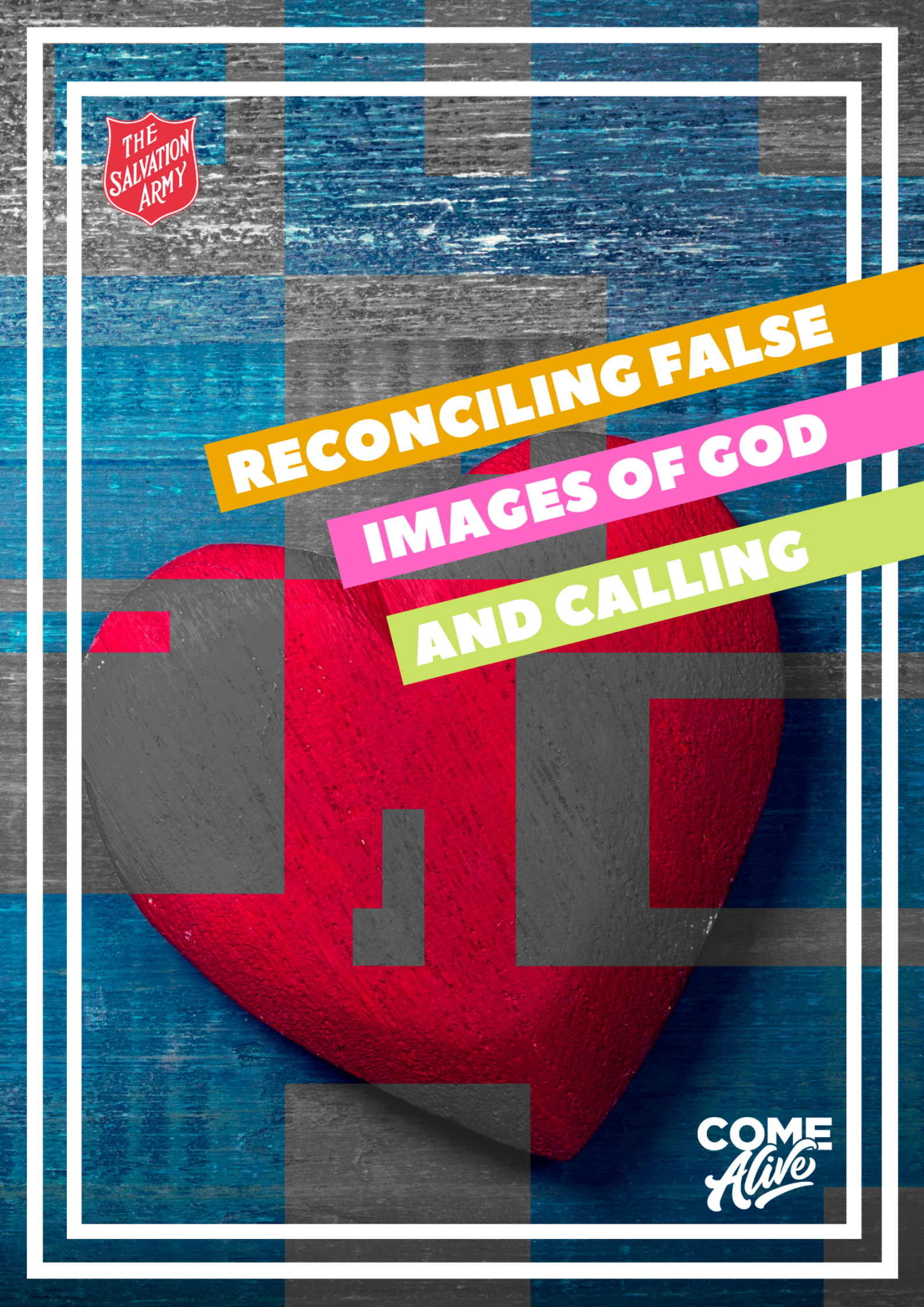
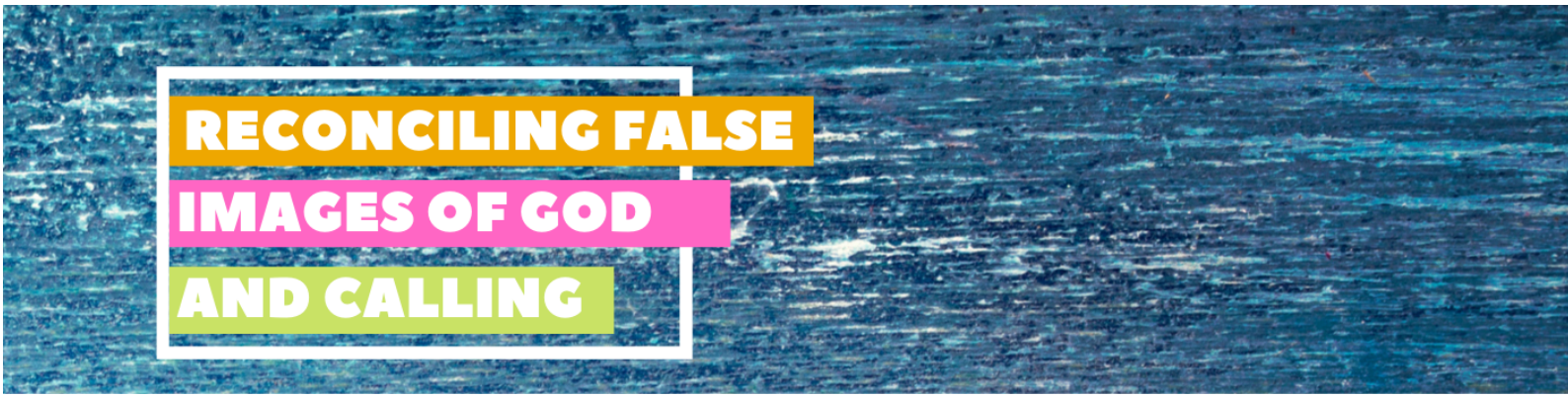

