

THE MONDAY MEMO
From the desk of
Dr. John Stanko - Issue 186

I trust that you had a good Christmas with family and friends. Our family enjoyed being together and we will be together again this weekend for the New Year. Right now I am writing this Memo still trying to get warm. My wife and I attended a football game today, namely the Pittsburgh Steelers against the Baltimore Ravens. (That's American football for my non-U.S. friends.) The Steelers won, but the temperature was 20 degrees. (That's minus five Celsius for my non-U.S. friends.). It was cold and we've decided to watch the rest of the season on television from the warmth of our home.

This week I want to take a quick look at the shepherds of the Christmas story. On the night Jesus was born, they were tending their flocks on the hillsides outside Bethlehem. They were minding their own business when God sent them messengers:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (Luke 2:8-16).

These shepherds were doing what they knew to do at that time in their life and God interrupted them with a special news report. This both scared and thrilled them. That's how it is when you find your life purpose. Often you are doing what you know to do at the time. It is usually a job or role that is less than fulfilling. Suddenly God, the Great Communicator, breaks into your consciousness and brings a message of purpose, of what He has always wanted you to do. That not only terrifies you but also gives you a desire to clarify it and fulfill it.

That night the shepherds went to work like any other day. God spoke to them, however, and they were never the same. They started by sitting on a hillside in cold weather; they ended by finding a great treasure in Bethlehem, a treasure that had not been revealed to anyone else but them.

Maybe you have been in a desperate search for your purpose and its expression. As we end this year, I suggest that you be encouraged and remember the shepherds. Finding your purpose doesn't depend on your diligence; it depends on God's grace. Yes, you must search for your purpose, but only God can reveal it to you. I don't know when or how He will do that. It may be one cold, dark night when you go about your business like countless other nights. At that point, God may send His messenger and change your life forever. I don't know when or how He will do it, I just know that He will.

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So relax this holiday season. Keep asking God to help you see who you are and what you were born to do, but after that, trust Him. He wants you to fulfill your purpose more than you do, and He will show you in the fullness of time. When He does, you will join with the shepherds as laborers who found more than business as usual one night when they went to work. May the God of purpose speak to you soon and may you have the courage to believe what He says! Merry Christmas!

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Happy New Year! I hope you had a great holiday season and that you are prepared for a super New Year. I'm ready to get back to work after taking a break from my normal routine over the last two weeks. I did everything I wanted to do over the holidays and now I'm prepared to make the most of my next three weeks at home. Then I begin traveling in earnest once again. And I am excited that this is the year of the PurposeQuest cruise to Alaska. Don't miss the new cruise home page at www.purposequest.com that is certain to win many web design awards.

In a few weeks I will announce another adjustment to my personal purpose statement. It's ironic that my statement was the same for 22 years and now it's going to be adjusted for the second time in the last eight months. But the change is a reflection of an ongoing clarity that is part of my own PurposeQuest. I promise to share this with you when the time is right. But this week let's look at two common concerns or comments I regularly hear when people talk to me about their purpose.

IT SOUNDS SO SPIRITUAL.

I often hear people tell me that they don't sense any urgency in finding their purpose. "I just want to be available to the Lord," they tell me, "And do whatever He wants me to do." How can you argue with that? It's almost as hard as arguing with someone who says, "I'm waiting on God's timing." While both statements sound spiritual, it's my opinion that they aren't spiritual at all. Being open to doing everything makes you available to accomplish nothing. Waiting on God's timing assumes that one has perfect knowledge of God's mind. I've found that you don't realize it is God's timing until *after* you start doing something. Timing isn't something you can figure out this side of action; timing is only understood on the other side of action, after you've begun to do something that you were created to do.

I'm intrigued by Luke's report in Acts:

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:2-3).

When the Lord spoke to the church about the purpose for Barnabas and Saul, He said, "Set apart *for me*." I'm not a Greek scholar, but the voice there is the middle voice, which represents an action that someone undertakes for himself or herself. When the Lord "called" Barnabas and Saul, He called them to Himself, for Himself. He had something specific for them to do, and it was something to do for *Him*. Their purpose brought them into a special relationship with the Lord and they achieved great results because God was fulfilling His purpose, according to His

own plan and foreknowledge, through them. It may sound humble and spiritual to say, “God, I’m available to do anything.” But it is better to say, “God, I’m available to do what you have assigned for me to do and I want to refuse to do anything else, no matter how important or noble.”

I stopped trying to pastor in 1993 because there was something else that God wanted me to do *for* Him. And when I said I would do that, it brought me closer *to* Him. What’s more, I stopped thinking, “Well maybe the Lord wants me to do this or that.” Maybe belongs in games of chance, not in serving the Lord or fulfilling your purpose. You won’t be a person of purpose by saying “maybe.” You’ll be a person of purpose when you say “This is what I was created to do, and anything else is a distraction.”

