

Giants of the Faith

William Booth: The General of the Slums (1829–1912)

"While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while little children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight... I'll fight to the very end!"

His Early Life: William Booth was born into modest circumstances on April 10, 1829, in Sneinton, a suburb of Nottingham, England. He passed away on August 20, 1912, in London, England. He stands as one of the most radical embodiments of active, whole-life faith in church history. Booth experienced a profound religious conversion as a teenager, recording in his diary the lifelong resolve: *"God shall have all there is of William Booth."* Though initially trained as a Methodist minister, Booth grew increasingly restless with the comfortable, middle-class pew-culture of 19th-century Victorian England, which largely closed its doors to the destitute, the alcoholic, and the outcast.

The Pioneering Work: In 1865, alongside his brilliant theological partner and wife, Catherine, Booth abandoned traditional pulpits to launch the Christian Mission in the squalor of London's East End. By 1878, envisioning a relentless spiritual warfare against sin and systemic poverty, he restructured the movement along military lines. Adopting the title of "General," Booth outfitted his followers in military-style uniforms, issued ranks, and created the organization known today as The Salvation Army.

The Movement: Booth's philosophy was famously anchored in the pragmatic synthesis of spiritual and physical redemption: **"Soup, Soap, and Salvation."** He fiercely believed that it was practically impossible to preach the Gospel of eternal salvation to a man whose stomach was entirely empty or whose body was freezing in the streets. Under his leadership, the Army established food banks, shelters, rescue homes for women, and legal aid for the poor. His groundbreaking 1890 social manifesto, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, laid out an exhaustive blueprint for eradicating poverty and lifting up society's absolute lowest tiers. This uncompromising mission did not come easily. Booth and his soldiers faced fierce public hostility, violent riots, and organized opposition (such as the antagonistic "Skeleton Army") that pelted them with stones and subjected them to arrests.

The Legacy: Yet, driven by an unshakeable love for Christ and a profound hatred of suffering, Booth fought to his final breath. By the time he passed away in 1912 at the age of 83, his once-mocked street-corner mission had exploded into a global phenomenon, proving that the church's true power of an honorable life is found not in comfort or prestige, but in rolling up one's sleeves to serve "the least of these."

The Five Principles of William Booth's life and ministry:

- 1. Live for others:** Purpose comes from serving humanity rather than focusing solely on oneself.
- 2. Do something:** Love must be practical, active, and hands-on instead of purely theoretical.
- 3. Keep the fire burning:** Faith requires deliberate, daily tending so that inner zeal does not fade.
- 4. Stay close to God:** Action remains deeply rooted in spiritual transformation and intimacy with the Creator.
- 5. Finish well:** Endurance matters most, fighting for the vulnerable with dedication until the very end