

# ALL <sup>OF</sup> US

## A SPIRITUAL FRAMEWORK

ALL OF US ALL OF US ALL OF US ALL OF US ALL OF US ALL OF US ALL OF US

## FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

SALVOS YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS





# ALL OF US

## GROWING UP TODAY

This is a complicated time for all of us. There seems to be so much going on. Everywhere we go we're surrounded by the noise of modern life. We're always connected to everything happening in the world through the internet and our phones. We're constantly pressured to consider how the world sees us and to 'sell' a vision of ourselves. But with all this connection, many struggle with loneliness and mental health, failing to find people who they genuinely connect with.

Imagine how complicated it is to grow up at this time. Young people are navigating this complex world as they try to figure out who they are, where they belong, and their purpose. They are developing their identity, but trying to find a solid foundation in an ever-shifting world is difficult. They want to figure out who they are but feel the need to be acceptable to others. Social media has trained them to present a version of themselves to the world to be rated and compared to others. Many voices tell them who they need to be to be cool, popular, or attractive, but it's difficult to know who to trust. Young people struggle with perfectionism, worrying that any mistake or slip-up will diminish their worth. For some, this causes anxiety or withdrawal. In this environment, it isn't easy to feel good about yourself.

Young people are looking for the people and places where they can be themselves and find acceptance. They are trying to belong. They want to feel important, cared for, and valued

by others. Sometimes they feel the pressure to conform or change themselves so others will like them. Some young people might not feel like there's much about them that others will want. Sometimes they fear rejection, which makes building relationships and handling conflict difficult. Sometimes this fear leads young people to hide their true selves from others, leading to loneliness and isolation. They drift through life, never finding their people.

As young people grow, they learn more about the great wide world and start to consider their place in it. They need to figure out what they think about the big issues and how they'll respond. They need to find their purpose. For many young people, the world they see is what is presented to them online. Social media seemingly provides a roadmap to fame, success, and fortune – if you can be exactly what others want. Even though all of us are connected online, we don't seem to be talking to each other. Everyone has their own groups that they stick to, and people are less willing to relate and empathise with those they disagree with. The internet thrives on generating a big reaction – often scandal, strife, or anger. All the problems of the world are magnified and fed to us 24/7. This can be exhausting or discouraging. For some young people, the challenges seem too difficult, and they withdraw from trying to make change. When the pain and problems seem too vast, it's easier to scroll and swipe our way to distraction. As young people try to find their place in the world, they can struggle to find what is real and what matters.

## SEARCHING FOR SIGNIFICANCE

Young people are trying to answer the questions of their lives: who am I? Where do I belong? What's my purpose? But underneath these challenges, there are questions that all of us are asking: am I important? Do I matter? Do I have any effect on the world? We are all looking for significance, to know that our lives mean something. We need to know that we have worth and value. We need to feel like there are people we are important to, who know and love us for who we truly are. We want people to be glad to see us and miss us when we aren't around. We want to know that our presence in the world makes a difference, that we have something to offer, that the world is a different and better place because we're in it. We want to know that our lives have meaning in the grand scheme of things.

Unfortunately, many young people struggle to feel this way. As we've seen, modern life is complicated. Some young people are pushed to the edge of society, told that they aren't important or don't matter. Some young people feel like failures, like they can't get anything right. Some have no friends or strained relationships with family. They don't have people on their side. In a society that equates our worth with bank balance, attractiveness, or talent, young people on the margins of society can feel like the world

is not interested in them, or that they have nothing to offer. Sometimes hardship or trauma can diminish young people's sense of significance. When we go through tough times, all of us can feel like we don't matter.

For young people, knowing that they matter isn't just a warm fuzzy feeling. Without a sense of significance, young people are vulnerable to significant harm. Some young people might go to any measure to try to get people to like them, even compromising their own boundaries and values. Others might try to numb the pain of feeling insignificant through harmful behaviours and addictions. For some, this pain leads to mental health challenges like depression. When young people don't feel important, they can believe that nothing they do matters. They might engage in risk-taking behaviours or toxic relationships, lashing out in an unheard cry of pain. For others, they lose hope, withdraw, and can even wonder if the world would be better without them.

When young people told us about their lives, they shared about this need for significance. Some shared challenging experiences:

**“I didn't feel like I mattered honestly by anyone's standard.”**

“I didn't have any friends and felt really unwanted. At lunch times I just used to go on my phone in the bathroom.”

