Our giving is not a handout. It is an act of love, a spiritual discipline, because God reminds us over and over again that we love because he first loved us. What we do is no more and no less than a response to his love for us. Are we seeking to fulfil that chief end in our lives – to glorify God?

You may want to use *SASB* 371 ‘I will offer up my life’ as part of your response as you encourage each person to ask: ‘Jesus, what shall I give; what shall I bring?’

## Discussion points:

1. How do you feel about giving money to aid people in other countries?
2. Bramwell Booth: ‘Every land is my fatherland because every land is my Father’s land.’ What difference should that make to our attitude - to the way we live?
3. How can we help to maintain the dignity of the people who will benefit from our gifts?