

## **Monday Memo 301: Huh?**

In Monday Memo 290, I raised the issue of focusing on the question "what?" rather than "how?" I think I would like to revisit that topic again this week. You may want to go back and read issue 290 before you proceed but, if not, then let's get started.

### **HOW?**

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce that she was pregnant with Jesus, he delivered the "what" to that young girl. She was to give birth to a Son and He would change the world. This would be a lot of "what" information to deliver to anyone, let alone a young teenage girl. But like so many of us, Mary immediately began to think of the "how."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34).

The angel was patient with this young girl, more patient than he had been with her cousin's husband Zechariah, who was unable to talk for nine months after he asked "How?". The angel told Mary:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Luke 1:35).

I contend that Mary had no more information after the angel answered than before she asked. To understand what I mean, read on.

### **HUH?**

Mary could have responded to the angel, "Huh?" When we hear "Holy Spirit," we have a well-developed theology to understand who He is. Mary, however, had no such thing. When the angel answered her question "how" with, "The Holy Spirit will take care of it," she still had no idea what that meant. Do you see how this relates to your current situation?

You know what you want to do, and you may even know your purpose. But you want to know how? How will your book be published? How will your singing career be launched? How will you get the money to start your business? How can you pay for your degree? How will you find your life partner? The answer to every question you can pose is the same as the answer that Mary received: The Holy Spirit will do it! The angel added these words for good measure; "For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

So if the answer to your question is the same as Mary received, then your response should perhaps be the same as Mary's:

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38).

The angel told Mary in so many words, "You just focus on the what. Let God handle the how." That was good advice then and it's good advice now.

Do you see how liberating this is for you? You can focus on getting ready for the what and leave the how in God's hands. You can enjoy the journey, even your PurposeQuest, because you don't to have all the answers. You just have to sit back and watch it all unfold.

Now that I've made your life easier, you can enjoy a what-filled week while you leave the how to Him.

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

## **Monday Memo 302: I Learned to Speak By Not Speaking**

I enjoy speaking and continue to work at improving my craft. Someone once called me a Wednesday speaker. When I asked him to explain, he said, "I still remember on Wednesday what you said on Sunday." I considered that a high compliment. Last year, I ran into two women who recognized me. They both told me that they had just been thinking about a message they heard me deliver. To the best of my calculations, they had heard those messages eight years earlier!

Most people don't know, however, that I learned to speak by not speaking. If you don't think that's possible, it is true. To understand how I did it, you will have to read on.

### **ELEVEN YEARS**

I was an associate pastor in Alabama for eleven years from 1978–1989. While I had many chances to lead a small home group, I only got two chances in those eleven years to speak before the entire church. The second time I spoke was the last Sunday I was there before I left for Orlando. So it's an accurate statement that I averaged one talk every eleven years. That's a lot of preparation time between messages, don't you think?

So what did I do for those 600 Sundays, plus conferences and special meetings, when I watched and listened to so many speakers? I got ready to speak, that's what I did!

I knew that one day I would address large audiences, even though I was far from doing that during those eleven years. So first, I would dream of and visualize myself speaking before people. I often tell audiences that I saw them before I ever came to be with them. Second, I studied the speakers I witnessed. I watched what worked and what didn't. I decided what kind of speaker I would be before I ever got a chance to speak, just by watching and learning. I think the most difficult thing was to watch ineffective speakers when I knew in my heart that I could do a better job.

Third, I prepared things to say, even though I had no invitations or speaking engagements. I wrote my Life is a Gold Mine seminar in 1985, well before I ever had an invitation to deliver it. I prepared the slides, outlines and material. I had a few chances outside of my local church to speak, and I made the most of those opportunities, although at times I wasn't very effective.

Finally, I never gave up my dream, even though I had few opportunities to speak. I watched comedienne's. listened and read great speeches of history and went to school to earn my doctorate. I did all that I knew to do. There were times that I was so discouraged when nothing happened to advance my vision that I, well, I just cried. But I never gave up.

## **THE BREAKTHROUGH**

Then I moved to Orlando in 1989 where I was pastor of a church until 1993. It was then that I also began to speak in prisons. I would speak once a week at the church, but often spoke six or seven times a week in a jail or prison. I went from no speaking to nonstop speaking. Today, I have no lack of engagements and I continue to hone my skills. My main preparation, however, was during those eleven years of non-activity.

What is the dynamic here that is important for you to grasp? I think it's found in Proverbs 22:29:

Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.

I don't care what your dream is. If you spend time pursuing excellence and becoming good at what you do, you won't have to go looking for "kings." The kings will come looking for you. So don't waste any more time waiting for your breakthrough. Rather invest your time in preparing

for the day when your breakthrough comes. And that preparation can begin the minute you finish reading this Monday Memo. Have a great week!