JESUS IS THE MODEL.

Jesus is our purpose model. Jesus didn’t just walk around, available to do whatever He saw that needed done. Jesus had a specific purpose “to seek and save the lost.” (see Luke 19:10). The Father sent Jesus with specific work to do: “I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me” (John 5:36-37). And Jesus finished that work and that is how He glorified His Father: “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4-5). If that is how Jesus glorified the Father, you can be sure that this is how you will glorify Him as well. You won’t glorify God by singing, waiting, or being available to do menial tasks, but by doing or preparing to do your life’s work. You have work to do and there’s no “maybe” involved. It’s specific and it precludes doing anything else. It isn’t your career or your job; it’s the will of God. It’s your purpose.

2005

So what can you do during this first week of 2005 to help you be a person of purpose? Here are some simple recommendations:

1. **Don’t be content with a vague purpose.** While you can’t twist God’s arm to reveal your purpose, you can set the stage for Him to tell you. Don’t be passive! Cry out to God for insight and wisdom. Keep a journal. Take every clue you find seriously and don’t give up. You may be closer than you thought to clarifying your purpose already. But please don’t tell me it’s not a matter of urgency.
2. **Do something to clarify your purpose.** Don’t just wait for this to happen. Read a book. Find a purpose coach. Go to a seminar. But please don’t sit there and say that it’s not God’s timing for you to know. How do you know that for sure? You don’t, so go for it. Don’t worry about what will happen if you fail. Do what you can and trust God to do what He can. Between the two of you, you will find your purpose.
3. **Say no.** You may not be available to find or fulfill your purpose because you’re preoccupied. You may be too busy doing *good* things and that is keeping you from doing the *best* things. You may have to say no before you find out what your “yes” is. Do you have the faith to do that?

The fact that you are reading this **Memo** as the year begins tells me you are serious about your purpose. And that tells me that God is going to help you. So keep your head up, be aggressive and trust God. Who knows? This may be the week of your purpose

breakthrough and it will make 2005 your best year yet. Have a great year and, while you're at it, have a great week too!

THE MONDAY MEMO
From the desk of
Dr. John Stanko - Issue 188

I had a great first week of 2005 and I hope you did, too. I did a lot of writing, praying and thinking this past week. Plus I received a lot of feedback from last week's **Memo**, especially about the topic of timing. (But I didn't receive any feedback from my new home page picture!) In case you didn't see it, last week I wrote the following paragraph:

I often hear people tell me that they don't sense any urgency in finding their purpose. "I just want to be available to the Lord," they tell me, "And do whatever He wants me to do." How can you argue with that? It's almost as hard as arguing with someone who says, "I'm waiting on God's timing." While both statements sound spiritual, it's my opinion that they aren't spiritual at all. Being open to doing everything makes you available to accomplish nothing. Waiting on God's timing assumes that one has perfect knowledge of God's mind. I've found that you don't realize it is God's timing until *after* you start doing something. Timing isn't something you can figure out this side of action; timing is only understood on the other side of action, after you've begun to do something that you were created to do.

A READER WRITES.

I got the following questions and comments from a reader:

But what about Moses who supposedly stepped out in his purpose at the wrong time? Remember when he tried to deliver the children of Israel while still in Egypt and had to go to the desert for 40 years? It wasn't the right time for him, was it? Or Joseph who sees his purpose of being a leader but still has to be a slave in Egypt before he can get to the throne? Or Jesus who has to work as a carpenter for 30 years before moving into purpose? Dare I say that you also had to be a pastor for "x" number of years before you could begin to walk in His will. For you 1993 was God's timing. Surely, sir, there must be something like God's timing which we all have to wait for-maybe coz there are lessons we ought to learn 1st. We dare not leave god behind simply because we are walking in our purpose! What say you sir?

THE WRITER RESPONDS.

How would you respond to this? Here is what I wrote back with some additional thoughts.

1. The men you mention were special leaders. I'm open to the fact that you are in that category. Most are not. Most don't need that much preparation to do what God wants them to do. Plus both Joseph and Moses were leaders *before* there was any written word or people of God. We have so much more today at our disposal to succeed in doing God's will.

