

The Monday Memo 266

The first day is here and gone, but the week is still in front of you. It's time to Celebrate a Failure. I trust that your celebration has gotten off to a good start. If you haven't partied yet, keep in mind that Celebrate a Failure Week runs through Saturday, October 7. There's still plenty of time for you to get into the spirit of the week as together we focus on and learn to overcome our fear of failure. We will do so by learning from our past mistakes, focusing on God's faithfulness in the midst of our weaknesses.

In the past few weeks, I have written about some of my more notable failures. I am doing this with the hope that it will help you celebrate your own failures as I celebrate mine. Permit me to share one more failure this week.

THE WORST CONFERENCE IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

When I was with Integrity Music, I helped plan and organize the worst conference in the history of the world! Our team was going to Dallas about this time of year. We thought registrations were coming in slowly, but didn't think there was anything to worry about. Then we learned right before we were scheduled to be there that the postal service had lost our brochures, all 50,000 of them. Only a handful were delivered and that explained the low response.

Instead of canceling the event, we pulled out all the stops to spread the word that we were coming, confident we could still have a successful event. Were we ever mistaken! On the first night of the event, we had less than 1,000 people in a church that seated 5,000. Right after we started the event, the sound system failed. When I returned from trying to work in the audio booth, I saw Ron Kenoly on stage playing the guitar and trying to lead worship. (Ron isn't known for his guitar-playing skills, believe me.) When he asked for the words to come up on the screen, it was then we realized that the projection system had malfunctioned. The bulb burned out and the church didn't have a spare.

I ran backstage to try and print off some sheets with the words on them only to discover that the copy machine was broken. I got up to take an offering and apologized, saying that I felt like I should be paying anyone who happened to be there that evening. To make matters worse, the event went on to lose about \$15,000. I realized that weekend that a bad event is like flushing a toilet. Once you flush, there isn't any way you can stop the process; you just have to let it run its course. That is how a badly planned event can be.

TWO CHOICES

I had two choices after that disastrous weekend. The first was to quit, which I briefly considered. The second was to take three months between Dallas and our next scheduled event and study what went wrong. I chose the latter and we went through everything we did. We came up with a number of innovations and built in more than a few safeguards to make sure what happened in Dallas would never happen again.

By God's grace, our next event was a fantastic success. We introduced some changes that generated quite a bit of revenue, and our team was better prepared and focused. Today I thank God for that terrible Dallas event and some others that followed. I learned more from those failures than I ever did from the good events. I also learned that a bad event isn't the end of the world.

When a baseball player strikes out or a soccer player misses a wide open goal, they don't go off the field and sit in the stands. They keep playing through their failure. In practice, they work on their technique but in the game they keep swinging and kicking. That's what you and I need to do as well.

Don't let your failures discourage you. Don't give up on your dream. Accept that failure is a part of every successful person's life, even your own. Adjust your expectations, but don't quit! Today I can organize great events because I organized some poor ones.

So bring out the confetti! Put up the banners and inflate the balloons. We have some celebrating to do! Don't let Celebrate a Failure Week end without taking the lesson of the week to heart: Failure isn't fatal or final unless you allow it to be. I hope you have a great week as you join with friends and failures around the world as we stare failure in the face and laugh at its attempts to limit our effectiveness and creativity. As you do, I trust that you will have a great week!

Feel free to add your comments, failure stories, favorite failure quotes or other pertinent information on the [site](#) where this entry is posted.

The Monday Memo 267

I don't know about you, but Celebrate a Failure Week wore me out because I had so much to celebrate! Seriously though, I hope that you did some time to reflect on failure and are ready now to move on to new levels productivity and purpose. I know that I am. (I made some

additional comments on purpose today on my blog site if you are interested.)

I was adding up the numbers the other day, and discovered that I've met with almost 1,500 people in the last five years to talk one-on-one about purpose. That's almost one person every day for five years! One thing's for sure: Those numbers give me a unique perspective on purpose and the challenges people face in finding and fulfilling it. There is one phrase that I hear all the time when I meet with people. Perhaps I would hear you say it if got together. What is the phrase? I'm glad you asked. That phrase is a simple two words.

