

## **The Monday Memo 276**

As you read this, I will be on my way home from Zimbabwe through Amsterdam. These last three weeks have been among the best since I started PurposeQuest six years ago. I felt more focused, effective and productive than at any other time. I am ready to go home, however, and I am looking forward to a Christmas break with family.

Yesterday I spoke at Celebration Church for the second time this trip. On both occasions, I chose a portion of the Christmas story as my theme. Two weeks ago, my title was "Have a Mary Christmas." Yesterday my title was "Suddenly: The Sights and Sounds of Breakthrough." Since breakthrough was the theme for the church in 2006, I thought it would be good to wrap up the year by giving some of my limited insights on the subject. The PowerPoint slides from both messages can be found on my blog.

I almost spoke about the Magi last Sunday, but I thought I would save those thoughts for this Monday Memo.

### **WHO WERE THOSE MEN?**

Who were those wise men or Magi who came from the east to visit Jesus and bring him gifts? (You may want to renew your familiarity with this brief story by reading Matthew 2:1-12.) We aren't really sure. Nor do we know what they were looking for as they studied the heavens and what kind of star they saw that caused them to follow it hundreds of miles to find an infant king. We know it wasn't a comet, for the star stopped right over the place where Jesus was.

There were probably more than three men who came to see Jesus, but we have numbered them as three since they brought three gifts of myrrh, incense and gold. They rode on camels for days, weeks even, not sure of what they would find when they arrived.

When they did arrive, they checked in with King Herod, convinced that he would know where the infant royalty was. It is interesting that the wise men knew more of what was going on spiritually in Herod's kingdom than Herod did.

By the time the Magi arrived, Joseph, Mary and Jesus were living in a house, not in a stable, so they came some time after the night the shepherds went to see Jesus in the manger. Since Herod carefully ascertained when the star had first appeared and then had all the male babies two years of age and under killed in Bethlehem, the Magi could

have arrived as much as two years after Jesus birth. That's a long time to watch and follow a star.

## **FOLLOW YOUR OWN STAR**

When praying for someone yesterday morning, I spoke this prayer: "May the star of Jesus appear in your life and lead and guide you to where He wants you to be!" After I said that, I couldn't stop thinking about that phrase. And the more I thought about it, the more I knew that was my prayer for you as well.

You will need God's help if you are to find and fulfill your purpose. That's not a problem, however, for God is in the business of helping people like you clarify purpose. When Jesus was born, His star appeared and led those who were interested directly to his home. The same thing can happen today for you. God can lead and guide you right where you need to be, when you need to be there. Oftentimes when you can't see your purpose, you aren't quite ready to find it. Yet if you keep searching just like the Magi kept searching the heavens, your star will appear and suddenly it will all make sense.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, I urge you to follow in the footsteps of the Magi. Wise men and women still seek Jesus and, as they do, they find purpose. I pray that 2007 will be a year of purpose and productivity the likes of which you have never seen, imagined or enjoyed. I also pray that when you find the star and follow it, you will end up as the Magi did--worshiping the King and giving Him gifts. There is no greater gift than devoting and dedicating the fulfillment of your purpose to Christ and His kingdom.

From all the Stanko household, we wish you a very Merry Christmas as you follow your star into the purpose of God!

Feel free to post your comment to this Memo on the [site](#) where it is located. You can also go to the same site to read the other Monday Memos from 2006. And don't forget my personal PurposeQuest website, which has loads of material that will help you find your purpose and be productive. Finally, please remember PurposeQuest and the Stankos in your year-end giving.

## **The Monday Memo 277**

It's Christmas Eve 2006. Where did this year go? As I get older, it seems that the days just fly by, which is why I am determined to enjoy every one of them. I don't know how many I have left.

This week I have been meditating on two things. One is the story of the magi, which I wrote about in last week's Memo. This week I want to write about the other theme, which will cause us to focus on the famous Christmas carol, Hark the Herald Angels Sing!

All credit for Hark the Herald Angels Sing is usually attributed to Charles Wesley, the brother of Methodism's founder, John Wesley. Charles was a prolific song writer, with almost 9,000 hymns to his credit. Charles only approved of sombre, slow and solemn music for any of his lyrics, however, so this particular carol was sung to a different tune for 100 years after it was first written in 1739.