2. In my 31 years of ministry experience, I've found that most people are not too quick to ministry but too slow. I was too slow and waited until 1993 when I should have been "moving" sooner.
3. Jesus told his disciples to go when the power of the Holy Spirit came upon them, and after only 3.5 years of preparation with Him (see Acts 1). Paul began to preach Jesus immediately after he became a believer.
4. We should be aggressive in doing God's will and fulfilling our purpose. I've met some people who are passive and others who are just plain lazy. I think of what Jesus said: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it" (Matthew 11:12).
5. Jesus gave us the Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). I preached a message once by the title, "What Part of **Go** Don't You Understand?" We have been given a mandate to spread the gospel and extend the Kingdom now, not later.
6. I've often waited for "strength" to go into battle. The writer of Hebrews wrote: "Whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful *in* battle and routed foreign armies" (Hebrews 11:34-35). Often we are equipped to do God's will *as* we do it, not before.
7. People often quote Isaiah 40:31 that those who *wait* on the Lord will renew their strength. Read how the NIV translates that verse: "But those who *hope* in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." There is *nothing* passive about that verse. Only those *doing* something need to have hope and renew strength. And they will soar not sit around.

AND NOW IT'S YOUR TURN.

I want to thank the reader who wrote for causing me to think and pray more about what I said. In no way am I trying to belittle what he wrote, for I do believe that there are historical situations that must work out before some can make the full impact for which they were created. You may have some thoughts about this and you may not agree with my position. Please feel free to write me with your thoughts or with more insight about this topic of timing. But while you're thinking and writing, do something that will help you be more productive in doing and not just talking about doing God's will. Have a great week!

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I'm sitting at my desk, watching the snow come down outside my window. And it is so cold—a perfect night to sit and write a Monday Memo. But it's not the conditions that make writing a Memo special for me; it's knowing that you are reading and that we are connecting every week across the miles and the oceans. I received a *lot* of response on the timing issue from last week's **Memo**. I got so much feedback, I decided to write about timing again this week. But soon we will start another series on how to celebrate a failure and I still have to update you concerning my new purpose statement. But I think I will continue the suspense on that one more week at least.

MOSES, MOSES, MOSES

To review, I wrote the following two weeks ago:

I often hear people tell me that they don't sense any urgency in finding their purpose. "I just want to be available to the Lord," they tell me, "And do whatever He wants me to do." How can you argue with that? It's almost as hard as arguing with someone who says, "I'm waiting on God's timing." While both statements sound spiritual, it's my opinion that they aren't spiritual at all. Being open to doing everything makes you available to accomplish nothing. Waiting on God's timing assumes that one has perfect knowledge of God's mind. I've found that you don't realize it is God's timing until *after* you start doing something. Timing isn't something you can figure out this side of action; timing is only understood on the other side of action, after you've begun to do something that you were created to do.

Then last week I gave some further thoughts on being urgent in fulfilling your purpose and achieving your goals. I won't repeat those here, but urge you to go back and read them at your earliest convenience. And I asked last week for you to write me with your thoughts, which many of you did.

Almost everyone who wrote me about timing used the example of Moses trying to deliver his people prematurely as found in Exodus 2. Let's examine this more closely. Moses knew that he was to deliver his people (see Acts 7:25). One day he saw one of his fellow Israelites being mistreated and he killed the Egyptian perpetrator. Moses murdered someone. Have you ever considered killing someone in order to fulfill your purpose? Probably and hopefully not! Yet that is what Moses did. Does anyone see that as a severe problem? Was the timing wrong for Moses to deliver his people or did Moses have such deep issues that God had to deal with them by sending him to tend sheep for 40 years? The answer to that last question is probably yes on both counts. But what if we take away this unusual story? What example would you use now to justify slowing down the process of doing the will of God? And keep in mind that Moses was a special example; you probably don't have something as unique to do as Moses did.

EXCUSES, EXCUSES, EXCUSES

Joseph and Jesus waited, but they were both 30 when they entered their most effective years. The disciples were with Jesus for three and a half years, and then launched out into effective ministry. Do you need more examples or exhortation? Consider some additional examples that I didn't include last week:

1. Consider the attitude of the four lepers found in 2 Kings 7. Notice what they said in verse three: "Why stay here until we die?" There are some who will die in their inactivity, waiting for the perfect moment that will never come.
2. Read the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. The lesson of that parable is that God expects increase. The person who played it safe was judged the most harshly in the story. He was so afraid of loss that he could not do anything that led to increase. When questioned why he had no increase, he offered the excuse that he was afraid.
3. Notice what Saul did immediately after he was saved, baptized and healed of blindness: "*At once* he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20 emphasis added).

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When I wrote about creativity last year, I mentioned that much of our creativity goes into excuse-making. We spend a lot of time putting a “spin” on why this isn’t the right time to step out. We are all guilty for we could all do more than we are currently doing. After all, Charles Wesley wrote 9,000 hymns; Charles Spurgeon preached 10,000 sermons; Bach wrote more than 1,100 musical compositions; John Wesley traveled the equivalent of five times around the equator in preaching the gospel. I am not promising those kind of results. I am only saying that we won’t produce anything if we simply wait for the “right time.”