THE SALVATION ARMY
RECONCILING FALSE
IMAGES OF GOD
AND CALLING
COME Alive



INTRODUCTION

When it comes to calling, have you ever wrestled with any of the following questions:

- "What if I don't want to go/move to where God is calling me?"
- “What if I don’t want to do that type of ministry?”
- “Will I be stuck with second best for my life if I don’t pursue God’s call?”
- “What if I choose wrong?”
- “Do we even have a decision to make when it comes to calling – aren’t we just meant to say yes?”

When we think about it, the answers to these questions are heavily influenced by who we perceive God to be. Meaning, that our decisions and how we respond to God’s calling are shaped by the image of God we carry.

So today we’re going look at three incorrect images of God and how they influence our decision-making, followed by three positive images of God and their flow-on effect.

1. Negative Images of God

PPT #1: Authoritarian without Empathy

This image paints God as a distant figure who is only interested in accomplishing ministry objectives. Although God may speak to us at times or give us a calling, there isn’t much care or consideration given to our circumstances or our dreams and desires.

In short, go where you are called. Don’t question. Don’t delay. Do it and do it now.

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If we hold onto this view, then we may feel God doesn't value our family, friends, or support structures in our lives. As a result, even though we might say yes and embrace that call, there's a high chance that we will end up feeling angry or resentful towards God, carrying bitterness or mistrust in our hearts towards God.

PPT #2: A Stern Judge

Some of us might hold the image that God is a stern judge, waiting to announce His verdict on us, so better not make any mistakes. This creates a subconscious belief of needing good works for salvation and acceptance.

This may play out in your decision-making process in the following ways:

- Calling comes through a defining moment in time or experience, rather than a process developed in relationship.
- We only have one chance to get it right - so we may rush instead of entering into a time of discernment.
- We only have one chance to get it right - so if we say no, feelings of guilt and condemnation will follow us.

This view of God brings with it a lot of pressure, fear, and a tendency to rush into things.

As a result, in our desire to please God, we may incidentally cut off the voices of others that could bring perspective and help guide us to make wise choices.

Without fostering an open and honest relationship with God – and other leaders around us - we may take on feelings of disempowerment and make decisions blindly without taking the time to process our feelings or fears.

