



January 1, 2024

Dear Ministry Partner,

Happy New Year!

Have you made your New Year's resolutions? (Have you broken some already?) Let me launch 2024 with a remarkable true story—though perhaps not the sweet, heartwarming kind of New Year's story you might expect...

I'll call him Phil. He lived in the Spanish city of Segovia. It was New Year's Eve. He was drunk at home. So drunk, and so crazed by his addiction, that he seized a knife and tried to kill his wife, Mary Jo.

She grabbed their five-year-old daughter, ran into a bedroom, moved the bed to block the door, then pushed other furniture into place to strengthen the barricade.

Phil, crazed by alcohol, pushed and kicked until the door gave way. Mary Jo picked up a chair, knocking him down with it. He lost the knife, and mother and daughter dashed out.

The late-night winter weather must have been too brutal for them to flee. They ran to another room and set up another barricade. Again Phil forced his way in. Again Mary Jo fought back and escaped with the little girl. The horrible scenario was repeated in room after room—until finally, at five in the morning, Phil passed out. Mary Jo and her young daughter, in the shock of survival mode, were at first too numb to cry.

In those days we ministered on the radio in the Segovia region. I was called in to help the family. Hope was basically gone. But since they had nothing else to lose at this point, they agreed to try whatever I proposed.

So I told them the story of two men, Bill from Vermont and Bob from Ohio, who decided to escape their alcoholism. Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Holbrook organized Alcoholics Anonymous. Dr. Bob said in no uncertain terms from the very beginning that AA's ethics were founded on Scripture: the Sermon on the Mount, 1 Corinthians 13, and the book of James.

Over the years, many millions of people have been led out of alcoholism through the work of AA. Just before he succumbed to cancer, Dr. Bob declared that he was merely God's agent: It was God Himself who set all those people free from bondage to alcohol.

I urged Phil to get involved in AA there in Segovia. Desperate for a new life, he began the process of marching to sobriety. By the grace of God, he came out of alcoholism and into the new life that his wife and daughter had desperately prayed for. Witnessing Phil's amazing transformation, others followed. I thank God that we were able to help them too.

In the years since then, a dear Madrid-based friend named Elliot has followed a similar path—letting God do a major work in his life, then devoting himself to leading others out of every sort of enslaving sin. Elliot’s “therapy” program is powerful proof that the Word of God alone is sufficient to revolutionize a life! His ministry has spread to 31 countries so far—and in every case, the “therapy” is the same.

- For Phil, it all began with a New Year’s resolution.
- For Elliot, too, his new life began with a resolution—to help others experience God’s transforming power just as he had.
- For Bob and Bill, likewise, it also began with a resolution of love: the love of people who needed what they themselves needed . . . what they themselves had found through the Lord’s help.

*It starts with a resolution.*

But you and I both know . . . lots of New Year’s resolutions come and go. Not just any resolution leads to true transformation. A truly effective resolution requires a certain “infrastructure” based on biblical principle. ***The spiritual truth is the key to victory.***

I can’t help but remember the old joke, “How do you eat a whale?” The answer is surprisingly simple: “One bite at a time!” To overcome a besetting sin, begin by praying this daily prayer: “Just for today.”

You may not have a problem that requires AA. But according to Romans 7, we all wrestle with sins that we need to overcome. We all have a conflict between the two natures, the flesh and the Spirit. Paul himself struggled. In the Spirit, he admits, in Romans 7:15,24 (NASB):

“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”

*This is the New Testament version of what so many of us feel . . . as we break our New Year’s resolutions!*

A young man recently asked me a very good question: **How might I position my life to achieve fruitfulness in the year ahead?** In other words, *How can I make wise New Year’s resolutions—and keep them?* This is what Jesus addresses in John 15:8: The Father is glorified in our bearing much fruit—*AND*—this proves we are His disciples.

What are the fruits, that is, the results, that Jesus and the Father and the Spirit are looking for? **Christian character. Christian conduct. Christian converts.**

This is how I answered that young man. At the same time, this is what the Lord wants to see in us in 2024! . . .