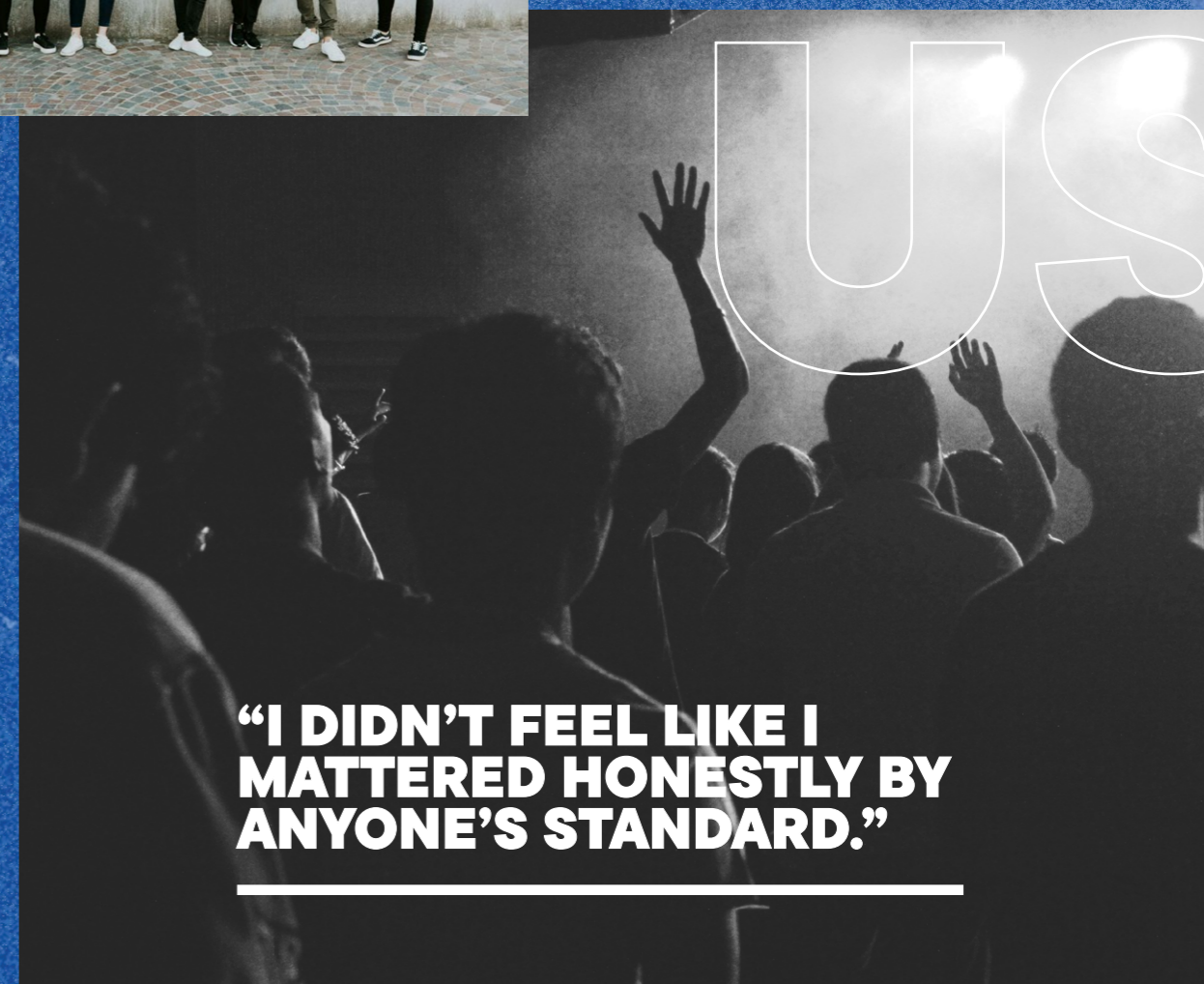
**“Much of my life I didn't know I was loved and felt like no one cared.”**

Others shared the difference it made when young people knew they were important:

“And there are challenges that comes in your life sometimes when you want to give up, but [you don't] because the people around you make you feel like you're important to them. No matter how you might think about your life, that your life is worthless now and there's nothing about your life that can come good out of. But you are seeing those people you know and giving you that hope. In the minds or eyes of other people, you might see that's not necessary, but that is a big pivotal change. It's really something that keep somebody breathing.”