Then in 1840, a man named Felix Mendelssohn wrote a commemorative cantata to honor Johann Gutenberg's invention of the printing press. What does that have to do with this carol? It would have nothing except that a man named William Cummings heard the cantata and felt that one of the melodies could better serve the magnificent lyrics that Wesley had penned for his carol. Cummings adapted Mendelssohn's melody to Wesley's lyrics and the result was the version of Hark the Herald Angels Sing! that we know and sing today.

What does this have to do with anything, you may ask? It strikes me as a classic example of the simplicity and interconnection of the creative process. Not all creativity has to involve something original. Cummings took two existing things--Mendelssohn's music and Wesley's words--to create something totally new. He improved something that already existed and took something that could be put to better use to create something fresh and new that has impacted the world for more than a century.

As we end 2006, I want to begin a new discussion of the creative process to encourage you to take your own creativity more seriously in 2007. You are a creative person! What you see and the ideas you have can change the world, if you will stop discounting them as meaningless or insignificant. You don't have to invent something totally new to qualify as creative; you just have to act on your ideas and release them to the world. The world, with God as your agent, can then act to endorse the very creativity that you dismiss or take for granted.

Do you have any good ideas, even if they are only to improve something that already exists? If you do, take heart and remember Wesley, Mendelssohn, and Cummings. Those three men who never met collaborated to create something memorable. There is no reason why you can't do the same.

From my house to yours, we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a creative New Year!

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## **The Monday Memo 278**

Happy New Year! I trust that you had a great holiday season and are now ready to be more purposeful and productive in 2007 than ever before! Our holidays were good, but they went by way too quickly. I did a lot of writing over the Christmas break. Now I begin a busy travel schedule for the next few months, which you can see below, along with a number of other important notices that I urge you to read.

Last week we began talking about creativity. I think we will maintain that theme for at least the next few weeks. This week I was reading my last book for 2006, entitled *The Best American Spiritual Writing 2006*. One of the essays in that book, entitled *Into the Wonder*, was about C.S. Lewis, the great Christian author and apologist and one of the great creative minds of the last century. I thought the article had merit for our discussion on creativity.

### **AN UNLIKELY CANDIDATE**

The essay began by describing a particularly trying time in Lewis's life when he was living with his brother and an elderly woman. The woman was bedridden and increasingly used Lewis as an extra maid to help meet her needs. Meanwhile his brother, who helped him with correspondence and filing, drank himself to insensibility and ended up in a hospital. The pressures of this situation, along with his work load at Oxford, drove Lewis to the point of collapse and he was eventually hospitalized for exhaustion.

It was shortly thereafter that Lewis had a friend over to read him a portion of a new children's book that Lewis was writing. This book became *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, which was the first of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, which to date has sold 85 million copies in 30 languages.

What is so interesting to me about this scenario?

First, Lewis wrote perhaps his most famous work at a most inopportune time in his life. I often feel like I can't be more creative or productive until certain things change, until my life is free of worry, anxiety or mental clutter. Lewis didn't wait for the best time. In fact, in a time of suffering and professional busy-ness, he began to write fiction for children, a most unusual exercise for a man known more at that point for his theological rather than fantasy work.

Second, Lewis was not married at the time and had no children (he had two stepsons from his marriage to Joy Gresham and maintained a relationship with the boys after his wife's death). I think it remarkable that Lewis could write so effectively for children when he had none of his own.

Finally, Lewis was a loner as a child. His childhood, while not sad or abusive, wasn't filled with the kind of childhood joys upon which he could draw to write his stories.

## **NO MORE EXCUSES**

Lewis produced creative work in spite of his personal difficulties. You must learn to do the same. You can no longer not create because circumstances in your life aren't quite right. Neither can you dismiss your creative ideas because you don't see yourself as qualified or fit. Lewis was neither a happy child nor natural father, yet he wrote children's books that changed the world. What could you do if you stopped hiding behind excuses and limitations and just did it?

It seems that Lewis's hardships prepared him to create; his suffering somehow fueled his drive to write. If you can see that your suffering is preparation and not a hindrance, you will find new freedom to produce when it may not seem like a good time to produce. And please don't tell anyone that you don't have the time to create. You have all the time in the world--24 hours every day. It's not that you don't have time; you aren't using it creatively to create.

May 2007 be your most purposeful and productive yet. Together let's do things that will change our generation (and future ones) just like C. S. Lewis did. Have a great week and year!

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## The Monday Memo 279

Have you wondered where creativity comes from? Have you also wondered why some people are more creative than others? You haven't I have and I don't have many answers. For the most part, creativity continues to be a mystery to me. One thing I do know, however, and that is that creativity is hard work. Today I am sitting in a cafe, composing this Monday Memo. This Memo won't descend from heaven, even if God inspires it (which I hope He is). I have to write it and send it out. That's not glamorous or spiritual; it's just effort.

