

The Monday Memo
From the desk of
Dr. John Stanko
Issue 176

I'm back! I have been away from home since August 26 and it is great to be home, at least for a few days. Later this month I will be in England and then Singapore, and I am looking forward to my time in both countries. The readers in Singapore should be receiving a special email from me in the next few days. In the meantime, I hope you missed me, because I missed you!

I thought I would write some purpose profiles for the next few weeks. I began speaking on some Biblical characters while I was in Kenya, and I had some new insight that I want to share with you. This week I want to focus on Samson, one of the most unusual characters in the Bible. There is one verse that gives me great hope when I consider Samson's life and it is found in Hebrews 11:32: "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson." What is so encouraging about this verse? The fact that Samson is mentioned at all in Hebrews 11, which lists the heroes of the faith, gives me hope. If Samson made it and pleased God, then so can I! What's more, so can you!

Samson was less than perfect, to say the least. Yet he pleased God in faith, as a man of purpose. I'm going to assume you know Samson's story. If not, then please take time now to read about him in Judges 13:24-16:31 (Even if you know his story, you may want to stop and read it again before you go on.). But there are three points I would like to make concerning Samson's life of purpose and hopefully you can apply them to your own PurposeQuest.

1. **God is often leading you and you don't even know it.** "Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me." (His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.) (Judges 14:1-4). Samson's family didn't understand what was going on and, for that matter, neither did Samson. But God was leading Samson, positioning him right where God wanted him to be so he could do what the Lord wanted him to do. It may not seem like God is leading you, but He is! When you feel like God isn't there, that's not the time to trust less, but more. Put your hope in the God of your purpose and move on.
2. **Your past may hold a key to your quest.** "Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her. Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass. In it was a swarm of bees and some honey, which he scooped out with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass" (Judges 14:5-9). Samson did something that he thought was gone and forgotten. Yet when he returned to it, even though it was "dead," it brought forth something sweet, which fed both him and his parents. What is in your past that you

thought was dead? Is it a failure, or something you enjoyed doing but don't do anymore. Perhaps it's time to revisit that and see if there is something sweet there. Very often simple or overlooked things from your past provide a key for your present PurposeQuest.

3. **It's never too late.** While they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson to entertain us." So they called Samson out of the prison, and he performed for them. When they stood him among the pillars, Samson said to the servant who held his hand, "Put me where I can feel the pillars that support the temple, so that I may lean against them." Now the temple was crowded with men and women; all the rulers of the Philistines were there, and on the roof were about three thousand men and women watching Samson perform. Then Samson prayed to the LORD, "O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes." Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived (Judges 16:25-30). Samson was a miserable failure, or so it seemed. He was defeated, blinded and forced to perform for his enemies. Yet he prayed and God heard him, and Samson literally brought the house down at his last performance! He fulfilled his purpose to the end, proving it's never too late to pursue or fulfill purpose.

So what about you? What lessons can you learn from Samson's life? How can apply them to your current PurposeQuest? Is it time to trust God this week even though it seems like nothing is happening in your life? Is it time to reevaluate your past and see if there is anything there that can still yield something useful? Have you given up, feeling like it's too late to be a person of purpose? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, then take out a piece of paper and start writing. Put down your thoughts and study Samson's life, recording your thoughts from that as well. Then use Samson's profile to encourage yourself in your own PurposeQuest. If Samson made it, so can we. Let's not abandon the quest. Have a great week!

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It is so good to be home for a few days this week, especially since Tuesday is my anniversary. Kathryn and I will celebrate 30 years of marriage tomorrow! As I have told many people, I've been married for 30 years and home for 16 of them. That's probably why we are still together! At any rate, we will celebrate on Tuesday. Then I am off to England on Wednesday and to Singapore from November 2-14. By the way, if so you sent me an email last Monday, I probably didn't get it. My service was having problems, so I missed almost all my Monday emails. I apologize for any inconvenience.