YES, BUT. . .

I hear "yes, but" all the time. Do you hate your job? "Yes, but I can't quit." Are you good at what you do? "Yes, but it's not me, it's the Lord." Do you want to travel? "Yes, but I'm not sure it's God's will." Do you want to be in ministry full-time? "Yes, but I'm not sure if it's the right time or season." Are you ready to do God's will in your life no matter what the cost? "Yes, but I want balance and don't want to go overboard on any one thing."

I have come to the conclusion that "yes, but" people are expert excuse makers. They use their magnificent creativity to concoct all kinds of reasons why now is not the time for them to produce, shine or make an impact. I have come to the conclusion that "yes, but" is really the same answer as "no." "Yes, but" sounds a whole lot better.

The last excuse on my list of examples is one that I would like to explore more closely and that is our desire for balance.

BALANCE IS BUNK

Many people stop short of effectiveness because they don't want to go overboard. They want to be balanced. They want to have faith, but not excessive faith. They want to address racism, for example, but not make anyone unhappy or uncomfortable. They want to see world-class results in their life, but not have to pay a world-class price.

I challenge you to name one person who was balanced who made a difference in the world. Was Martin Luther or Martin Luther King? How about Nelson Mandela or Florence Nightingale? Perhaps Winston Churchill or Billy Graham?

Now you would say that those were great people who had a unique purpose to fulfill? All right then, think of your favorite teacher when you were growing up. Were they balanced or were they passionate about teaching and learning? Think of your favorite athlete or singer? How did they achieve that special place in your mind? They did it, I would guess, because they were totally committed to their craft, their purpose. I would further imagine that they were not "yes, but" people, but "yes, and here's how we will do it" people.

Yes, I believe that balance is bunk, a myth that we pursue in our minds. The pursuit of balance makes us ineffective and at times boring. Listen to yourself this week and see if you are in the habit of saying, "Yes, but." If you are, then keep the yes, and get rid of the but. From there, I urge you to get busy giving the world what you have that it needs. As you do, I know you'll have a great week.

Feel free to post your comments to this Memo on the [site](#) where it is posted.

The Monday Memo 268

Last week I wrote about balance. Basically, I'm against it. No, that's not completely accurate. I just don't think it's possible to be "balanced" and to impact the world at the same time. I know some of you wrote me to express your disagreement and I urge you to read their comments and add your own on the site where this is posted.

I saw something this week that convinced me even more that balance and productivity, balance and purpose, balance and joy are all mutually exclusive. What did I see? I'm glad you asked

BLUEGRASS SPECIAL

I was channel flipping last week and came to a public television station that was showing a concert featuring Rhonda Vincent and The Rage from St. Louis. I had never heard of Rhonda or her group, but her voice caught my attention, so I decided to watch for a while. It turns out that Rhonda and The Rage are a bluegrass music group. For those outside of the U.S., bluegrass is a version of country western music. That's probably not the most accurate definition, but it will do for our purposes. (If you want to learn more about bluegrass music, you can check it out on the Internet link provided.)

The Rage featured a violin, viola, mandolin, cello, upright bass fiddle, banjo, guitar and Rhonda's fantastic voice. When I went to their website, I

found out that Rhonda has been voted outstanding female singer by the International Bluegrass Music Association for the last seven consecutive years. I remembered some of the songs from the television show and downloaded them to play on my Ipod, that's how good I thought they were.

"So what," you may be asking? "John Stanko is into bluegrass music now, big deal." No, I'm not into bluegrass music but I sure got into reading about Rhonda Vincent. You know what I found out? Rhonda Vincent isn't balanced! In my opinion, that's the key to her phenomenal success in the world of bluegrass music.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

I counted the concerts that Rhonda has in October and November and came up with 22. She is taking the month of December off, but then has 19 concerts in January and February. Her site lists concerts through next November. I think 41 concerts in five months is a lot of concerts, don't you? I wonder if she travels with her family, because I did see that she was wearing a wedding ring? Does she have children? I was unable to find out.