- **Christian character** is the result (the fruit) of the control of the Holy Spirit in our lives, as opposed to the works of the flesh (pitted against them, in a stark contrast, in Galatians

5:19-22): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

- **Christian conduct** is behavior above reproach, behavior consistent with how Jesus would do whatever we're doing in our day-to-day life. What would Jesus do? How can we be like Christ? James in his epistle makes 14 references to the Sermon on the Mount. He's exhorting us to be consistent with Christ: talk the talk, walk the walk! James's focus is "justification before men." The only way people will credit us with truly being Christians is if our conduct reflects the words of Christ.
- **Christian converts** is perhaps the most telling evidence that we are producing "fruit that remains." The moment we were reconciled, we were inducted into the ministry of reconciliation. We are to minister in such ways as to let God beg through us that people be reconciled to Him!

Of course, to achieve these results seems like a gigantic challenge . . . an unreachable goal . . . but only if we feel the responsibility to accomplish it by ourselves.

***How about we do it together? When we pursue these goals together, the results can be spectacular!***

I went to Ukraine 23 years ago and met with my friend Anatoly, president of Kyiv Theological Seminary. I shared the challenging task facing us in his country. But then I added this question: "Why don't we do it together?" Today, we see thousands of churches planted and multiplied into a joyful harvest all over the country!

The story repeats itself in Cuba, in Venezuela, in India, in the Philippines, in Liberia, in all the places God has sent us! **Together! We have done it all together, in Christ.**

Alone, we feel insignificant, and the task seems difficult if not impossible. By ourselves, we may feel that it hardly seems worth even trying. But together with a dynamic community of Christians, united to fulfill corporately what the BODY of Christ was meant to do, it's exciting—it's doable—even fun!

It's what Nehemiah and his comrades experienced: "Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah of the goldsmiths made repairs. Next to him Hananiah, one of the perfumers, made repairs, and they restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall" (Nehemiah 3:8).

As Dan Potter of The5mc.com has written:

There's an old saying, "many hands make light work." The idea that a grand task is made easier by many hands shouldering the same burden. . . . You've been toiling away at a large job only to have someone saunter up beside you and join in. Then only to see a few more join in. Before long that monumental job was whittled down by the many hands all taking out small chunks.

There is no difference in the work of the Lord. The work of the Lord involves a myriad of tasks, all of which need many hands to make the work manageable,

enjoyable, and enriching for the hands toiling.

When my family moved back to the U.S., we were in the same predicament. We needed to travel across the country and get to our new house, unload a gigantic truckload of furniture, move it in and put it all in place. But time was against us because I needed to leave for ministry in a far-off field.

Then a ministry from a church in Irving, Texas—a group literally named “Many Hands”—sent many hands to help! To this day I cannot believe we accomplished that huge task in two hours! (Nehemiah and group fulfilled their task in 52 days!)

I have shared this story in other churches, and one of them, in San Sebastian, Spain, instantly appointed a member to chair a new ministry they were launching: “Muchas Manos”!

So here comes 2024 . . . but you don’t have to go at it alone! We can do 2024 **together!**

Sure, we have a big task, but over the years wonderful friends like you have joined together, and we have done wonderful things . . . things that none of us would have thought possible if we had tried to do it on our own. God is in it—that’s what enthusiasm means. (The Greek enthousiazēin is to “be inspired or possessed by a god.” “Enthusiasm” is already here—God is already with us!)

- **So how do we tackle a whole year? One month at a time, one assignment at a time.** *Where do we get the strength and stamina for the task? “My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 121:2).*

God commits not only to bring provision for the journey, but to also give His protection in the journey: “He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber.”

You are not alone. You and I have not been called alone. Jesus has raised a whole army of people. *But we all must do our part.* We all have to move in step with the Head of the Body.

Let’s resolve to live this year for Him who died for us! Let’s live to please Him and to fulfill the glorious purposes He prepared before the foundation of the world so that we may walk in them. I invite you to start 2024 setting your first foot forward. Let’s bear fruit which glorifies the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Please let me hear from you soon—and cheerfully, because as 2 Corinthians 9:7 declares, God loves a cheerful giver!

Joyfully in Christ,

Dr. Manny Fernandez

P.S. Your generous response in giving today will bear much fruit in the year ahead, and the years ahead. Thank you for taking part personally in what God is doing through us TOGETHER!