

The Monday Memo
From the desk of
Dr. John W. Stanko
Issue 121

I've had another great week at home, but I have found it hard to stay focused and productive. When I travel, my departure creates a deadline by which I must have things completed. Without that deadline, I have to find other ways to stay productive and on schedule. One way is to follow my values, which we talked about last week. The other is my daily, prioritized list, which keeps me on task. But no one is here to make me follow that list, so I still must discipline myself. That isn't even what I want to write to you about this week; it's just an update on what's going on in my life.

This week I want to write about a sad thing I see almost every week. What do I see? People who are in a situation that is going nowhere, hoping that *somehow* their circumstances will change. Or they are hoping that they will change and suddenly be who they have never been. Usually they will quote Philippians 4:13, which states, "I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me."

I don't have the heart to tell them that their interpretation of Philippians 4:13 isn't correct. You cannot be anything you want to be, nor will God change you into someone He never intended you to be in the first place. The context of Philippians 4:13 is about finances. Paul was saying he had learned to be content with a lot or a little; he had learned to be happy with what God provided at any point in time.

Anyone who is trying to be who God didn't intend for them to be is trying to do something in their own strength, not in God's strength. For example, I tried for years to be a pastor, but no amount of trying or hiding behind Philippians could make me a pastor. In the end, I had to face the fact that God didn't create me to pastor. He created me to be who I am.

So who are you? To find out, you may first have to admit that you are *not* who you are trying to be. Perhaps you have taken on a role that you want, or accepted a role or position that others have given you. At this point, you may have to face the reality that what you're doing isn't working, that in a sense God has withheld His favor and blessing because you are not in the right place, doing the right thing. Only then, when you've accepted who you aren't, can God show you who you are.

God wants you to know your purpose. He will not empower you to be who you are not, but He will empower you to be the fullest, greatest expression of who you are. In that setting, you will be able to do all things because God is with you in reality. You will not be guilty of wishful thinking.

If I could personally do one thing for you this week, I would release you from trying to be who you are not. I would go on to tell you that you haven't failed; it's just time for you to move on. Furthermore, I would look you in the eye and say, "You *can't* do all things, but you *can* do the things that God wants you to do. So stop pretending and move on. God is with you." Since I can't be with you, I'm doing the next best thing to being there with you. I'm writing this **Monday Memo** to you. May you embrace your limitations this week and then find the path where God can truly enable you to do great things for Him and those around you. Have a great week!

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I want to return to a topic that I first wrote about in Memo 78, and that is the possible distinction between your purpose and your occupation. I find that I talk to someone almost every day about this principle and it is critical to remember and bears repeating.

Paul's purpose was to bring the gospel of Christ to the Gentile world. We know that because his "call" on the Damascus road has a prominent place in the book of Acts. In fact, Paul referred to his purpose in each of his letters (see if you can find them if you're interested), usually relating his purpose to an Old Testament passage. When Paul talked about himself, he referred to his purpose, yet that purpose wasn't his occupation.

To earn a living, Paul made tents. When he moved into an area and lacked funds, he went to work as a tent maker. Yet Paul never talked or wrote about his occupation. The only way we know that Paul made tents was that Luke wrote about it in the book of Acts. Don't you find it interesting that Paul never referred to making tents? That was what he *did*, but it wasn't who he *was*. He was an apostle to the Gentiles and that is what got the choice place in his heart, time, efforts and writings. (I realized just today that Paul returned the favor. Nowhere did Luke ever mention that he was a doctor; Paul told us that in Colossians 4:14. Obviously Luke learned from his mentor the difference between purpose and occupation.)

Who are you? I am not asking what you do. You may sell insurance, but who are you? You may also be a missionary to some people group, while insurance pays the bills. When people ask you what you do, like I just did, how do you respond? Do you say that you're an insurance salesperson or a missionary? If you answer the salesperson, then you are defining yourself by what you do. If you say missionary, you are focusing on purpose and not on what provides your food. You may only get to the mission field once a year on your vacation time, but the other weeks you're praying and working for that mission. You don't have to quit your occupation to embrace your purpose. You may simply need to distinguish between the two.

Os Guinness wrote the following paragraph in his book, *Entrepreneurs of Life* (since he uses the words "calling" and "vocation" for purpose, I have taken the liberty of inserting the word "purpose" where appropriate):

Calling [purpose] helps us finish [our lives] well because it prevents us from confusing the termination of our occupations with the termination of our vocations [purpose]. If we ever limit our calling [purpose] to what we do, and that task is taken away from us--we suddenly find ourselves unemployed, retired, or pronounced terminally ill--then we are tempted to depression and doubt. What has happened? We have let our occupation become so intertwined with our vocation [purpose] that losing the occupation means losing the sense of vocation [purpose] too.

Have you either not found or lost your sense of purpose? Then perhaps you have confused the difference between what you *do* and who you *are* (parents and spouses included). I would suggest you take this week to reflect on this important distinction. No longer be content to define your life in terms of what you do but rather who you are. It will make all the difference in the world. Have a great week!

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I talk with people every week to help them clarify their purpose. I have noticed that many people are trying to “figure out” what their purpose is. They are so stuck in their head that they cannot follow what is in their heart. Consequently their head is helping them see all their options but isn’t helping them choose among those options. If this describes where you are, I want to talk to you this week.

First and foremost, faith is the foundation to find your purpose. When you start your PurposeQuest, you must believe that you have a purpose. That requires faith in the God of your purpose and not faith in your ability to figure out what it is. You must have faith that God is able to show you what your purpose is. This sounds so basic, but it is a critical step in anyone’s PurposeQuest. I talk to many people who are praying to know their purpose, but they don’t really believe that God is showing them what their purpose is. They dismiss the “spiritual” evidence of joy, passions and talents in the light of their rational understanding of the evidence. If you are praying to know your purpose, why are you so skeptical that God is answering? If you are seeking the mind of Christ, why are you surprised that you may have it?