ACTION, ACTION, ACTION

So what do I prescribe? Let’s look at one last passage as we close this **Memo**:

If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well (Ecclesiastes 11:3-6).

This is the attitude and spirit I am advocating for all PurposeQuest-ers. Don’t watch the wind; don’t study the clouds. Step out and do something. This week, write your book outline, call someone who can help you in business or ministry, make a phone call, plan the missions trip or enroll for school. You may fail, but you may succeed. You may be delayed and it won’t be the right time, but you won’t know that for sure until you try. Don’t talk yourself out of doing something before you make an effort. I pray that you will have a purposeful and meaningful week as you step out to do something about what’s in your heart. Have a great week!

THE MONDAY MEMO

Written in Temecula, California
By Dr. John Stanko - Issue 190

My time at home is over and I’m on the road again. My first trip this year is to sunny Southern California, where I was able to avoid the cold and snowy weather that came through Pittsburgh yesterday. But I don’t travel to avoid bad weather; I travel to talk about purpose. And my purpose travels will bring me to New York, Dallas, Williamsburg, Virginia and Arkansas over the next five weeks. If you would like to attend a seminar or schedule a one-on-one PurposeQuest session, please let me know

I’ve mentioned in past weeks that my purpose statement is in for another change. This is a surprise to me, for after 22 years with the same statement, I’ve now adjusted it twice in the last eight months. I don’t make this change lightly, but I do feel it adequately expresses who I am and what God created me to do. Before I share the change, let me give you some background.

JESUS WAS A SERVANT LEADER.

Five years ago, I read Robert Greenleaf’s famous book, *The Power of Servant Leadership*. When I started reading, I couldn’t put it down. Quite frankly, that book took my breath away (and still does). I have tried to read everything and anything on servant leadership since that

time, and all of it has served to sharpen my leadership focus and teaching. I was surprised to find that most of the books on servant leadership were not written by church leaders, but rather business leaders. This surprised me, since I knew that Jesus initiated the servant leadership message. Yet somehow the servant leadership message had escaped or circumvented the church. I determined at that point to introduce or reintroduce the message wherever and whenever possible.

To do this, I've reflected on what the Bible and Jesus had to say about servant leadership. More importantly, I studied what Jesus did as a servant leader. Here are some of my findings:

1. **Jesus had no official title or position.** He was called rabbi, which means teacher, yet he had no synagogue that he used as a base. He was an itinerate teacher in His three years of ministry work.
2. **Jesus built no organization.** Jesus had followers, but He never tried to formalize His network. He was content to teach, travel, heal and train leaders.
3. **Jesus did not recruit followers to a paid position.** Instead, Jesus recruited people to fulfill their purpose. He never promised a salary or benefits, yet He never apologized to anyone for calling them to do what they were created to do. Jesus never recruited anyone through guilt or manipulation, but through love.
4. **Jesus never was content to teach.** Jesus influenced people by what He taught and how He lived. He did everything He could to deflect attention from Himself to God the Father. Jesus never put pressure on anyone to follow Him. In fact, He discouraged some who wanted to do so. He sent them home to live their lives and share their testimony of He had helped them.
5. **Jesus never clarified who He was.** When people asked Jesus who He was, He asked them, "Who do you think I am?" He never took time to defend Himself from false accusations, but stayed focused on His purpose.

I determined at some point that I wanted to be a servant leader; I wanted to lead like Jesus. And that has led me to evaluate my life of 54 years. I've never had a high position in any organization. When I was a pastor, I was happier traveling and teaching. I now have an organization that allows me to teach through my books, personal appearances and website, but there are no employees. The purpose message has influenced many and I believe that the best is yet to come.

I'M A SERVANT LEADER, TOO.

I've said all this to let you know that my new purpose statement is: *To create order out of chaos without control.* My job is to influence as many people as I can with the message of purpose, productivity and servant leadership. I must do that without expecting anything in return, except the joy of seeing lives changed and organizations impacted. I believe that servant leadership is the next great emphasis for leaders all over the world, especially those who call on the name of the Lord. Jesus is our model for leadership. That's easy to say, but much harder to do. I urge you to join me as together we fulfill our purpose, trusting in the Lord that how Jesus led will still work today. Let's form a powerful network of men and women who are committed to fulfill their purpose the way Jesus fulfilled His.

I have a great deal of material on my website that talks about servant leadership. I include an index below of articles that are free for the taking (or asking). I urge you in the weeks to come to study and then apply the servant leadership principles in your family, life, work and ministry. Have a great week filled with purposeful service!