

A MESSAGE OF HOPE, comfort and freedom in Jesus Christ

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“Discovering Our Purpose” by Kyle Murphy

First, on behalf of the Board of Directors of Message of Hope Jail and Prison Ministry, I would like to wish each of you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

With the New Year upon us, many of us will commit to making (and attempting to keep) certain resolutions. I thought it might be interesting to find out what the most common New Year’s resolutions are, so I searched online and found: (1) Stay fit and healthy, (2) Lose weight, (3) Enjoy life to the fullest, (4) Spend less, save more and (5) Spend more time with family and friends.

These are all commendable resolutions and great goals to strive for but...my challenge to you – rather than conform to resolutions such as those listed above – is to resolve in this New Year to find out what God’s plan for your life is; to discover what your purpose is.

Our quarterly scripture verse comes from Ephesians 2:10. In this verse we are told that God has “prepared in advance” the work He would have us do. We are each given certain gifts and talents. In addition, we each have our own unique strengths and personality. God created each of us with a purpose and provided us with these traits and they are part of why He calls you and me His “handiwork” (also translated as His “masterpiece” in other Bible translations).

In our attempt at discovering our purpose, many of us may get stuck with trying to find the precise niche we are

called to. While I believe God does call some of us to specific ministries, I also believe He calls all of us to live a life according to the example His Son, Jesus Christ, set for us. God prepared in advance for us to live according to His will and for His glory. Time and time again in his epistles, Paul reminds his readers of this. In addition to our quarterly scripture verse, see also Romans 12:1; Colossians 3:17; and Philippians 1:27 for some examples of these reminders.

In the last quarterly newsletter, I shared how I had been struggling with depression. I found that meditating on verses such as Genesis 1:27 and Ephesians 2:10 – which remind me that I am made in God’s image and that He calls me His handiwork – was beneficial in helping me overcome the negative thoughts that accompany depression. Simply recognizing these truths, though, is not enough to sustain me.

While there is comfort in knowing that I am special to God, I was created for something more than just to exist. As Paul stated, I was “created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” The same is true for you. You were “created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

What does this mean for us, then? I believe this means that if we are to enjoy the fullness of this life – as God defines fullness rather than how the world defines it – we need to truly accept

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Quarterly Scripture Focus:

Ephesians 2:10

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

A Look Back

Over the last year, we were blessed with many opportunities to serve. We praise God that He allows us to continue in this work and are grateful for all He has done in 2016 and excited for what He has in store for 2017. As a quick recap of what Message of Hope Jail and Prison Ministry provides, please see the following summary of programs:

Next Step Christian Recovery: A Christ-centered Twelve Step program devoted to helping its members break the cycle of addiction in their lives. It is for any type of addiction. Class members are given a Bible-based workbook and attend group meetings where they help each other work through problems of their past and support each other's efforts to change their thoughts and behaviors.

Voices for Christ...from behind the narrow windows: A web-based ministry dedicated to the Christian voices behind the narrow windows of prison. It provides them with an opportunity to communicate how Christ has changed their lives. They are able to submit words of encouragement, lessons, poems/hymns and testimonies in order to be published on the ministry's website and Facebook page.

Correspondence Courses: These are comprehensive study-by-mail courses through which the students can discover a meaningful and personal relationship with God. The courses are designed to change the student's way of thinking in order to change their way of living.

Message of Hope Card Ministry: An aspect of the ministry in which we send birthday cards, Christmas cards and cards of encouragement to our friends inside who are affiliated with the ministry in an effort to share the love of Jesus Christ with them.

Message of Hope Prayer Team: A team of Prayer Warriors committed to praying for our friends inside who request prayers for themselves or family members.

We are pleased to share with you some of the statistics that were collected from 2016. In our Next Step Christian Recovery program, we had 101 individuals who attended at Carson City Correctional along with another 89 at Macomb Correctional and 108 at Macomb County Jail!

There were well over 300 submissions received by Voices for Christ from our ministry partners inside in 2016. To date, we have received submissions from 89 men and women from facilities within Michigan, California, Arkansas and Virginia. Overall, there are nearly 700 posts currently published on the website!

We had 45 students enrolled in correspondence courses throughout 2016 and issued 23 certificates. Our instructors distributed approximately 400 lessons by mail to students seeking a closer relationship with God!