Many people tell me that they are more productive because they don't have enough time to write, paint, study, or think, for that matter. You know my response to that excuse. You have all the time there is in the world--24 hours every day. It's what you do with that time that will set you apart as a creative or non-creative person.

If you have read many of my Memos, you know that I am a big fan of Julia Cameron; In her book *The Sound of Paper: Starting from Scratch*, Cameron had this to say about the issues of time and creativity:

Most of us think, "If only I had more time, then I would create." We have a fantasy that there is such a thing as good creative time, an idyll of endless, seamless time unfolding invitingly for us to frolic in creativity. No such bolts of limitless time exist for most of us. Our days are chopped into segments, and if we are to be creative, we must learn to use the limited time that we have.

When ego is siphoned off creativity, when creativity becomes one more thing we do, like laundry, then it takes far less time to do it. Much of our desire for creative time has to do with our trying to coax ourselves into being in the right mood to create. We want to "feel like it," and when we don't quickly, we think the solution is more time. Actually, the solution is less attention to the vagaries of mood. In short, creativity needs to become daily, doable and nonnegotiable; something as quotidian [everyday, commonplace, ordinary] as breathing. When we make a special occasion out of our art, we rob ourselves of the time we actually have.

Often I don't start creating because I don't believe I have enough time to complete what I start. When that is the case, I need to trust that God will help me use the time I have. At other times, I don't start something because I am afraid I won't have enough time to do it well. When that happens, I need more courage, not more time. I need to begin and trust that what I don't consider "good enough" may be more than good enough

to impact someone else. I can't let my perfectionism inhibit my ability to produce what I can, when I can, no matter how meager it may seem.

I have begun most days for the last five years writing my daily installment for my weekly Bible studies. I have completed 16 books in the New Testament by focusing on four verses a day every day, usually investing 15–20 minutes. I sit down to write and somehow the creative process kicks in, and the result is a large body of work of which I am quite pleased. Even today I just had to sit down and begin to write; the result is this edition 279 of The Monday Memo thirty minutes later.

You have the time and you also have the creative ability. Now all you have to do is spend a little time every day bringing forth what has probably been in you for some time. You are a creative person; don't waste your creativity on excuses of why you can't produce. Move past your fears and invest some time and hard work. In the long run, you and the world will be the better for those efforts. Have a great week!

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## **The Monday Memo 280**

I am in the Pittsburgh airport heading out of town for the week. This past weekend I did some leadership training for church leaders after I returned from Dallas, something I really enjoy doing. I started out talking about purpose and had planned to move on to include some other material. We never got past purpose, however, as I got a lot of questions about purpose and how it relates to church work.

One of the questions really got me thinking while I spoke, so I thought I would include the question and my answer this week.

### **THE QUESTION**

One man raised his hand and asked me, "What about the pain that you have to go through to achieve your purpose? How can you press through it?" My initial response was that purpose is the answer. When you find something that you love doing, that is so important to you that you can't ignore it or walk away from it, then you have a reason to press through or endure the pain.

It is said of Jesus, "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2 NASU). Jesus had joy and that

propelled to the cross and through the shame. That is why I am so adamant that joy is critical to your PurposeQuest. Without it, you don't have what you need to take you through the tough times that will surely come.

Do you have that kind of joy? Is there something that you are willing to suffer to achieve, paying whatever price is necessary? I hope you do. If not, I urge you to do whatever you have to do to find it.

## **MORE ANSWERS**

But then we kept talking and I identified two other things that leaders need to deal with in addition to pain. The second is money and the third is fear. When you don't know where the money is coming from, you can limit your vision and dreams, reducing them to meet your current resource pool. Whenever that happens, you shrink back from the brink of success, living in your potential but never seeing it fulfilled.

If you are a regular reader, you know what I have had to say about fear. Recently I have come to see that it isn't fear of failure that often paralyzes you. It is the fear of criticism. I have realized in the last few years how many times I didn't do something that was in my heart to do because I was fearful of what someone would say about me.

I felt good about my leadership session and I hope the people left with those three things in their mind: pain and joy, money and fear. Maybe this would be a good week to see how you're doing with those three things. What could you do if you had joy, didn't worry about money at first, and overcame your fears? Those answers will go a long way toward you understanding and fulfilling your purpose. Have a great week!