

## **ARM Prison Outreach International**

**"Ministers' Minute" Volume XI Number 3**

### **"Essential Equipment - #2: Purpose"**

Jeff Strite

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Editor's Note: This "MM" is an email sermon, the 3rd of 2012 --123rd overall-- in a series we are sending as an encouragement to Christians around the world. This is the first message in our current series. [It is my prayer that this message by Jeff Strite will encourage you and honor God.](#) Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, use it or components of it! May God bless your labors!

-- Rod Farthing, Development Director

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## **ARM QUICK FACTS:**

### Baptistry Report

#### **ARM sent 5 baptistries to prisons in Jan-Feb 2012**

LA County Jails -- Santa Clarita, CA  
Rockcastle Co. Detention Center -- Mt. Vernon, KY  
ADC - Benton Unit -- Benton, AR 72015  
New Castle Correctional Facility -- New Castle, IN  
Jenkins Correctional Center -- Millen, GA

#### **ARM sent 4 baptistries to the mission field in Jan-Feb 2012**

Khasi Hills, India  
Kitgum, Uganda  
Okayama City, Japan  
Eastern Europe

#### **ARM sent 1 baptistry to the military in Jan-Feb 2012**

Bamberg, Germany

Since 1973, ARM has donated over **1,480** baptistries to prisons!  
In addition, hundreds have been shipped to military bases and mission fields!

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## ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT - ON PURPOSE

### TEXT: Phil. 3:7-14

QUESTION: Do you know what your purpose is? What is it that drives you, what motivates you? (give the audience time to write down what they think their purpose is).

OPEN: One of the most challenging courses at the University of Denver was a business law class in which the professor gave difficult true & false tests. During one of the more exasperating exams, the professor noticed another student flipping a coin. The professor approached him. "Son are you guessing on this test?" he asked. "No sir," replied the student. "I'm just checking my answers."

APPLY: There are people who seem to live their whole lives that way. They have no direction, no purpose, no goals. They live their lives by flipping coin, drifting along aimlessly in life.

ILLUS: When I worked at a factory near my hometown, we had a term for that type of person: they were fat, dumb & happy.

Yogi Berra: "If you don't know where you're going, you're likely to end up someplace else."

ILLUS: In preparation for a similar sermon, a large church went out onto the street and asked that question: "What is your purpose in life?" Here were some of the responses:

- > One person answered: "I can't say I know the purpose... I think after I die I'll find out what the purpose of life is."
- > Another: "My purpose? I think my purpose is... I don't know."
- > Some did have an idea of their purpose in life and their answers indicated their purpose in life centered around themselves:
  - to have fun
  - be happy
  - to have a good time and enjoy my life
  - to have as much fun as possible in as short a time as possible

Now, there's nothing wrong with enjoying life. But if that's your WHOLE purpose in life, there's an emptiness to it. It's like Cotton Candy - all taste, but no substance.

- > Others had pretty good answers, ones even Christians might give:
  - \* to live a moral life
  - \* to raise a good family

\* to raise up kids to have a good future.

But I suggest to you that all of those “purpose statements” were short sighted. In essence not big enough for the Christian. Ecclesiastes tells us that God put “eternity in our hearts.” A big God calls up on us to have a big purpose in our lives.

### **I. In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon examined the things that commonly motivate us in life...**

Pleasure... Accomplishments... Pursuit of wisdom... learning... power... position... riches... security. But he finishes each of his evaluations by declaring that these things are not what it's cracked up to be. It's all empty, worthless, dissatisfying.

### **II. Nearly 1000 years later, Paul writes the words of our text today: Phil. 3:7-14**

Paul had had everything. He was a leader, looked up to, an up & comer. He was going places. Yet now he held that it was all rubbish, excess debris, worthless junk.

Paul summed his purpose statement in vs. 13-14:

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

### **III. Paul realized the things of this world would not last.**

> Pleasure wasn't going to last:

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

ILLUS: Oscar Wilde (Irish born Novelist, Poet, Playwright and Critic of the 1800's wrote in his book De Profundis I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the housetop. I ceased to be the lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace."

> Possessions weren't gonna last:

1 Timothy 6:7 says "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing

out of it."

Or as a famous t-shirt once said: He who dies with the most toys... still dies.

> Prestige won't last:

Jesus said: "Many who are first will be last and the last will be first"

Or as one version put it: "Many people who seem important now will be the least important in eternity."

The Italians have a proverb about that: Once the game is over, the king and the pawn go back into the same box.