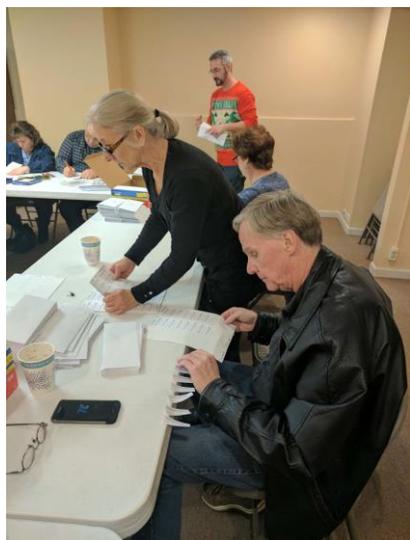
A Look Ahead

In Matthew 7:7 we read the words of Jesus, "Ask and it will be given to you..." Truth be told, asking for help is not something I ever been very good at. God is working on me with this but it is a process. That being said, I come to you asking for your help in one particular area in which we would like to move forward in the year ahead.

The need for outreach volunteers is huge. An outreach volunteer is someone who visits with our friends inside one-on-one setting in the visiting room. Many of our friends inside do not receive visits of any type. An hour or two away from it all to sit and talk with someone who cares goes a long way. Training is provided and this is something you can do on your own time as your schedule allows.

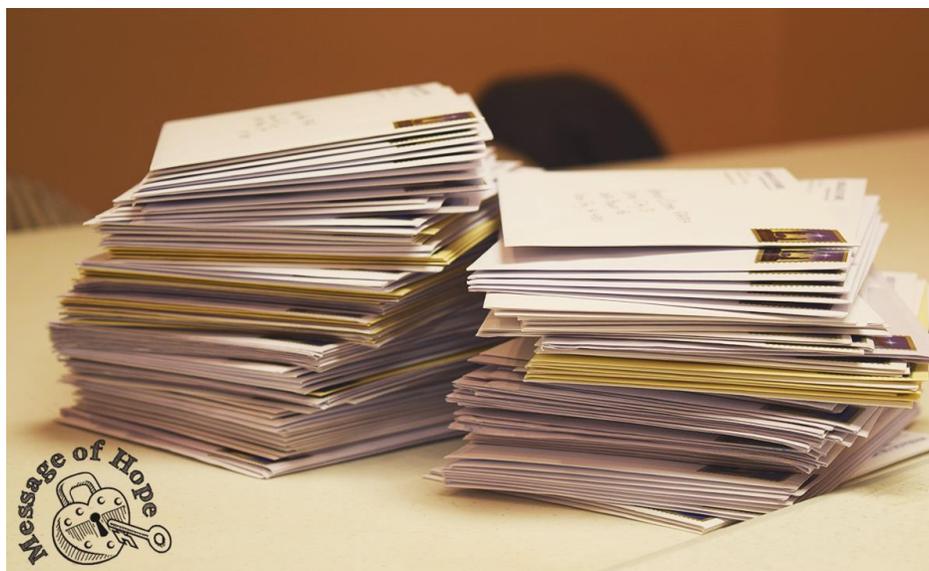
For anyone who may be interest in getting involved in this way please know that no upfront commitment is required other than the couple hours needed for the training. We ask that you spend some time in prayer to determine if God has prepared you for the work of an outreach volunteer!

1st Annual Message of Hope Christmas Card Assembly Party



We held our 1st Annual Christmas Card Assembly Party this year. We had twelve volunteers come together in order to stamp, sign and seal nearly 200 Christmas cards for our friends inside. Cards were sent to brothers and sisters in Christ at 27 facilities in 3 states (Michigan, Missouri and California). We are so blessed to have such loving and caring volunteers and are grateful to each one of them for helping us share the love of Jesus Christ with so many. It is our hope that many were encouraged during the Christmas season by these expressions of love.

Our thanks as well to Macomb Christian Church for allowing us the use of their facilities for this event! We are already looking forward to next year's party! Rumor has it that Kyle will be sporting another "ugly Christmas sweater."



Next Step Christian Recovery

This past year has been quite amazing in regard to our Next Step Christian Recovery program. We continue to hold weekly meetings at Macomb Correctional Facility (MRF), Carson City Correctional (DRF) and Macomb County Jail (MCJ).

One of the members of the class at MRF has taken on the role of facilitator on numerous occasions and, I don't mind saying, is doing a far greater job than I ever could. Thank you Tore Price for everything you have brought to Next Step at MRF. It is wonderful to witness his progression into the role of facilitator. That is what Jesus Christ called each of us to do – make disciples.

I'd also like to publicly thank Tim Pelfrey for his faithfulness to the program at MRF. He has been in the class since it began in 2012 and just celebrated 4 straight years with us. As one of the group's founders he also leads us in praise and worship each week.

Hunter Tokar has also experienced a great deal of success in the program he is leading at DRF. Hunter has reached many souls for Jesus Christ through Next Step in the last year and handed out over 100 certificates of completion! I praise God for his hard work, dedication and willingness to serve our Lord by leading others to Him.