### **Monday Memo 303: Joy Feast**

I am in Nairobi, but I'm on my way home! It's been 10 weeks away, so I'm anxious to get home to my wife, summer weather, reliable electricity and water, and the Fourth of July. I am not complaining, for I've had a great trip and will be back on the African continent the third week of August.

During this trip, I reconnected with my favorite book, Proverbs. As you know, I published a book in 1997 entitled A Daily Dose of Proverbs. It is still one of my best-selling books, in which I wrote one page of devotional material focusing on one verse from Proverbs for every day of the year. (I recently wrote a blog entry about Proverbs if you would like to read it.) While reading through the book this month, I ran across a few verses on joy that stood out to me in light of the discussions we have had about joy in Monday Memos 297 and 298. (I am also attaching the July excerpt from my Proverbs book below for your use and enjoyment.)

#### **JOY VERSES**

The first verse that caught my attention is Proverbs 14:10:

Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.

No one can tell you what you should like or not like, energize you or not. You know what your heart is telling you when you love to do something, and when something is a drag. You can't explain it, justify it or dismiss it. It just is. I love to write. I love to work in Africa. That joy is my indicator that those are things I am supposed to do. At the same time, I was depressed when I was the pastor of a local church. A pastor does a noble work, but there was no joy in it for me. So I stopped being a pastor in 1993 and I have never looked back or had any regrets. I didn't leave church work; I just pursued work in that world that gave my heart joy.

The second verse is found in Proverbs 17:22:

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Joy, or lack of it, affects your physiology. If you have joy, you have a better chance for health. If not, then you are in danger of dried up bones. How often do you laugh every day? More importantly, how often do you

laugh while you are working or doing whatever it is that you do all day, like going to school or tending your children? Laughter is good medicine, so doing what you enjoy is a health tonic of sorts. Not doing what you love is a prescription for illness, pure and simple. No wonder I feel so good these days!

## **JOY FEAST**

The one verse, however, that really caught my attention is in Proverbs 15:15:

All the days of the oppressed are wretched, but the cheerful heart has a continual feast.

How many people I know who hate to get up and go to work. Their days are wretched and that means they are oppressed. How so? They have to do what they do and they somehow feel that this is noble or God's will. God does not oppress you by placing you in situations that you don't enjoy or find happiness. He may do that for a season to train you or develop some aspect of your character, but He won't do it for long.

Yet those who find what they love to do and then do it have a continual feast. They constantly feed at a table of creativity, innovation and significance. They have energy and an attitude that says, "I don't have to do what I'm doing; I get to do what I'm doing." Every day is a "ten" on a scale of one to ten when you do what you love.

So at what table are you feeding? Is it a table of meager fulfillment and occasional joy, or is it a table where there is an endless supply, a feast, of joyful energy? I refuse to spend one day at the wretched table of oppression, but only want to sit and serve where I can access the abundance of joy. I invite you to sit at the table with me, for there's plenty of room and there is no end to goodies that joy can provide. In fact, why not determine to take your place at that table today! If you do, you won't just have a good week in general, but a good week filled with seven joyful days.

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

## **Monday Memo 304: Goals**

As you read this, I will be on my way to Atlanta, Georgia and the annual Christian Booksellers Convention, where I will premier my seventh book, Beyond Purpose: Keys to Unlocking a Life of Productivity and Fulfillment.

It is a 52-lesson guide to a more creative and productive life and I am pleased with the outcome. You can find out how to order a copy at the end of this Memo.

This week I feel like updating you on some things going on in my life, with the hope that these things will spur you to set some goals and set about achieving them.

## **WRITING**

I have a goal to earn more revenue from writing so that I can spend more time writing. I regularly visualize myself in a major bookstore somewhere, sitting behind a table, busily autographing my books for eager, paying customers lined up around the store. Any time I am writing, I keep that image before me and it encourages me to write. Today and tomorrow I will have a book signing hour for bookstore owners from around the world. I already see long lines forming to get my latest book at that event.

I had a toy typewriter when I was a child, and I used to spend hours typing out articles and chapters from magazines and books. My goal as a 10-year-old was to have a pile of papers next to that typewriter that was the size of a manuscript. I didn't write anything original then, but I knew I wanted to write something that had substance to it. Today, I am doing just that.

## **SCHOOL**

I have always enjoyed school and was a good student. I graduated in the top ten percent of my university class, went on to graduate school for economics and then earned a doctorate in pastoral ministries in 1995. I have decided it's time to go back to school, so in August I will start a doctorate in ministry program at the Reformed Theological Presbyterian Seminary here in Pittsburgh.