By contrast Jesus said: What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? (Mark 8:36)

1 John 2:17 tells us: The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

#### **IV. You see – we that are Christians. We who understand the emptiness of life HAVE AN ADVANTAGE.**

We have the ultimate reason to live. Ephesians 2:10 tells us: "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that He prepared in advance for us to do." In other words, we have a purpose. We have a manifest destiny.

And it doesn't center around us & OUR needs, OUR family, OUR personal fulfillment. It centers around Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote in Philippians 3:13-14

"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."

NOW, let me clarify this: I'm not saying that we should abandon all that people regard as important in this world:

- taking care of our families,
- taking care of our needs
- having dreams for the future...

What I am saying is: as good and worthy as these aspects of our lives may be – they are not what should ultimately motivate us. Those goals are NOT BIG ENOUGH for us.

OUR Goal should be the same as Paul – (vss. 13-14).

That means: the reason I take care of my family – I've centered myself around Jesus.

The reason I love my wife – because I've centered my life around Jesus

The reason I love my children - I've centered my family around Jesus

It means I want to build my needs, my dreams around Jesus

THE ONLY MOTIVATION WORTHY & FULFILLING ENOUGH

CLOSE: Illustration that points to both the emptiness of what the world offers to motivate me, and what God offers:

Story of John Draper: "(I entered the business world with a high level of intensity). I quickly earned the adulation of my company and celebrated my first year of success on the French Riviera. I remember standing on a beautiful wood deck the night of the awards banquet overlooking the Mediterranean and thinking, "Have I arrived or what?!?!" I was New Account Salesman of the Year for my region. I had money rolling in and my peers were telling me I was on my way to the good times. I thought, "This is what life is all about!" What more did I need?

But that feeling of success and accomplishment faded quickly and I began to look to an illicit affair to fill the hole in my heart. Riding high in 1984 with plenty of money, a beautiful home in Anaheim Hills and surrounded by women who were openly available, I began to commit adultery after nine years of marriage. In spite of all my material success, I was still coming up empty. I had no real purpose for living.

But true to form, I found excuses for everything. My lousy excuse for being unfaithful to my wife was because she wasn't attractive enough. I also created excuses to justify my divorce. Next in my search for purpose I tried partying and pleasure. I found a gorgeous girlfriend who looked good on my arm and went into party-mode. Alcohol and cocaine were the order of the day. So what if I had to declare bankruptcy? That was all my ex's fault for taking me to the cleaners. Excuses and alcohol always gave me a way to deny the pain and deny that I had become totally self centered and egotistical.

In spite of all the hurt and heartache I had caused in her life, that gorgeous girlfriend became my wife and is to this day. In 1993, our daughter was born. My little girl made me start to realize that I was not the center of the universe. I thought at least my family should give me my purpose for living but I still continued to drink and act like an irresponsible adolescent. Finally early in '94 my wife told me enough was enough! That was my wake up call. I knew that I had get my life together or I was going to lose both of them. I stopped going to bars but I continued to drink at home. Drinking allowed me to pass out every night and perpetuate the denial of my emptiness. Looking back, in spite of my reluctance to turn to God for my purpose, God remained faithful to me. He was waiting for me to come home.

At my wife's urging we started coming to church in March of this year, just six months ago. Every Sunday, always nursing a hangover, the music would move me to tears and it wasn't because of the throbbing headache. (The preacher) would touch my heart with some observation about God's love and forgiveness. In all my attending church and seminary, I never really grasped the truth that I mattered to God. One Sunday, John (one of the members) was standing in this very spot sharing his story. Like me, he was a functioning alcoholic. His story and the ministry of this church made me start to hope again that a relationship with a God of love could give my life some real purpose. On June 11, 1996 was my first day of sobriety. I came to Celebrate Recovery meeting with a feeling like there was no place else to go. What I found was a bunch of men that had nothing but love in their hearts. On day eight of my recovery I wrote this in my journal: "I'm still searching for a God I know is there. Perhaps my God is too small. Perhaps He's not there. I fervently hope that is not true because I have no where else to go. I've tried everything else." Drinking was just a symptom of the real problem. I was in a life and death search for the God who could make sense out of my life.

On June 26th, John shared a Bible verse that finally cut through all of my denial. Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God." I knew that God was saying to me, "Stop trying to maintain the façade. Stop making excuses for your life. This is why I died for you. Be still. Relax. Accept My gift of freedom." I finally came home to my Abba – Daddy – (my Father) in heaven . I finally began to understand that God's purpose for my life all along was to simply have a relationship with Him. I was made to love God and to be loved by God.

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**Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B**  
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**In 2010, 71 ABA Bible courses were mailed from ARM every day!**