We are also excited to have started a Next Step Christian Recovery group – separate and apart from Message of Hope – at our home congregation, Macomb Christian Church (MCC). Keri and I have partnered with another couple, Marshall and Maria, in helping those of our congregation and community break the cycle of addiction in their lives as well as build a closer relationship with God.

At one particular meeting a month or so ago, my worlds collided (in an incredible way) when two former members of Next Step at MRF along with a former member of Next Step at MCJ were in attendance at the new Monday night meeting. It was so uplifting and a great encouragement to me personally to see the way God is using this program to work in the lives of its members who are willing to put the steps and His Holy Word to work in their lives and recovery.

We look forward to what God has in store for the New Year and ask for your prayers and support in helping us to expand this program further.

In closing, I would like to share the following article which was published in the most recent While We Wait Prison Ministry quarterly newsletter. It was written by one of our Next Step Christian Recovery members at DRF and is an excellent description of what this program is all about.

I attend a program called Next Step Christian Recovery. It is a 12-step Christ based recovery program for those who have strongholds in their lives, which pretty much includes all of us.

The friendship and love I have experienced in the program is something I have not experienced in any other program. There is just something special about the way Next Step Christian Recovery is run and the way that a bond has developed between the men at the small group tables.

Previously whenever I heard someone say "12-step program" or "Small Group" I was not interested. Both terms in my opinion are just wore out. However based on all of the great things I had heard about the program here I thought I'd give it a try and I'm so glad I did. My relationship with God has gone to a whole new level because I have allowed Him to lead me through this program. He has used Next Step Christian Recovery to show me some things about myself that I needed to change, some things I needed to focus on and some things I just had to let go.

Next Step Christian Recovery is not just for those struggling with drug and alcohol addiction, it is for all of us struggling with sin in general. I have previously attended AA and NA and some other programs but Next Step is different. The focus is on Jesus Christ and my relationship with Him, moving from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. In other programs the focus was on me and what I had to change by working the steps. The opportunity to go through and continue in this program has made a HUGE impact on not only my relationship with Christ but my relationship with those around me as well as my family and loved ones on the outside.

Taking the Next Step,
Mark K.

...continued from page 1

Paul's words. We have to believe in the depths of our soul that we are God's handiwork AND we are created Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Having accepted this truth, if you feel so inclined as to resolve to stay fit and healthy, lose weight, or spend less save more in this New Year than so be it – those are commendable goals and good will most likely come from keeping resolutions such as those. But, if you wish to more fully realize the peace and joy of this life, resolve instead to seek God's plan for your life.

If you aren't convinced that God is calling you to a particular ministry then stick with what Jesus shared were the greatest commandments: "Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And...love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37, 39). You can't go wrong with living according to those principles!

Again, as we step into this New Year, let's do so with the knowledge that we are God's masterpieces and He has prepared in advance the work He would have us do! Seek Him and His purpose for your life in this New Year!!

THANK YOU
FROM
MESSAGE OF HOPE

In looking back over the last year, we have many people to be thankful for. We ended 2015 and began 2016 with an urgent request for instructors for our correspondence courses. We are overjoyed to be starting 2017 with ten brothers and sisters in Christ who are faithfully serving in this regard! Our thanks go out to the following...

To our Correspondence Course Instructors: due to your willingness to serve we have been able to fulfill every request received over the last year from those seeking to know more about God and His Word.

To our Next Step Christian Recovery volunteers: Ralph, who attends every Wednesday night at MRF with a smile on his face and full of the Holy Spirit; Hunter and Archie who started and have been facilitating the Next Step Christian Recovery program at DRF every Thursday night since it began. Ms. Andrejewski and Chaplain Adamson for allowing us to serve at their facilities as well as Chaplains Steve and Robin Malek who provide us the privilege of ministering to those at the Macomb County Jail every Friday evening.

To our Prayer Warriors: Dale, Marshall and Keri. May God bless you for the time you devote to lifting up the prayers of our friends inside.

To our Generous Donors: Without your willingness to so freely share what God has blessed you with we would not be able to continue to provide the programs and resources we do! Thank you as well to Gerord Robinson, one of our brothers in Christ who attends Next Step Christian Recovery, who has made a decision to pay it forward by contributing to the ministry.

To Roseville Church of Christ: For your continued support of this ministry! Once again, they provided ALL the workbooks for ALL the recovery classes we offer. What a blessing!

To our Social Media Manager: We are especially excited for the creativity and new ideas that Sarah has brought to the ministry. If you haven't visited our Facebook page lately please do so to get a glimpse of the wonderful creations she has designed and posted.

MESSAGE OF HOPE
PO Box 221
Washington, MI 48094

Website address:

www.messageofhope.org

Interested in receiving our
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Message of Hope Prayer Team:
prayingforyou@messageofhope.org

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PO Box 221
Washington, MI 48094
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