

Monday Memo 311: Wake Up!

Last week, we looked at the Jonah Complex and the implications of trying to run from your purpose. This week I want to revisit Jonah and look at the circumstances that caused him to come to his senses and embrace his mission. Perhaps you will be able to identify with where he was, but you won't know whether you do or not until you read on. So don't stop here; read on.

ASLEEP IN THE STORM

When Jonah ran from God's presence, he got on a ship that was heading in the opposite direction from Nineveh. So God decided to get his attention. How? "Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up" (Jonah 1:4). That sounds like a hurricane or monsoon. The sailors on the ship panicked, so it must have been a massive storm. But where was Jonah in all this?

"But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep" (Jonah 1:5).

This tells me that you can become so accustomed to your bad circumstances that you adapt and go on living a normal life. You can learn to live with your unfulfilling work, meager wages or abusive work relationships. The storm can blow, the ship is about to be torn apart but somehow you sleep.

The captain of the ship went below and asked Jonah a question: "How can you sleep?" (Jonah 1:6). After the sailors determined by lot that Jonah was the reason for the storm, the sailors asked Jonah a series of other questions that I think have meaning for you and me today. They asked:

- * Who is responsible for making all this trouble for us?
- * What do you do?
- * Where do you come from?
- * Who are your people?

Jonah answered their questions honestly and told them that he was the cause of the storm because he was running from the Lord. If you look at the questions, however, you will notice that the sailors asked Jonah what he did, or his occupation. Jonah responded by telling them who he was, that he was supposed to be on a mission for his God.

My point is that Jonah didn't fully wake up until he admitted who he was and what he was created to do. After that, the men threw him overboard, the storm died down, a big fish swallowed Jonah and he did indeed go to Nineveh to deliver the word of the Lord.

WAKE UP!

Perhaps you need to ask yourself the questions that were posed to Jonah. Here is how I think you should look at them.

1. How can you sleep? Have you grown so accustomed to non-purposeful living that God has sent a storm into your life not to harm you but to re-direct you?
2. Who is responsible for making all this trouble? Are others being affected by your depression, lack of joy or sense of failure or insignificance?
3. What do you do? Is your current occupation God's best for you? What is your purpose? Are you fulfilling it? Do you derive your identity from what you do instead of who you are?
4. Where do you come from? Are you living the dreams you once had, or are they distant memories that resurface every now and then to haunt you, not to inspire you?
5. Who are your people? Are you living up to the fullness of your inheritance in the Lord? Are you working as part of a purpose-led team that is making a difference?

I urge you to take these questions seriously and to meditate on them in the coming weeks. I would also recommend that you record what you hear and see in some kind of journal or notebook. As someone said, the problem with taking mental notes is that they fade so quickly. Don't give up if you don't get any answers right away, just keep seeking and asking. I know that you will eventually get answers that will connect you with your purpose and that your purpose will lead you to happier and less stormy days. In the meantime, happy seeking and have a great week.

Monday Memo 312: You Control God

I knew that title would get you! You can't wait to find out if I really believe that statement. Can you and I in any way control God? To get the answer and to find out whether or not I am a heretic, you will have to read on.

YOU DO, SORT OF

Of course, no one can control God. Anything, anyone or any principle that could control God would be, well, it would be God. Perhaps it is better said that you influence God and the manner in which He responds to you. Where did I get such an idea? There are two passages that I am thinking of here:

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (James 4:8 NAS)

With the kind You show Yourself kind; with the blameless You show Yourself blameless; with the pure You show Yourself pure, and with the crooked You show Yourself astute. For You save an afflicted people, but haughty eyes You abase. For You light my lamp; the LORD my God illumines my darkness. (Psalm 18:25–28 NAS).

If you seek God, God allows Himself to be found. If you are gentle, so is God. Yet the Amplified Version says that God can be contrary with the crooked. Contrary is not a word I usually associate with God, but I suppose He could be that in a righteous kind of way.

SO?

So what does this have to do with purpose and goals? I think it has a lot to do with them. First, you can't figure out your purpose. If you make it a dry, academic exercise, you will miss the fact that God has assigned your purpose to you. I regularly hear and receive purpose statements and many of them lack passion and excitement. Why? It's not that the sender didn't try, but they usually tried to make purpose a head thing rather than a heart thing.

Second, if you think your purpose and goals are hard to find and out of reach, then guess what they will be? They will be hard to find and out of reach! If you think God is trying to trick you or will withhold Himself from you when you are seeking His will, then that's just what He may do! Finally, most often your purpose isn't some hidden treasure that is buried on the ocean floor. While it is a treasure, it is with you, an intimate part of you, and probably something you are already fulfilling to some degree or another.

If you're uptight because you haven't clarified or aren't fulfilling your purpose, relax! God wants you to know and fulfill your purpose more than you do! If you accept that, then the purpose process can be easy, or at least easier than you have made it out to be so far. Can you believe

that God can illumine your darkness this coming week? If you do, then that's a good thing, for you will seek God in faith as light for your path and He will meet you in the manner that you seek Him.

