

sharper focus_Down by the sea

By Victor Leslie ,Lt. Colonel

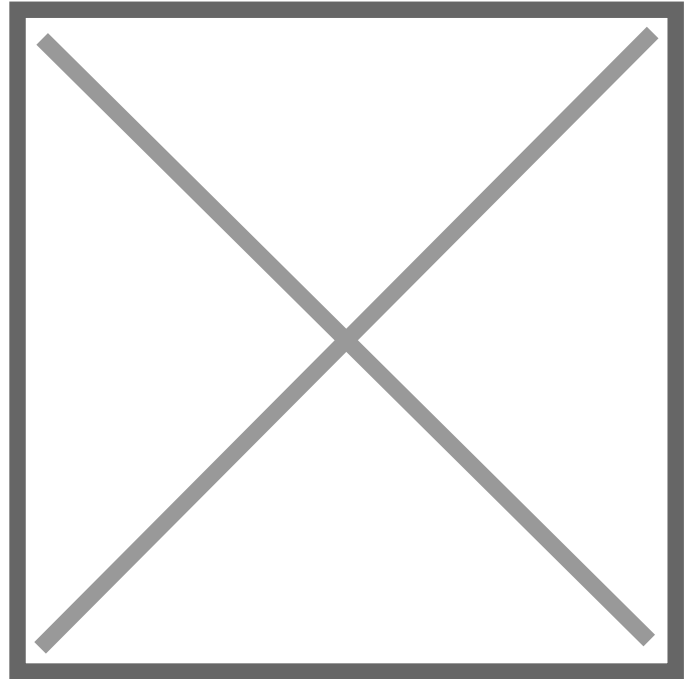
In the cool of the evening, I watch the rain fall and scan the horizon as the sun suddenly dips below the edge of the endless ocean and hides its bright orange and red colors behind the splatter of grey and purple hues of clouds that unceremoniously cover the evening sky.

I am in Antigua, the Caribbean island that boasts 365 beaches, and I have just returned from the meetings to celebrate 110 years of Salvation Army service in the island nation, which can only be described as a ballet of celebration, offering and pulsating praise.

The unique scent of colorful city streets resting against the arms of the turquoise sea water reaches me, and I inhale the fragrance of damp coconut trees swaying in the salty night air. Here in Antigua, where it is often said that “the beach is just the beginning,” my mind begins to walk a familiar route through the noiseless neighborhood of time to a place of refuge and reflection, a place where my spirit is regularly refreshed, a place somewhere—rather, anywhere—down by the sea.

Just being down by the sea, standing and gazing at the ocean, listening, reflecting, creating, learning, and discovering lessons I will never forget is freeing and edifying. Down by the sea, as the raindrops puncture the surface of the water, I notice how the ocean quickly heals itself and realize how God is able to heal the things that seem to puncture our daily lives. Down by the sea, in the pounding surf and choppy waters, I see twigs aimlessly being washed out to sea after the rain and remember that we should not simply drift with the tide—there must be purpose in our living. As the strong currents relentlessly play tug-of-war with the fishing boats down by the sea, I am reassured that it is fine to sometimes go against the tide to win the battle.

Down by the sea, as the waves faithfully whip the milky white mass of sand, I rediscover that gentleness and strength are eccentric partners and smile at the paradox that uncertainty and constancy can co-exist and fuse in perfect harmony. I watch in awe as the ocean depths raise their voice...and roar (Ps. 93:3). I see the mighty waves jump out of the water with “fortissimo-piano” power and smash into the blanketed coastline. Yet, within the uncertainty of the cadence of the next wave,



there is the moment of constancy as the smooth rhythms and patterns of the waves faithfully retreat in unending sequence stroking the sand below, incredibly unchanging, even laughing for a brief moment as the momentum begins again.

Down by the sea, in the stillness and tranquility of the evening, the huge cruise ships sail by and I confirm my answers to the theological debate of faith versus reason—there are things that cannot be explained and must be experienced! I ponder the mystery of the depth, width and magnitude of this vast body of water. My heart is in tune with Psalm 104:25: There is the sea, vast and spacious, with waters that are dark and deep, filled with pristine coral reefs and teeming with creatures beyond number—living things both large and small; waters that create a sense of infinite space and delicate beauty as the glittering sea and the illuminated sky play with each other for the right to display the stars scattered across the universe. It is a mystery that is wondrous to behold and contemplate. I cannot explain it but I have experienced it.

I am tempted to leave my soul there—down by the sea where I find refuge in the eternal and unfailing faithfulness of God. But I must return to the reality of now, bringing with me the songs and stories found only down by the sea. I think—did not Jesus always go down by sea?