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PPT #3. Conditional Love

We may base our relationship with God on more of a transactional basis. Sometimes we unknowingly set conditions of the call. For example, if God does this for me or sets up the call in such a way it ticks all my boxes, then I will follow Him.

Or, I'll only go if God calls me to this place, or provides me with this opportunity. We may even hold onto the belief that we need to always please God in order to receive his love and acceptance.

If we hold onto this view, then our choices will be heavily influenced by the need to feel accepted, loved, and liked by God. If we fail to respond to God quickly, we may worry that we've endlessly disappointed God or feel cut-off from Him in some way.

In this case, we ultimately end up making decisions out of a place of fear rather than peace.

Point

As you can imagine, holding onto any one of these false understanding of God will dramatically impact our motivations, taint how we make decisions, and at times confuse us on how to respond to an invitation from God.

Transition

So, the three negative and false images of God that prevent us from making healthy decisions are:

1. God as an authoritarian without empathy.
2. God is a stern judge.
3. God's love is conditional.

So, what are the three positive images of God that help us reconcile calling with God's character and healthy decision making? Let's have a look.

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2. Positive Images of God

PPT #1: Authoritarian with Compassion

God is our supreme authority, but God never removes our free will or sets out to harm us. We are not merely a resource that God uses to accomplish His plans. Scripture tells us that we are God's children, co-heirs and co-labourers with Christ.

But what about "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24). This is a challenging one because Jesus did say that. However, Jesus also said,

> **"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt 6:28-33).**

God values us and the support structures He has brought into our lives. Yes, God will call us out of our comfort zones, but God does so because He has already set up new ones for us.

If we find ourselves called to a new environment, we can trust that God is already there. Knowing that God has empathy and compassion for us makes it easier for us to trust Him.

PPT Meditate on these verses:

- God is the God who pursues us (Psalm 23:6).
- God is the God who will guide us (Phil 3:15).
- God is our loving heavenly Father (Rom 5:7-11).

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PPT #2: A Grace-filled Judge

Scripture does tell us that God will judge every person. But Scripture also reveals that God is a graceful judge and sent Jesus to forgive our sins and be our saviour. It was because of love that God sent His one and only Son, not the anger or vengeance of a grumpy judge in heaven.

God's default setting isn't one of condemnation, but one that seeks to draw all people into relationship with Him.

God knows that life is challenging – which is why God has revealed Himself as our helper.

With this view in mind, we are empowered by a more accurate image of God, one that understands God is for us, and not against us.

God has a heart full of love towards us and comes alongside us in a supportive manner. This image of God enables us to be more vulnerable with God in prayer, relying more on His grace and strength to make the right decisions.

PPT Meditate on these verses:

- But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation(Rom 5:8-9).
- For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in ourtime of need (Heb 4:14-6).

PPT #3: Unconditional Love

Jesus came to reveal God's heart and attitude towards us (Jn 1:18, 14:9). God's deepest desire is to be in a life-giving, loving relationship with us.

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If we know that God accepts us, loves us, values us, cares for us, then we can make decisions to follow Him out of a place of peace, security, and joy. Knowing this empowers us to try - and if we fail - to try again.

If we feel we need more time to discern God's will, we won't feel rushed or pressured to make a hasty decision, because we trust God will still bless us. Obedience and steps of faith are much easier when we operate from that state of internal peace – they come as a natural response to the goodness of God.

PPT Meditate on these verses:

- Everyone who honors your name can trust you, because you are faithful to all who depend on you (Ps 9:10).
- What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:21).
- When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put the ways of childhood behind me (1 Cor 13:11).
- Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3).
- There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear (1 Jn 4:18).

PPT CONCLUSION

With thorough reflection we can have a healthy image of God.

1. Instead of seeing God as an authoritarian without empathy we can see God as having supreme authority while remaining compassionate and kind.
2. Instead of seeing God as a stern judge we can see God as a judge who is filled with grace and mercy.
3. Instead of holding onto a false belief that God's love is conditional we can know that God's love is unconditional.

Let's hold onto the right images of God.

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PRAYER

Lord Jesus, please help all of us to receive a true understanding of who God the Father is, and His loving kindness towards us.

CALL TO ACTION

For more resources on calling you can visit:

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