I know that Rhonda writes music and does a lot of recording, too. Ms. Vincent is totally committed to her love, her passion. That is who she is and she has impacted her world of influence like no other woman has ever done.

If that is what one woman can do in her field, what can you do? I'll tell you one thing: You won't do much if you choose to pursue balance. Balance is boring; passion changes lives. Balance causes you to be mediocre at doing a few things; passion drives you to be the best at one thing. You say, "I can do my best when I do a little work, then a little family time, and then a little ministry time." I say focus on one at a time and devote yourself to being the best that you can be, whether it's being a parent, worker, or pastor.

Was Paul balanced? Were Peter, James and John? How about Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther, Ernest Hemingway, or Beethoven? We know who those men are because they were passionate and they pursued what they did best with abandon. The world is in desperate need of who you are and what you have to offer. Please don't hide behind the balance myth; let your flame burn brightly and intensely for as many as possible to see. As you do, I know that you will take your place with the Rhonda Vincents of the world, who have decided to make their mark by being the best they can possibly be in their chosen vocation.

Feel free to write your comments to this entry on the [site](#) where it is posted. Sign in and let us know what you think about my attempts to derail the balance movement. Am I misguided or spot on?

The Monday Memo 269

I'm sorry I didn't get The Monday Memo to you yesterday. I had planned on sending it from the airport, but I missed my flight in Detroit and the whole trip got a bit complicated. I'm in Rome now, however, and ready to start my tour tomorrow. First, let's take care of even more important business--The Monday Memo.

I received more responses last week on the topic of balance than for any other Memo in its five-year history. If you haven't already, go to the site where the responses are posted and read them yourself. Included is a response from a woman named Manda who is passionate about bluegrass music. She wrote to give us more information on Rhonda Vincent and some recommendations for other hot bluegrass groups.

I was impressed by Manda's passion for bluegrass and the time it took for her to write me. I guess you could say she is unbalanced where bluegrass music is concerned. That's why she took the time to write such a comprehensive response even though she isn't a subscriber to The Monday Memo! I hope you'll find something that you can passionate and unbalanced about as well.

I'M NOT CONVINCED.

After all was said and done, however, my conviction remains the same. Balance is a myth, a figment of someone's imagination. Charles Moody, the famous American evangelist of the 19th century said, "This one thing I do, not these many things I dabble in." When you're balanced, you tend to dabble but you don't major in anything. Consequently your life is "nice," but nice lives don't change the world and advance the kingdom of God. If you agree or disagree, make sure you go the site where these entries are posted and weigh in on the topic. If I am off base, then you must let me know. If I am spot on, then you must help me convert those who are convinced I've missed the mark.

Was Mother Teresa balanced? Absolutely not! That's why she captured the attention of the world! I'm not saying that you have to do what Mother Teresa did with her passion and purpose. If your passion is flowers, for example, then be unbalanced where flowers are concerned. Grow them, arrange them, study them and open a greenhouse.

George Washington Carver was a famous African-American scientist of the 19th century. He prayed, "Lord, teach me about the peanut" and God did. In Carver's simple laboratory, he discovered more than 300 uses for the peanut (along with 119 for the sweet potato). Carver was unbalanced where the peanut was concerned and he changed the course of agriculture. Do you see my point?

UNBALANCED BALANCE

I came to another conclusion after reading last week's mail: Some people are unbalanced where balance is concerned. They're so committed to being balanced that they've become unbalanced! That convinced me even more that balance is a myth; God created you to be a passionate being and you will pursue something with all your heart. Those that don't know Him are passionate about sin. Come to think of it, some who know Him are, too!

As I reflected on balance this past week, I wondered whether it doesn't serve as another cover for fear. If I don't attempt to excel at anything, I can't very well fail, can I? Then the other thought I had was that balance is achievable, but only over a long period of time. That long period, however, will be a conglomeration of unbalanced seasons.