It is a two-year cohort program, which means I will be with the same classmates (my cohorts) throughout the program. Then I will have a ministry project to do and will hopefully finish in not much longer than the two years the classes will take to complete. Right now I am in the midst of the 18 books I have to read for the start of classes on August 6. I guess when I graduate, you will have to call me Doctor-Doctor.

My goal is to enroll for something every year that will add to my effectiveness. Last year, I attended the training at The Pacific Institute, and that changed my life in so many ways. This doctoral program will

fulfill my training goal for the next two years and help direct my reading program to relevant and helpful material.

## **GOALS**

My book and school are the direct result of goals I have set for myself. No one forces me to set or achieve those goals. They are things I want and choose to do. There may be more income for me from those goals, but that is incidental to why I set them. I want to be the best that I can be at what I do and writing and study help make that possible. I have other goals that I won't mention here, but I hope you get the picture.

So what are your goals? Do you have any? Can you set some more? If you don't have any, why don't you? What are afraid of? To help you understand the goal-setting process even more, I have attached an excerpt below from my first book, *Life is a Gold Mine: Can You Dig It?* Take some time this week to read this article, examine the goals you have and set some goals you would like to achieve. Then get busy visualizing and actualizing how you will accomplish those goals. Who knows, one day you may be sitting at that table with me and we may be signing some books together. That would be great, wouldn't it? While you're dreaming and planning, I hope you have a great week! I know I will!

## **Monday Memo 305: Ask What?**

I am writing this from a cruise ship by the name of Oosterdam, sailing someplace between Seattle and Alaska. I left yesterday on the Michael W. Smith cruise and today is our day at sea. This is my eighth Alaskan cruise and I always enjoy the scenery, not to mention the food. I am thinking of hosting my own Alaskan cruise in 2008. If you would be interested in coming along, drop me an email and let me know.

Yesterday, I was reflecting on my being here and formulating some questions for the week. These will be things I am asking the Lord while I am onboard. One of the things is to understand how Michael W. effectively uses his website. I won't share with you what the others are, for they are personal. I think we are to seek the Lord and part of seeking Him is asking questions that only He can answer. So let's talk about that this week.

## **QUALITY QUESTIONS**

I think I first heard Tony Robbins say, "Quality questions lead to a quality life." I totally agree. What's more, when you ask quality questions, you get quality answers, answers that will help you lead the kind of life that

satisfies you and glorifies God. Yet, most people aren't asking quality questions, or they don't hold those questions until they get the answers. That is how I would define seeking the Lord: Asking good questions, the answers to which will benefit you and other people.

Many people who encountered Jesus on His earthly visit asked Him useless questions. I know that many did not realize that they were talking with God when they talked with Him. Most knew, however, that they were talking with a prophet at most or an effective rabbi at least. Yet they used their audience with Him as a time to ask trivial questions. I know people today who do the same. What were some of these trivial questions.

In Matthew 15, the Pharisees wanted to know why Jesus didn't wash His hands like the elders, giving them a thorough scrubbing up the elbow, like a modern-day surgeon. In Mark 11, the leaders wanted to know by what authority Jesus did the things He did. They weren't interested in how He healed or why they could not. They wanted to ask God self-serving and self-seeking questions. They had a golden opportunity and wasted it.

### **ASK WHAT?**

Yet there was one man who asked a good question in Mark 12. He asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment and Jesus answered him. When the man responded with integrity and insight, Jesus promised the man that he wasn't far from God's kingdom. Jesus was so enthused by the man's question and response that He went on to delight the crowd with insight into Psalm 110. I guess that proves it's possible to get God excited with a good question, one that will elicit more and more godly insight.

So what are you currently asking the Lord? What insight are you seeking? What answers do you need so desperately that you will spend time and effort obtaining those answers?

In my opinion, one of those questions should be: "What is my purpose?" Once you clarify that, your second question should be, "How do You want me to express or fulfill it?" Don't just ask those questions once or twice. Keep asking until you get answers. Then get busy doing ordering your life so that you can apply the answers.

I have my journal out to hear the answers to my questions I am asking this week. As I watch snow-capped mountains and glaciers go by, I will be asking God why I am here and what He wants from me. You may not be on the ship with me this week, but you can be asking meaningful questions because you have access to God. Don't waste time this week

asking God meaningless things, and by all means don't have any questions at all. When you ask, ask for significant insight and be ready for significant answers. Those answers in turn will make you a significant person. As you ask, I pray that you will have a great week. I know I will.

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