This week we want to continue our purpose profiles, which we began last week with a look at Samson. This week (and next) we will look at Esther and study some interesting purpose lessons from her life. We know that Esther was a queen and was instrumental in saving her fellow Jews from destruction by being in the right place at the right time. How did she get to this place where she fulfilled her purpose, being used by God in a special way? This week we will look at three points that will help answer that question:

1. **Your past doesn't prevent you from fulfilling your purpose, unless you allow it to do so.** “Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother” (Esther 2:7). Esther was an orphan. What’s more, she wasn’t even raised by an aunt or grandparent. She was raised by her male cousin, Mordecai, in a foreign country where they were both minorities. So Esther didn’t have much going for her in the natural. But she had God with her and someone once said, “You plus God are a majority no matter how many others there are.” Do you believe that? If you do, then when will start acting like it?
2. **You may be taking your obvious purpose for granted.** “This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died” (Esther 2:7). I love the way the Bible describes Esther. One version states that she was beautiful “in face and form.” In other words, Esther was a fox! That may not seem very special, but her beauty was an important part of her purpose. We can get so accustomed to who we are that we miss the obvious, which is why you may not be able to describe your purpose. Your purpose may be so natural or “unspectacular” to you that is hard to recognize. You may even take your beauty or some other feature for granted, when it may hold a key to fulfilling your purpose.
3. **God wants to build on your strengths and not your weaknesses.** “When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. 9 The girl pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem” (Esther 2:8-9). Esther was beautiful, so what did God do? He gave her people who would make her more beautiful! Too often we spend too much time fretting about our weaknesses and consequently spend even more time trying to be who we’re not. If you’re doing that, please stop. Focus on your strengths and be the best expression of who God made you to be. God isn’t interested in well-rounded individuals. He wants to use specialists who have focused on being the best they can be. That’s the power of purpose.

So who are you? Are you beautiful? Can you play the piano? Speak before people? Play or coach basketball? Can you write poetry? Then this week ask yourself how you can be even better in those areas where you are already strong? Don’t try to emulate someone else whom you admire if who they are isn’t who you are. Rather this week focus on your strengths and please don’t allow your past, even your failures, to determine the extent to which God can use you today. God used Esther’s beauty to open doors for her and He will use your strengths to do the same for you, if you don’t try to diminish your strength. This week determine to follow in Esther’s footsteps and be the best you can be. Have a great week!

The Monday Memo
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Issue 178

Today I am off to Singapore! Before I depart, however, I want to continue our purpose profiles by taking another look at the like of Esther. This week I will share with you one of my favorite stories in the entire Bible! I know that this story will encourage you and help you in your PurposeQuest. So without further ado, let's look at this week's lesson.

While this week's profile is from the life of Esther, it really isn't about Esther. It's about her cousin, Mordecai. As we learned last week, Mordecai raised Esther because her parents had died. Mordecai was Esther's career mentor and because Esther obeyed his advice, she eventually won a beauty pageant and was chosen to be the new queen. Then we read these few verses about Mordecai himself:

During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on a gallows. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king (Esther 2:21-23).

You may be asking, "Why is this story one of your favorites?" My answer is that this represents only half of the story. Wait until you read the rest! But first, I want to make a few comments about the story's first half. Mordecai had already done the king a favor by directing Esther to become queen. Now Mordecai did the king a second favor: He saved his life by uncovering and reporting the conspiracy to the king through Esther. When the report was investigated and found to be true, the conspirators were killed and the whole story recorded in the public record. The story could have ended there and almost seems like it does.

And that is how it may be with you. You have done good things that you knew were related to your purpose. You have helped other people, been faithful and still it doesn't seem like you have received your promotion or breakthrough. You feel like that is the end of your life's story so far. If you feel or have felt like that, read on!