**“I want to be a positive influence in these kids' lives, and give them the wisdom that I never had, that they are important, no matter what they do or what they want to be. And if the only thing I teach them is, that they are loved, and that they are important, then that's my win.”**

“I just want all of these people who feel like they're ignored, or obsolete, or even the people who do have attention, to feel like they matter.”



**“I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE I MATTERED HONESTLY BY ANYONE'S STANDARD.”**

## THE GOOD NEWS

When young people know that they matter, their lives can be transformed. While growing up in the modern world is challenging, there is Good News for all of us.

As young people struggle to find their worth and value, the Good News is that God loves them. They are valuable because God has created them (Mt 10:29-31). They don't have to earn this love or be exceptional (Rm 5:8). They don't have to have it all together. This love is for all of us, whether we are impressive to others or not (1 Sam 16:8). Whilst we talk about God's love a lot, as young people come to understand the depth of God's love for them, they can learn to love themselves. When they question or doubt their worth or significance, they can remember how much they matter to God.

When young people are struggling to connect and find their place with others, the Good News is there is a place for all of us in God's family (1 Jn 3:1). In God's family, we are known and accepted for who we truly are (Ps 139:13). Instead of needing approval of others and fearing rejection, we can learn to love others and show them the love of God (1 Jn 4:18). When there is conflict, we can work for reconciliation (Mt 5:23-25). In God's family, we all matter to God and each other.

As young people look to make their mark on their world, the Good News is all of us have a

part to play in God's Kingdom (1 Cor 12:12-14). Like a mosaic, each of us brings something unique and makes up part of the whole. If we were missing, something would be lost. We each have gifts and an opportunity to make a difference. When we are confronted by the pain of our lives and the world, we can bring God's love to make a difference.

This is the hope we can offer young people. When they know that they are significant no matter what happens, they can be confident in themselves. They can be brave and resilient to face the challenges life throws them. They can be friends and bridge-builders, connecting positively with others. They can face the future with hope and think about the needs of others. They can find their life in giving it away for others.

Young people told us about the acceptance, confidence, and purpose they found with God and in their faith communities:

**"Whilst I was at the Salvation Army I started feeling more comfortable, started grasping that 'hey, it's ok to be who I am'."**

"Coming from a life full of judgement I expected that at church, but I was loved. Church isn't for perfect people but for broken people."

"I felt accepted even though I had issues, but being in a healthy community was empowering and helped me change my life."

"They told us that we mattered, they we were ok, that if we wanted to, we could change."

"I feel His presence. I feel more than just the basic feelings and emotions that people would have. I feel connected. Feel somewhat worthy to be a child of God. To be someone's child. To be at least someone... I'm worthy of His love, of his presence."

"I want to be a positive influence in kids' lives, and give them the wisdom that I never had, that they are important, no matter what they do or what they want to be. ... if I can get them to realise that they are important, and they can chase any of their dreams, and do whatever they want to be, be the person who they want to be, then that's a good thing, rather than them realising maybe much later on in life. If I can save them now, as early on as I can, then that's what I want to be able to do."



**"I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE I MATTERED HONESTLY BY ANYONE'S STANDARD."**

## IT TAKES ALL OF US

How do we help young people navigate the complexities of growing up in the modern world? How do we help them find the solid foundations of God's love? The truth is that nobody makes it on their own. We all need people in our lives to support us, teach us, and encourage us. Young people need all kinds of people who will love and care for them: parents, carers, grandparents, youth leaders, teachers, corps officers, coaches, mentors, friends, congregations, and churches. They need all of us.

Youth ministries can help young people find their significance in God's love. We don't just tell young people that they matter, we show them. When we welcome and accept young people, we can open the doors of their hearts to the truth that each of them is important. We can teach and model what it looks like to trust and believe what God says about each of us – that we are loved, unique, and worthy. We can help young people make connections and find belonging. We can help young people find a sense of purpose and make a difference for others.

When we consider the challenges that young people face today it can be daunting. It's difficult to see how we can make a difference in the complicated circumstances young people are growing up in. But the Good News is that we are not on our own. With God and each other, all of us can work together to make a positive difference in the lives of young people.

Young people need communities to show them how important and special they are. They need people who can show them God's love. They need you, and they need me. They need all of us.

