

The Monday Memo 246

When I arrived in Nairobi last week, I was informed that there were no hotel rooms due to a large international conference that the city was hosting. After I spent the first night in a hotel that is best forgotten (see Take That One Off Your List), I decided that God had something better and set out to see what I could find.

The Nairobi Hilton gave me a room but said I absolutely, positively had to be out after three nights. Since I needed a room for 10 nights, I decided to take what I could get and trust the Lord. When the end of my stay came, I went and asked for an extension. The Hilton said I could stay for two more nights, but then I absolutely, positively had to check out, since there would be no rooms available.

When the end of that stay came, I went and requested an extension. They granted my extension until I departed Nairobi for Zimbabwe. When I got my last extension, the desk clerk said to me, "You must have really been praying to God!" I said, "No, I was really thanking Him for what I knew He would do."

TRUST

At no point did I ever doubt that God would provide me a room. I prayed once and then spent my time thanking God for His provision--if not at the Hilton, then any place where I could rest in comfort and do my work.

This story is a typical example of my life the last few years. God has been teaching me to trust Him in large and small ways. I actually feel I am getting better at it! The reason I didn't send a Memo out yesterday was that my computer "froze" after my son tried to load some basic software. I said to the Lord, "If you want me to send out a Memo, then you need to help me get my computer fixed." This morning a friend and brother found the problem and fixed it. He said, "You need to thank God, Bill Gates and me for finding the problem." I was able to thank two of the three on his list.

I can't begin to tell you how much time I have spent as an adult fretting about things that were beyond my control. God has never failed me, yet I have regularly questioned His faithfulness. In fact, God has never failed anyone and He's not about to ruin His perfect record on me--I'm just not worth it!

DO YOU HAVE YOUR TRUST ON?

So how about you? How's your trust coming along? Are you fretting over things over which you have no control? Do you see daily challenges as an opportunity to worry, or as times to improve your trust? Can you see that these challenges are the basis for new testimonies, new stories that speak of God's love and care?

So here I am in Zimbabwe, sending out a Monday Memo not because I have a new system, but because of God's help. I hope that you see God's hand in your current situation, and that you will increasingly entrust your purpose and productivity to a God who never slumbers nor sleeps, who is capable of doing anything. And if you ever need a room in Nairobi, I suggest you go check out the Hilton.

The Monday Memo 247

Last week I wrote about trust and this week I have a wonderful opportunity to follow through. When I came home from church today, my computer showed an all too familiar blue screen that indicates there is a serious problem. Either the hard disk has crashed or perhaps a virus has shut down my system. I think it's the hard drive, but I'm no expert. I am sending this Memo from my friend's house here in Zimbabwe.

I wish I could say I am as prepared as I should be, but it's been about 10 days since I backed up any data. (If you sent me an email or subscribed to the Memo or Bible study in the last 10 days, you may want to re-send you request because I was behind in my correspondence.)

As I write this, I am at peace. I've got my trust on. I have a busy week and have important things to do. So I am putting this in God's hands and I am staying focused.

Well, I'm actually going one step further. I'm thanking God for this situation. I know it will work to my good, although I can't see how right now. I am especially thankful that I have this new system worked out, so I can send this Memo whether I am at my own computer or not.

Are you facing a tough situation right now? Then I invite you to join me and let's put our trust on together. I have decided to have a good week regardless of the news from the technician. God is still in charge.

I won't add my usual close this week so I can keep this short. I hope to be back to normal next week but, if not, I'll be in touch one way or the other.

The Monday Memo 248

Last night I was driving to an evening concert where I served as emcee. On the way I picked up four young men who were also going to the concert. Fuel is expensive and in short supply here in Zimbabwe, so we try to fill up our cars with passengers we know whenever possible.

The young men seemed glad to meet me and one of them asked me a question. "Dr. Stanko," he said, "I probably won't ever get another chance to be with you like this. I like to be in front of people and make them laugh. You do that so well. Can you share any secrets with me?"

I am often asked this question, so I have an answer ready. I thought I would share with you what I told him.

HUMOROUS SECRETS

1. Accept who you are. I have always made people laugh. There were times, however, when I abused and misused humor to make people look silly. I can remember one night when I asked the Lord to take away my humor because I had used it incorrectly. Yet I sensed that God had no intention of taking it away; He wanted to teach me how to use it properly.

Many times since then I have been able to use my humor to de-fuse sensitive situations. My humor has enhanced my ability to speak and write. In other words, being funny is who I am. The first step to using it properly was to accept it as a gift.

2. Develop who you are. Once I accepted the fact that being humorous is part of who I am, I then set out to make my humor effective. I studied other humorous people. I read their books and articles. I watched their routines, studying what worked and what didn't. I noticed that people did not laugh at everything they said, yet they were still considered comics.

I've still made lots of mistakes and I've said and written many things that weren't funny. Yet I keep working at it, studying how I can be better at what I do and who I am. More often than not, I will hear feedback that says, "You should be a stand-up comic." I laugh and respond, "I already am!"

3. Work at who you are. The final thing I said to the young man in the car surprised him. I told him that after I accepted who I who and began to develop my skill, I then had to work at being funny. I think a lot about what to say in certain situations. I may even go back and reconsider, "What could or should I have said in that situation that may have been

funny?" When I am an emcee, I try to plan scenarios before I go on, even if I'm working with another person.

Much of what I do is spontaneous; I am not a good joke teller. Yet I have found the more work I do to be funny, the more opportunities present themselves for me to be humorous.

YOU MAY NOT BE FUNNY BUT. . .