Mordecai had an enemy named Haman, who hated Mordecai because he was a Jew and would now bow down and pay him honor. Haman was secretly plotting to wipe out Mordecai and the Jews but before he could hatch his plot, we read the following:

That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered. The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him. His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered. When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'" "Go at once,"

the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended." So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!" (Esther 6:1-11).

I love this story! To me, this symbolizes the fact that God *never* forgets what you do for Him. I've told many audiences that God has a big book and a sharp pencil and He records everything that you do for Him. In the fullness of time, often when you least expect it, God rewards you and blesses you with honor, meaningful work, or significant purpose opportunities. And what's more, Mordecai could not have been blessed until after Esther became queen and had access to the king. Sometimes fulfilling your purpose is a matter of timing—there isn't a need yet for who you are or what you do, or perhaps God hasn't yet created the need that you were designed to fill, the problem that you were created to solve.

So take heart this week. *God hasn't forgotten you*—He remembers everything that you have done and the preparation you have undertaken. Put your trust in Him. And one night, when God can't sleep, He will ask one of His heavenly messengers to read the book of good deeds and He will hear your name mentioned. He will then ask, "What have we done for my son or daughter to reward them?" When the answer comes back, "Nothing," then He will respond, "It is time to do something." And who knows, this may be the week that God uses one of your enemies to be a source of blessing to you. I hope that this is the week when that happens, but if it isn't, you know that is only a matter of time before that week comes. So keep on seeking and doing the good that you know you are to do. As you do, I pray that you will have a great week!

THE MONDAY MEMO

From Singapore
Issue 179

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO LOOKING FOR PURPOSE; PURPOSE COMES LOOKING FOR YOU!

I've enjoyed my first week in Singapore and still have another week to do. Of course I've had numerous chances already to talk about purpose and have many more opportunities this week. I've also written a new paper directed to youth and youth workers entitled "Never Too Young for Purpose." Please see the end of this **Memo** for instructions on how to obtain a copy.

I received more feedback from last week's **Memo** than any other I have written. I urge you to read the Memos from the last two weeks, for this week we continue our purpose profiles of Esther and Mordecai. **The first point I want to make this week is that Esther and Mordecai didn't have to look for their purpose; their purpose came looking for them.**

Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it (Esther 2:2-4).

Esther was found and chosen to be among those women, and was eventually selected by the king to be the new queen. Last week we saw that Mordecai foiled a plot to assassinate the king and was then sought out and rewarded for his work. Both didn't go looking for purpose; their purpose came looking for them.

As you examine your purpose this week, ask yourself: What always finds me that needs done? What group or kind of people always seem to seek me out for counsel, encouragement or help? If you can answer those questions, you are well on your way to clarifying your purpose. One thing that regularly happens to me, no matter where I am in the world, is that people ask me for directions—an expression of my purpose to create order out of chaos. I mentioned that fact last week in a church service, and the next day someone jokingly asked me if anyone had asked me for directions yet. I responded no one had, but that the day was still young.

A few hours later, I was on a train heading to Heathrow Airport. As the train slowed down for the first stop, I man came up to me and asked, "Do you know from which terminal the British Air flight to New York departs?" Guess what? I knew it was terminal four! I can bring order out of chaos. I never have to looking for chaos' it always comes looking for me. Of course, I then misread my own itinerary and jumped off at the wrong stop for my plane! I never said you would fulfill your purpose perfectly; I simply stated that the fulfillment of your purpose will always find you.

THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

After Esther was chosen to be the new queen, a crisis arose among her fellow Jews. The king had an aide named Haman, who hated the Jews with a passion. He was able to convince the king (who was unaware that Esther was a Jew) to issue an edict that all the Jews were to be exterminated throughout the kingdom. What was Esther to do? Her cousin Mordecai gave her good advice, as usual:

When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. *And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?*" (Esther 4:12-14 emphasis added).