For a few years you could be unbalanced as a student with little time for anything else. Then perhaps you will be an unbalanced newlywed. You could go on to be an unbalanced parent, spending large amounts of time with your young children. Then you may enter a season of being unbalanced in your work or career. You may have a time when you are disciplined in the ways of God, with little interest in anything but solidifying your faith. As I look back on my 56 years, I see a tapestry of seasons and interests that required my undivided attention. Today they are the recipe for my success.

So, how about it? Are you convinced yet? If not, you must write and tell me why so that I don't continue to lead the readers astray. If you are, then give me more insight for the fight. I'm now on a mission to stamp out balance in my lifetime. It's a big job, but someone has to do it. I figure if I'm unbalanced enough where balance is concerned, then the world and the Kingdom will be the better for it.

Have a great, passionate, zealous, unbalanced week!

The Monday Memo 270

I'm back in London after finishing my cruise last Saturday. I spoke three times on Sunday, twice in London at Celebration Church London and once at New Jerusalem Apostolic Church in Birmingham. I will be in London for some profiling appointments until I return home on Wednesday. If you're interested in my reports from the cruise where we retraced the steps of Paul, you can read them on my blog site. If you're new to The Monday Memo, you can read some of the past Memos on the site where they are posted.

This past week I've been talking to people about faith and productivity. It may seem strange to link a business word like productivity with a spiritual word like faith, but I think the two are connected. Let me explain my thinking.

GREATER WORKS

In John 14:12, Jesus made this astounding statement:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Now think for a minute. In your opinion, what was the greatest thing that Jesus did? Most people respond that it was when He raised the dead. If that's true, then what could be a greater work than raising a dead person? Raising more dead people? Clearing out a cemetery or hospital?

Most people don't think much about this verse because they don't really believe that they can top what Jesus did, regardless of what they consider His greatest works. When you think like that, however, you miss a dynamic that could greatly help you be more productive.

Jesus did fabulous things but there were some things He didn't do. Jesus never opened an orphanage. He never wrote a book. As far as we know, He never opened a hospital or organized a group to go on a mission of mercy to a foreign land. He never started a business and never gave a large sum of money to a worthy cause. Why didn't He do those things? He left them for you and me to do.

YOUR GREATER WORKS

So if you believe in Jesus, and I hope you do, why aren't you doing greater things than He did? Perhaps you have underestimated just how important and powerful it would be to actually achieve the things that are in your heart today. You may also think that only a supernatural miracle

would qualify as a greater work. Since you don't do supernatural miracles, you assumed that John 14:12 was for someone else and you were exempt or disqualified from this tremendous promise.

I have faith in Jesus and I want to do greater works. How about you? If you answer "yes," then what will you do? Where can you apply your faith so that the results are miraculous? Maybe you will care for Aids orphans or perhaps you will open a chain of businesses. You could create some educational innovation that will revolutionize the way children learn. You may invent some technique that will make life easier, enriching yourself in the process. Then you'll start foundations like Mr. Kellogg, Mr. Ford or Mr. Rockefeller that will fund humanitarian projects long after you're gone.

You get my point. You may ask, "Who am I to think about doing those things?" If you believe in Jesus, the answer is, "Who are you not to think like that?" The question you have to settle is whether or not John 14:12 only applies to a select few or to every believer. If it's for you, then you have some work to do. The good news is that you're not alone if your work is coupled with faith. With faith, you are guaranteed that your results will be great, greater than you could ever imagine because God is with you.

What have you said someone ought to do? Could that someone be you? Write down in your journal what I call your elegant dream. You don't have to know how you will do it right now; you just have to know what it is. Let it come out of you in its entirety. Once you write it out, study it. Let it become a part of your thinking every day.

If there's something you can do to make it a reality, what would it be? Do you need to go back to school? How can you make that happen (remember, you must incorporate faith)? Do you need to have money to do achieve your elegant dream? Are you sure that's your greatest need? You could meet someone this week who could help you develop a plan or give you the money for this elegant dream that could eventually qualify as a greater work. You have to be able, however, to articulate that dream, before you can expect anyone to understand it and respond. What are you waiting for? Get moving, and have a great week while you're at it.