So there you have my three secrets of humor, and they really aren't so secret. They apply to almost any gift or talent you may have. Humor may not be your gift. I know, however, that you do have one, and that you may be looking past it or doing nothing with it. So, your assignment is to take these three tips and apply them to your own life and work.

For instance, are you a good cook? If so, then are you applying these three principles to your life in the kitchen? Are you taking cooking lessons? Giving lessons? Writing cookbooks? Teaching others to cook?

Creativity, productivity and purpose aren't magical concepts. They require a lot of work on your part, not only to find them, but to fulfill and express them. I urge you to do your part so that the world can enjoy you to the fullest. As you work on your gifts, I promise to continue to work on mine. Have a great week!

The Monday Memo 249

I feel reflective and philosophical today. I have spent some time thinking the last few days about my involvement in what I call the purpose revolution. I delivered my first purpose message in November, 2001. Since then, I estimate that I have spoken on purpose about 900 times in various settings. I don't think there are many others who can reflect on this message the way I can. I thought I would share some of those reflections with you in this Memo.

MY BIGGEST JOY

I think my greatest joy in purpose has been the number of people who have been impacted by the message. Little did I know in November, 2001 that I would not only speak so often about purpose but would also write six books and 249 Monday Memos. I hear from people all over the world who share their stories, testimonies and questions about purpose. What's more, there's no end in sight.

The people who write or call all tend to say the same thing: The purpose message is liberating and affirming. Even those who struggle to clarify their purpose write to say that they are better off for having searched, even if they aren't clear yet. What a privilege to be part of something that has touched so many lives.

MY BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT

When I first started speaking on purpose, I thought it would be just a matter of time before churches everywhere wanted to hear this message. I am delighted that Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, has touched so many and gone so far. I have never been comfortable with the fact, however, that purpose was confined to a 40-day study in Pastor Warren's approach. And, for the most part, I have been disappointed at how unresponsive the church and especially the leaders have been to the purpose message, even after they have completed the 40-day program. Unless pastors see how this message can help their church grow, they just aren't that interested.

I had one pastor tell me that purpose doesn't work in the church. People, he said, can't be free to choose what they will do; they must be assigned or told what to do. Another pastor asked me not to speak on purpose while I was at his church. He said that he had everything "set" the way he wanted it, and the purpose message would only stir discontent. Perhaps he was correct--about the discontent I mean.

In part, this has been due to my inability to adequately show how purpose can help a church grow, which it can. Nevertheless I don't fully understand why leaders would not want to equip their people to know what they were created to do, whether or not it gains more ushers or workers for the church.

MY BIGGEST SURPRISE

My biggest surprise has been how practical the purpose message is. I have never had anyone get weird once they have embarked on a serious PurposeQuest. No one has ever said to me, "I think I'm supposed to be an astronaut," or have someone say, "I'm the next Billy Graham." The purpose message delivers people from being super-spiritual. It also causes them to do a sane assessment of who they are and who they are not.

Purpose expands the opportunities that people have to do God's will. No longer does anyone have to choose from a short list of acceptable purpose statements (to do God's will, to be holy, to be a pastor, to name

a few). Purpose allows people to serve God in the realm of art, music, business, education or the military, where they can do the will of God outside the church and still be spiritual.

So there you have my reflections. Feel free to add your comments to this Memo at the site where it is posted. In the meantime, I urge you to stay true to your PurposeQuest, as I stay true to the message that captured my heart almost 15 years ago.

The Monday Memo 250

When I started writing The Monday Memo in March, 2001, I didn't really think I would write 250 issues. Then again, my purpose has allowed me to do things and go places that were just a dream. As you read this, my son and I will be enjoying a game drive in the famous Masai Mara region of Kenya. I have been there before, but this is his first time. In fact, he has been with me for four weeks on this trip and he has visited a lot of places he has never been to before. It has been my honor to serve as his tour guide for the trip.

Coming to Africa as I do is truly a dream come true, and the dream goes back to childhood. When I was young, I was an avid stamp collector. I would sit for hours and study the stamps of the the nations of the world, especially Africa. I would watch any show on television that had anything to do with Africa and its animals.

Then in 1981, I discovered my purpose to create order out of chaos. Shortly after that, I sensed that my purpose would bring me to Africa one day. I didn't know when or how, but I knew I would go.

My first visit to Africa was in 1993 when I worked for Integrity Music. A turning point in my life, however, was my infamous visit to Zimbabwe in 1995. I had planned on staying one day, until someone stole my briefcase with my passport in it. I ended up staying four days. During those four days, God arrested my heart and gave me a new assignment.

Since then, I have visited countless times and have used Zimbabwe as a base to visit Malawi, Botswana, Zambia, Kenya, and Uganda. I have also brought about 250 people with me over the years, introducing them to the joys and pains of work and ministry in Africa. Much of what I teach and write I have developed while here in Africa. And no longer am I watching shows about the animals here, I am seeing them firsthand.

So as you read, I may be watching a herd of elephants or hearing the crunching sounds of a lion eating his prey. I may be tracking a leopard or

getting so close to a rhino that I could reach out and touch him. What's even better is that I am doing it all because I am a man of purpose and God has opened doors for that purpose all over the world.

What are your dreams? What did you think of doing when you were young? What do you dream of doing today? The key to fulfill those dreams may not be to pursue them directly, but to clarify your purpose and pursue it wholeheartedly. As you do, your purpose will open doors and along the way you will find your dreams coming true. As you read this, I hope you will think to yourself, "Hey, if God did that for John Stanko, then God can do that for me!" And your thinking would be correct. Have a great week!