The point I want to make here is that purpose puts you in the right place at the right time. When you function in your purpose, there is a sense that God is helping you accomplish what you are doing, without effort or you having to make something happen. When someone needs directions, I just happen to come along and for whatever reason they choose me out of the crowd to ask where to go. I couldn't plan that if I wanted to. It is a small way in which I know that God uses me to help others and it flows naturally. It is part of my purpose to create order out of chaos.

So ask yourself: When am I in "the flow?" When do I most seem to be in the right place at the right time? What need or needs do I always seem to be in a position to meet? Answers to those questions will most certainly help you clarify your purpose.

YOU CAN'T DO THIS WITHOUT FAITH.

Clarifying your purpose isn't a matter of doing your homework or figuring out what you do best or most often. You do have to work at finding your purpose, but it isn't something you can

identify logically. **The third point I want to make this week is that you need faith to both clarify *and* fulfill your purpose.**

When Esther received the exhortation from Mordecai that she had come to the throne for such a time as this, she replied:

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4:15-16).

Esther knew at this point that she could not do what she had to do in her own strength; she needed supernatural help and strength. You need to come to the same realization. People ask me how I write and travel as much as I do. I respond that I do it in faith. I determined four years ago that I would trust God, who showed me my purpose, to also fulfill my purpose. And like Esther, I said that if I fail, I fail. But if I failed, I would fail in faith!

I get many letters from readers who are uptight and frustrated with their individual PurposeQuest. I write back and tell them to relax. God will reveal your purpose when you are ready. Put your trust in Him and in His ability to speak—not in your ability to hear. God wants you to fulfill your purpose even more than you do, so, armed with that understanding, trust that He will not only show it to you, but open doors like He did for Esther that will enable you to fulfill it. People often tell me that it can’t be that simple, but I maintain that it is.

LET’S REVIEW.

So what purpose lessons have we learned from Esther and Mordecai these last three weeks?

- 1. Your past doesn’t prevent you from fulfilling your purpose, unless you allow it to do so.**
- 2. You may be taking for granted or looking past a purpose that is obvious to everyone but you.**
- 3. God wants to build on your strengths and not your weaknesses.**
- 4. God hasn’t forgotten you.**
- 5. You don’t have to go looking for purpose; purpose comes looking for you.**
- 6. Purpose puts you in the right place at the right time.**
- 7. It requires faith to find *and* fulfill your purpose.**

So there you have it. We have completed our second purpose profile (Samson was the first). This week, I want you to mediate on the seven points I have listed above. Pray over them and ask God to show you what you’re missing. Don’t just pray, but pray in faith with pen and paper in hand, believing that the Lord will show you some new perspective that you need to be a person of purpose. And as usual, if I can help you in any way, please let me know. Have a great week!

THE MONDAY MEMO

**From Singapore
Issue 180**

It has been a wonderful two weeks here in Singapore, but now it’s time to go home. While I was

here I registered my company here. Yes, PurposeQuest Singapore is a reality. I've enjoyed my time here and I anticipate being back soon. Thanks to everyone who made my visit special, especially KK Liam and his wife May, who served as my coordinators for the last two weeks.

This week we continue our purpose profiles as we look at the life of Nehemiah. There are some exciting and helpful purpose lessons ahead in the next few weeks as we study this man's life. (You may wish to read the book of Nehemiah before you read this Memo.) In short, Nehemiah served the Persian king Artaxerxes, who ruled from 464-424 BC. In about 445 BC, Artaxerxes commissioned his servant Nehemiah to return and rebuild Jerusalem, the city of his fathers. This profile will study how Nehemiah got assigned to duty in Jerusalem and what he did once he was there. Of course, we will see that Nehemiah was a man of purpose or he could not have done the great work that he did.

QUALITY QUESTIONS PRODUCE A QUALITY LIFE.

The book of Nehemiah begins with Nehemiah asking some men who had just come from Jerusalem some questions: "In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:1-2).

