



Alpha Prison Ministries Newsletter

January 2015 Edition

"I was in prison and you came to visit me." Matthew 25:36

Happy New 2015 From APM

I've never been particularly fond of new years resolutions because they are so prone to fail but the beginning of a new year lends itself well to fresh new starts and setting new goals. Consequently, I don't make resolutions but that doesn't stop me from setting goals whether it is at the beginning of the year or some other time.

As I revealed in the November newsletter, I became a Christian 32 years ago that month. Through a challenge at the end of 1983 to choose a yearly Bible verse for 1984, I opted not to consider it a new years resolution but a goal to focus on that year. It ended up not being my 1984 verse but a lifetime challenge that still is just as integral going into 2015 as it was then.

That 1984 passage that became my lifetime goal is Philippians 3:12-14: "Not that I have already obtained all this or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (NIV)

I've never chosen a yearly verse since because I'm still working on that one. I've memorized several other verses and passages but none have been as challenging. I've set many other goals at different times of the year but none have been as important. Like Paul, I identify with not being perfect but I'm so grateful I don't have to be.

God himself "qualifies" us (Colossians 1:12) because we're naturally inept and unable to qualify ourselves. You don't need a new years resolution to top that! We're not off the hook though, we accept his gift and expound on it, but we are free to take what he has graciously given us and live life to the fullest without any baggage from our past.

How incredibly liberating! God doesn't use our past to determine our future. We get a fresh start under any and all circumstances. The beginning of a new year is a great time to remember this, even more so if you fall into the trap of making and breaking new years resolutions.

You've already received many well wishes for this new year but we are adding another one because with God it keeps getting better.

Visit us online at:

www.alphapm.org

- ◆ Remember our Alpha House residents in your prayers. Current residents are: Charlie, Rob, Joe, Elmer, Kevin, Tim, and Charles. All residents are doing well but still face the challenges of reentry into society after prison.
- ◆ APM continues to face budget shortages but thank the Lord that he is our source and we don't have to worry or fret. We neither hide the fact that the challenges exist nor pressure anyone to give. We do ask that you seek the Lord on your role so you don't miss what he wants to do through you, and that no one else called to give would miss out either.
- ◆ The APM Board of Directors will be voting on January 15th concerning financial support of another prison ministry. This may seem odd considering our budget shortages but God's ways are higher than our own.

Prayer Requests

JANUARY 2015

Please cut around these prayer requests and use this as a bookmark in your Bible.

Alpha
Prison Ministries

ADVOCAATE

Open Floodgates Not Just Doors

The subject of tithing and giving often flares up negative reactions with many people but thankfully that would not be true for our supporters. It is also not true for APM Board members.

I'm especially grateful for this because that's exactly what we talked about during our devotional time at the December Board meeting. I prepared that devotional without having to worry about any of our Board members getting upset and we had a wonderful discussion which included a new challenge we will be voting on this month on the 15th.

As I write this, the final 2014 numbers for APM finances are not in yet, but we are looking at several thousand behind budget for the year. Although we're mentioning this fact to make you aware, that's not the purpose of this newsletter nor will we engage in arm-twisting.

In fact, the devotional included a quote from The Message Bible because I love the way it translates Paul's principle on giving in 2 Corinthians 9:7:

*I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. **That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting.** God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.*

Giving is to be planned and well thought out. That doesn't mean we never give spontaneously but it does mean it's not our normal practice.

For me, I can honestly say I *delight in the giving*. That's not a bragging statement except to brag on God. I never have to worry about lack because God has invited me into his inner circle. He's not stingy, his hands are wide open and since he's already given his Son, why should I worry about anything else?

Although that kind of anxiety is now far behind me, I was reminded how volatile a subject it can be in a recent conversation with Leon our Executive Director. He mentioned that several Alpha House residents have visited the church I attend and he hears all positive except for one item that often gets mentioned.

That item is money. The perception is the common myth that all the church wants is money. I responded with what I know to be true of my Pastor. He knows that when he stands before the Lord he will give an account of what he taught his flock, and that includes biblical teaching on the subject of giving.

This fact upsets a lot of people but God doesn't have all of you until he has your money. The first time you hear that it's understandable that you may not react well to it. Once you understand it though, it opens doors, more

like floodgates into your life.

For many of you reading this, it serves as encouragement to keep doing what you're doing and live generously. For others, I encourage you not to get mad but get free. As a born again Christian and citizen of God's kingdom, rescued from the domain of the devil, you are entitled to a completely different attitude toward money than the world.

Human beings have an incredible bend toward the negative and religion is often guilty of exploiting that. That shouldn't be too surprising since religion is the default substitute for fallen man. Unless you know God by being restored to him through Christ, you will find some kind of religion even if you claim it's not a religion.

That negative bend also creates a distorted view toward God. It creates ideas like, "God's gonna get you if you don't tithe." I'm sure you've heard that one before just as I have. God doesn't have to do anything if you don't obey his commands; the devil will have you for lunch because you forfeit the protection you're entitled to.

Malachi 3 does include God's declaration that "you are under a curse" by disobedience but not so he can hit us over the head with it, he's telling us explicitly how to **not** be under a curse so we can be blessed. He even goes so far as to tell us we can "test" him and it's the only place we're permitted to test him. The main focus is on the blessing and telling us how to get it, not the curse.

When you think about it, we are born cursed. Our default inheritance is curse. The entire Bible is about how we got in this mess and how to get out of it. The term *born again* is often misused but its biblical meaning is about being reborn out from under the curse, restored to God in our pre-fallen condition.

The same is true of every command in the Bible. It's the instruction manual on how to lift every curse from our lives. Your money is cursed by default. Your natural state is to love money. The amazing thing is the less of it you have, the more likely you are to love it. I know that from experience. Generosity will liberate you from the love of money and the curse that goes with it.

I mentioned that the Board will be voting on a new challenge this month. I heard a well known preacher state that his ministry tithes. Although I and the other Board members are tithers and givers, it escaped my thought patterns to tithe as a ministry. We do make a point of using all the funds we receive responsibly, now we will be voting on supporting another prison ministry to see what God does in 2015. Your support of Alpha will extend even further this way.

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Newsletter written/edited by APM Board member Steve Chittenden

APM Financial Summary January-November 2014

Total \$ Income:
88,142.00 (budget)
74,823.29 (actual)

Net \$ Expense:
87,207.30 (budget)
90,040.60 (actual)



Alpha
Prison Ministries

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APM is an **undenominational Christ-centered ministry** to prisoners and ex-offenders