I am reminded this week of a simple concept that Jesus taught in Luke 11: “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:11-13).

I have known people to ask what their purpose is and then be released from their jobs the next week. That is difficult, but I urge them to see that as an answer to prayer. I have talked to others who prayed and then had a perfect stranger come up to them to give them an important clue in understanding their purpose. Do you expect this to happen to you? If you ask your Father for purpose, do you expect the unexpected? When it comes, will you receive it?

Then faith is the foundation to fulfill your purpose. I talk to people who don’t write a book because they don’t know who will publish or purchase their book. Faith requires that you do what *you* can do and then trust God to do what only *He* can do. You write; God publishes. You create; God sells. If you stop taking the steps you can take because you don’t understand how the latter steps can ever happen, you are guilty of trying to “figure out” how everything will work out. In short, you don’t have faith and you are allowing your lack of faith to hinder what you can do today. I can only remind you of a verse that I have quoted many times in **The Monday Memo**: “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17).

If you don’t take the steps you can take, don’t expect God to take the steps that He can take. In many ways, how God responds to you is determined by how you respond to God first. I hope this will help you to stop trying to “figure out” what to do this week and to just do it. I hope this will also help you see what is happening in your life as an answer to prayer, an answer that you aren’t supposed to analyze but act on. Have a great week!

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I received an exciting email this past week from a friend in, of all places, England. I have been talking to let's call her "R" for two years in an attempt to help her clarify her purpose. There were times when R didn't feel like she was making any progress, but she really was. We did three separate Purpose Assessments (which you will soon be available for you to take online) and traded emails back and forth. Two weeks ago, I got this email from R:

"My purpose is to bring more joy and happiness into the world. I do this through my sense of humor and sense of fun and also through dance and my own personal brand of drama and entertainment and much laughter. It is my desire that people should always feel happier and more uplifted for having been in my presence"

My two life-defining passages from the Bible are "The joy of the Lord is my strength" (Nehemiah 8:10) and "A merry heart does good, like medicine" (Proverbs 17:22). And as an aside, I work as a legal secretary (but that is not my purpose). What do you think of that! I feel so much better now!

I have to be honest: This is one of the clearest statements I have ever received. Congratulations, R! R never gave up and knew that the search for purpose really is a quest. Her efforts have been rewarded. I am not surprised that she feels better, for clarifying your purpose gives you a new perspective and renewed energy.

So maybe it's time for you to renew your purpose journey. At <http://www.purposequest.com/purpose.htm> there are three documents that can help you begin or continue your PurposeQuest. One is a worksheet entitled "How to Write a Purpose Statement." The other two are sample purpose statements from **Monday Memo** readers and from the Bible. If you haven't sent me your purpose statement yet, then please do so and I will add yours to the website list. (If you can't download these, then write me with the words "statement," "Bible list," and/or "list" and I will send them to you.) Devote some time this week to looking these items over to see if they don't help you become a person of purpose.

I can't guarantee that you will clarify your purpose today or next week, but you may. And even if you don't, there's R's story to encourage you to hang in there and not to give up. If I can help you along the way, please let me know. Have a great week

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About five years ago, someone recommended that I read *The Power of Servant Leadership* by Robert Greenleaf. When I finished, I was a different man. Greenleaf was an executive with AT&T for 41 years and then became a consultant for the remainder of his life. He began writing essays based on his observations of servant leadership and the need for such leaders. Today, some twelve years after Greenleaf's death, his writings are more popular than ever. His foundation is based in Indiana and can be accessed by going to <http://www.greenleaf.org>.

I am writing to you about servant leadership because when you know your purpose, often you become a leader. I don't always understand how or why, but I guess since you know where you're going, others want to follow. Greenleaf wrote:

The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant--first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test [of servant leadership] is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will he or she benefit, or, at least, will he or she not be further deprived?

I have tried to use Greenleaf's words and concepts to evaluate my own leadership style. Many times I have been found lacking as a servant but I am committed to learn and grow in my capacity as a servant leader.

Jesus was a servant and His service was the basis for His leadership. Jesus was also a man of purpose. By His own words, He came "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Being a servant with purpose, people followed Him and still do. You may already know what your purpose is, but now may I ask: are you ready to serve? Finding your purpose is one thing; learning to serve is something completely different.

Service to others is what keeps a person of purpose humble and relevant. It keeps you grounded in reality, the reality of where people live and what their real needs are. While purpose focuses on self, service focuses on others. A servant leader has a healthy balance of self-interest *and* selflessness. Recently someone asked me if our purpose is always focused on others and I had to pause before I answered. But then I responded, "Yes!" If we were born to draw, build, sing or teach, we often do it for other people. We get something from fulfilling our purpose, but we receive because we are giving.

Serving someone is an art, but only if you turn your back on your needs and serve the needs of others. Jesus said that no man will serve two masters; that is true where service is concerned. You can't do things for others the way you want them done; you must perform according to their needs and wishes.

If you are a person of purpose, are you a purpose servant? Do others receive the best of your purpose efforts? Why not make an effort to be a better servant this week? Better yet, get Greenleaf's book and make service a priority beyond this week. Think of what the world would be like if people of purpose made service their priority. Think of what your world would be like if you were a better servant. Make service your aim this week and make your purpose all that it is supposed to be as you meet the needs of others. Have a great week!