Obviously, my answer is that you and I cannot control God; He is sovereign and does as He pleases. He is, however, pleased to reveal purpose to His people so that you and I can do His will. Go forth in the confidence of that truth this week and, as you do, I know you will have a great week!

Monday Memo 313: The Shalom of Purpose

Greetings from Jerusalem! I have been in Israel for one week and will be here a few more days before I move on to Jordan and then back to Zimbabwe. If you would like to read my daily reports from the Holy Land, visit my blog to read each daily report.

Since I am in the land of Jesus, I thought it would be appropriate to write about the concept of purpose in Jesus' life. Jesus was a man of purpose and His purpose brought great turmoil and shalom or peace into His life.

PURPOSE DEFINED

Jesus had a specific mission for His time on earth. He clearly understood what it was, and His effectiveness stemmed from that understanding. In Luke 4, Jesus stood up in the synagogue and read a portion of Isaiah 61, and the crowd listened intently:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:18-21).

On another occasion, Jesus was in the home of a tax collector named Zacchaeus, much to the chagrin of the man's neighbors, for they hated him and his occupation. Yet Jesus had peace being there and Zacchaeus had an encounter with God that changed his life. Jesus summarized His visit to that home by saying:

"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:9–10).

Finally, during His farewell address to His disciples before His death, Jesus made this amazing statement:

"I have brought you [His Father] glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4).

PURPOSE APPLIED

How could Jesus know that He had completed His work unless He knew what that work was? God cannot hold you or anyone else accountable to do His will, or your purpose, unless you know what it is. If your heart is to know your purpose, it's God's heart to let you know what it is. And you will find it just like Jesus did; by seeking God for it and by searching the Scriptures. (Notice too that purpose is a gift from God, for Jesus indicated that the Father had given Him work to do.)

Jesus talked of glorifying God, but didn't do that by praying, reading, or singing. He did it by finding and fulfilling His purpose.

When Jesus led Zacchaeus to a saving faith, Jesus confidently declared His purpose. It was clear, simple yet profound. It defined all His activities and allowed Him to say "yes" and "no" with relative ease. Jesus came to seek and save. That's it! His healing, teaching and leadership training all focused on that one purpose. If Jesus had that kind of clarity, you and I can have it, too.

Finally, Jesus was able to declare His purpose to the people among whom He taught and spoke. He was clear, and His purpose released His power to do great things. Jesus promised in John 14 that you and I would do even greater things than He did. You will only be able to do those greater things when you follow in Jesus' footsteps of purpose.

I am sure that Jesus had great peace, the peace that only your purpose can provide, even when the crowds and His own disciples questioned His authority and plotted His death. There is no feeling like being in the center of God's will and walking out your purpose. It isn't just for a few special people; it's for everyone. Do you have peace or shalom, its Hebrew equivalent? If not, then perhaps you aren't clear on your purpose.

Remember, purpose is a gift from God to you, specific work that only you can do. God wants you to know your purpose more than you do, and He

will help you. Relax, seek, have faith and follow Jesus. If you do that, your purpose will become as clear to you as the nose on your face. And if I can help you in any way, please don't hesitate to contact me. Shalom and have a great, purpose-filled week.

Monday Memo 314: I Am What I Am

I returned to Zimbabwe from Israel a few hours ago and it was a great trip. Everyone came back happy, healthy, with all their luggage, with a lot of great memories and with no money. That's what a trip to Holy Land will do for you! If you are interested in our daily activities there for the last 12 days, you can read my daily entries on my blog site. And if you would like to join us in Israel and Egypt next year around this time, please write and let me know. And don't forget about the Alaska Cruise scheduled for July 4-11, 2008.

I have a busy week ahead and it has reminded me of something that happened to me when I was in a busy season 20 years ago. The lessons I learned then have served me well and I thought I would share them with you this week. What are those lessons? I'm glad you asked, but to find out you will have to read on.

SOMETHING HAS TO GO!

Twenty years ago I was too busy and involved in way too many projects, or so I thought. I decided to spend some time seeking the Lord to determine what I could and should eliminate from my calendar and life. I was certain that something had to go.

I prayed, listened and kept a journal, yet nothing happened. I got neither relief nor insight. Then one night I had a dream. I don't remember the dream; I only remember that a voice spoke to me in the dream and gave me a verse from the Bible. I never had that happen before or since that I woke up with a verse on my mind. But it happened that night and I clearly heard 1 Corinthians 15:10. I was not familiar with that verse and had no idea what it said.

So finally I got out a Bible and this is what I read:

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

The meaning to me was clear right away. God wasn't going to send any less for me to do. He was actually going to send more, but was also going

to teach me how to handle more. He did, I have and the lessons I learned from that verse continue to bear fruit 20 years later.

THE LESSONS, PLEASE.