The first point I want to make this week is that most people don't know their purpose because they don't ask enough questions. I heard a motivational speaker say recently that quality questions lead to a quality life. What he meant was that you must seek the truth concerning who you are, and part of that seeking is asking the right questions.

Nehemiah was interested in Jerusalem and its residents, even though he had never been there. One day a group of travelers piqued his interest and he asked a lot of questions. Their answers provoked him to prayer, thought and action. The rest is history.

When I first found my purpose, it was because I asked God, "If you didn't create me to start this business that failed, what *did* You create me to do?" That was a quality question. The Lord responded, "I created you to create order out of chaos!" That was a quality answer, the pursuit of which has led me to a quality life, one that enables me to do what I love all over the world. In my November prayer letter, I listed 13 questions that I am currently asking the Lord and asked my prayer partners to pray with me for the answers. What questions are you currently asking? If quality questions lead to a quality life, do no questions lead to a nothing life?

WHAT MAKES YOU CRY?

When Nehemiah heard the answers to his questions, he was deeply moved:

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven (Nehemiah 1:4-5).

I often substitute the word passion for purpose. Passion is a driving force that activates your creativity and will to do something. Tears of joy and sorrow often accompany that passion as you respond and make yourself vulnerable and available to a need that exists in the world. The first time I spoke about purpose, people in the room wept. I have seen thousands more cry over the years. Tears and purpose seem to go together hand in hand.

In 1998, I was watching a television documentary about the suffering of women in Afghanistan. I remember praying, “Lord, why am I crying? If you need someone to go to Afghanistan, I’m willing.” In 2003, I received an invitation to go to Afghanistan from people I didn’t even know. I went and it changed my life and the course of my ministry.

So my second point is that tears often go hand in hand with purpose. What makes you cry? I’m not talking only about tears of sorrow. Can you sit and listen to some kind of music and cry? Do you cry during a sad movie? Cry with joy when someone is blessed? If you do, then go back to the first point in this **Memo** and ask the Lord, “Why am I crying?” The answers may surprise you and hold clues that will help you clarify your purpose. It certainly did for Nehemiah.

WELL, I SORT OF, YOU KNOW, KIND OF LIKE . . .

Nehemiah prayed and fasted to clarify his passion and direction forward. Then his big break came. One day he was serving the king and the king noticed that Nehemiah was sad. Let’s read the rest in Nehemiah’s own words.

The king said to me, "What is it you want?" Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it." Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time. I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me (Nehemiah 2:4-9).

The third point is that you must be able to state your purpose and goals with clarity and conviction. When the king asked Nehemiah what he wanted, Nehemiah had a ready answer. The king understood what he wanted and could then either say yes or no.

People often ask me questions to help them clarify their purpose. At times, I will ask them what they think their purpose is. It’s then that I see just how hard it is for some people to talk about themselves. They will often say, “Well, I think my purpose is, sort of, like to help people. Yeah, that’s it. And I probably, you know, encourage other people, but of course it’s not me, it’s the Lord.”

Does that sound like clarity? You can’t state your purpose and preface it with phrases like “I think,” “probably,” or “maybe.” You either know your purpose or you don’t. And if you can’t overcome the natural hesitancy that many have talking about themselves, you will always struggle to come up with a clear statement.

LET’S REVIEW.

This week we learned three purpose lessons from Nehemiah’s profile.

- 1. Most people don’t know their purpose because they don’t ask enough questions**
- 2. Tears often go hand in hand with purpose**

3. You must be able to state your purpose and goals with clarity and conviction.

Next week we will continue our Nehemiah profile. But this week, I want you to get your notebook, journal or a sheet of paper. I want you to write down all the questions you can think of concerning your purpose. Write them all down, even if one question is, “What should I be asking?” Focus your search through good questions and I promise you will have a better chance at good answers. And get comfortable not only talking about what you can’t do, but also what you can. Remember, your objective is to be able to clearly answer anyone who asks, “What is your passion and purpose?” Have a great week!