Here's what I learned:

1. By the grace of God I am what I am -- People ask me all the time how I am able to do what I do. My standard answer is that I stopped doing what I can't do so that I can do what I do best. Who made me a good administrator? God by His grace. Who didn't make me a Sunday-morning pastor? God by His grace. Who made me with a love for sports and a great sense of humor? God by His grace. I decided back then that if anyone had a problem with who I am, that's their problem. I cannot use that as an excuse for bad behavior or rudeness, but I can use it as a foundation upon which to live my life.

2. His grace toward me did not prove vain -- It is possible to receive God's grace in vain! You can talk about God's purpose, swim in God's purpose, write about it and meditate on it. Yet your purpose is to make you productive in the will of God, nothing more, nothing less. I don't know how many days I have yet to live, so I want to maximize them all. I am grateful for God's grace and I want His grace to yield a return that will be pleasing to Him.

3. I labored more than all of them -- I knew then and there that God wanted me to be a model of productivity and hard work. I was not to engage in just any hard work, but labor that was related to my purpose and sphere of influence. I live in Africa five months a year. Two years ago I spent 22 nights on a plane flying somewhere. Why? Because God wants me to work hard and produce! He has taught me how both to manage and have faith for time, and I know I can squeeze as much out of 24 hours as anyone. I do this not because I have to but because I choose to. It is a joy to me.

4. Not I, but the grace of God with me -- My hard work and productivity cannot be a source of pride, nor can I impose my work load or expectations on someone else. It's what God has for me to do. Yes, I cooperate and partner with God. Yet if He wasn't with me, helping me every step of the way, I would not be able to do anything, as the psalmist reminds us: "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves." (Psalm 127:1-2 NAS).

So there you have my lessons learned from 1 Corinthians 15:10. Why don't you meditate on that verse and see how you can apply it to your current life and situation? Are you as productive as you would like to be? Do you feel like you're too busy? Do you sense God's grace helping you on a daily basis? Reflect on those questions and feel free to share your insights or answers with my readers by writing a comment to this entry on the site where it is posted. And of course, as always, I wish you a great week as you seek to be who you are by and in God's grace.

Monday Memo 315: Flow

I am looking for flow in my life. Are you? You say you don't know what flow is. Then it's time you learned, but to learn you will have to read on.

FLOW

The believers in the book of Acts had their share of persecution and troubles but, for the most part, they had flow. By that, I mean they had supernatural help doing what God wanted them to do. Even though it was tough at times and some even lost their lives, they could count on the flow to help them, often at unexpected times.

Let's look at some examples of this thing I call flow:

1. Those in the upper room spoke about the wonders of God to the men at Pentecost in the native language of each man! (see Acts 2:1–12). This was an example of help with communication.
2. Peter and John healed the crippled beggar (see Acts 3). They had assistance gathering a crowd.
3. Peter knew that Ananias and Sapphira were lying (see Acts 5). He had help managing his "staff" and "volunteers."
4. After Philip talked with the Ethiopian eunuch, he was suddenly transported to another location! (see Acts 8:26–40). Philip received assistance with transportation.
5. Peter escaped from prison when the angel set him free from his chains (see Acts 12:1–19). Peter got out of a life-threatening situation.

I think you get the idea. Some would call these miracles and they would be correct. But these things just didn't happen with no purpose; they occurred because those involved were doing what they were created to do

and God showed up to help. I want and need this kind of flow and so do you. If you don't have it, it's like hitting your head against a brick wall.

SO HOW DO YOU GET IN THE FLOW?

I love when flow "happens" to me. I have so many stories of "chance" encounters and meetings, answers to questions that no one knew I was asking and assistance that goes beyond the ordinary--that may have even been supernatural. I can remember once when I worked for Integrity Music. We had a Saturday conference and late at night someone left their credit card behind after a purchase. I put the card in my pocket and thought I would take it back to the office on Monday and try to trace the owner.

Early the next Sunday morning, I took some musicians to the airport in Atlanta. On the way back to my hotel, I randomly chose a gas station to fill up my van. While I was filling up, someone recognized me from the conference and asked if anyone had found a credit card. The one I had found was actually theirs and I just happened to have it in my shirt pocket. Atlanta is a huge city and there are hundreds of petrol stations. I had to be in the flow for me to choose this station, for this person to find me and for me to solve their problem on the spot. This kind of thing happens to me all the time. God helps me do what I do and I know it.

Last week, I referred to a passage that I want to repeat this week after I ask you a question. Are you in the flow? Or are you working hard and not getting the results you want, or sensing the presence of God as you would like? Last week, we looked at Psalm 127:1-2: "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves."

Let me add one more passage this week, found in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

If your yoke (work) is heavy, then you don't have Jesus' yoke. The next question is obvious: Whose yoke do you have? And what are you willing to do to find and keep that easy yoke, one that comes with a whole lot of flow to help you do the hard work you have been assigned to do? As you ponder these questions, I do hope that you will have a good week. Mine will be good because I am heading home this Wednesday and because I am in the flow.