

Monday Memo 336: Uninspired or Lazy?

I have recovered from my bout with the flu last week, which I used to start the manuscript on my next book. Next Sunday I depart for England where I will be part of the Christian Booksellers Convention. You can see my itinerary below.

I have been writing on creativity and will do so for a few more weeks. Before we go on, however, let's review the major points we have made so far:

1. You are a creative person. Whether you think you are or not, you were created by a creative God the Creator to be creative. Creativity is built into the essence of your being.
2. Your creativity has enemies. We saw how fear, perfectionism and comparison are the main hindrances to your creative expressions.
3. There are many expressions of creativity. We began to build a list of creative expressions, which included raising children, how you dress, repairs, gardening, time management and problem solving. A list of other possible expressions can be found on my website.
4. Jesus was a creative person. Jesus was a carpenter, so He knew how to work with His hands. Then He used parables to creatively express the truths He came to proclaim. Since Jesus was and is creative, He can help you express yours.

CREATIVITY IS WORK

And now let's add one more point to the list: creativity is hard work. Thomas Edison, the famous inventor and creator, once said, "Genius is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration." This is an important point because many people are sitting around, waiting for a lightning bolt of inspiration to hit them before they begin to express their creativity. Since that lightning bolt seldom comes, they don't create, or at least don't think that what they want to do qualifies as creativity.

I was reading the creation story in Genesis and came across this verse: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work" (Genesis 2:2). Why did God have to rest? He had to rest following His six-day work of creation. People ask me all the time, "How do you write your books?" My answer is always the same: "One page at a time, one day at a time."

I begin almost every day by sitting down at my computer to write my daily Bible study devotional that I send out every week (I have now completed commentaries on 18 books of the New Testament by writing about four

verses a day every day for the last six years.) Three or four times every week I write for my blog and have written the Monday Memo for seven years next month. I do all this whether or not I feel creative or have any ideas. I begin to write and somehow my creativity flows. But it doesn't just fall down from heaven; I must work at it—work at being creative.

UNINSPIRED OR LAZY?

Could it be that we aren't more creative because we're lazy? All right, I'll be more specific. Are you not as creative as you could be because you are lazy? Is your lack of creativity due to a lack of discipline that doesn't allow you to sit down and write, or go to your workshop or pick up your paintbrush? Are you waiting for inspiration when you should be producing perspiration?

I was also thinking about the word recreation this week. Look at that word: re-creation. When you work at creativity, you need rest and re-creation. Why? So you can resume your creative expressions. If God rested from His creative work, then you and I will need to do the same. But we recreate not just to have fun, but also to replenish what is lost in the creation process so we can start all over again. Recreation isn't a right; it's something you earn as you create. Recreation that is separated from the work of creation is selfish idleness and can be a waste of time.

So what are you prepared to do this week with your creativity? I hope you have decided to work at it. Stop putting off until tomorrow the work that must be done today. As you do, plan for some rest and recreation. I trust that this week you will earn the right and create the need for some re-creation as you work to express your God-given creativity. Have a great week!

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

Monday Memo 337: Hit It Hard, Wish It Well

I am off to England in a few hours to be at the Christian Booksellers Convention in Telford. Then I have a five-day speaking tour put together by David Graham with Everlasting Books. I always enjoy going to England, but, come to think of it, I enjoy going just about anywhere. I love to travel, but there was a time when I did little traveling at all. During those years, I learned valuable lessons, one of which I would like to share with you this week. What is that lesson? I'm glad you asked, but to find out, you will have to read on.

A PHILOSOPHY FOR WINNING AT SOFTBALL . . . AND AT LIFE!

For eleven years, I lived in Alabama, a state in the deep South. Since I was home then, I played in a church softball league for nine of those years. Softball is a game similar to American baseball, but the ball is bigger and the pitcher throws it more slowly using an underhand motion. I was a better fielder than batter, and my teams won a few more than they lost.

There was one team from another church, however, that was very good, and they beat us most of the time year after year. They didn't look as sharp as we did because we got new uniforms almost every year and they played in whatever they had. We practiced weekly yet we never, ever saw them on the practice field. They just knew how to win.

One night we met with some of their players to see if we could understand the secret of their success. We asked many questions, but then our coach asked their best batsman, "When you're at bat, do you have an offensive philosophy? Do you try to hit it over the fence or do you try to advance the runners one base at a time?" The man stared at our coach with a surprised look for a short minute and then answered, "We don't have any philosophy. We just hit it hard and wish it well."

That simple statement changed my life, and from that point forward became my philosophy not only for softball but also for life itself!

As I have sought to express my creativity, I have found this a great strategy to employ. This week perhaps you too just need to stop thinking about what you want to do and just go "hit it hard and wish it well." In softball, sometimes you can do everything just right and not get to first base. Other times your technique can be all wrong, yet the ball off your bat lands in the right spot and you win the game for your team. Maybe you're waiting for perfection before you try something, or perhaps you're frustrated that you have done everything correctly, but things haven't worked out so far. This week you need to overcome your hesitancy or discouragement and go to bat one more time.

"HIT IT HARD" IS IN THE BIBLE!

"Hit is hard and wish it well" is a principle found in the Bible. The writer of Ecclesiastes wrote thousands of years ago:

"If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work

of God, the Maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well” (Ecclesiastes 11:3–6).

Do you have any creative ideas on which you need to act? The time to analyze is over; the time to act has come. This week step to the plate and take your turn. As you do, I am right there with you. I don't know if my radio show on the internet will be a success or how I will even pay for it all at this point. You know what? I'm going to hit it hard and wish it well! I don't know where I will get the money for the leadership center at the University of Zimbabwe, but I am laying the plans as if I have all the money in the world! I am at bat and I'm going to take my swings and see what happens.

You should do the same thing. Paint the picture, apply for the degree, start the business, or plan the vacation. Don't fret about uncertain results over which you have no control. Do what you can do this week and trust that it will work out for the good. If you do, I know you will have a great week!

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

Monday Memo 338: You Only Live Twice

Greetings from London! I am here to do some interviews on Revelation TV and then will fly back to the States tomorrow. I've had a short but productive visit to the UK, and I've met many new friends and had more open doors for the purpose message. I also had lunch with friend Yvonne Brooks. Yvonne said I never mention her in my Monday Memos; now she can't say that any more.

I have come to the conclusion this week that we can actually live life at least twice. That's right, you can live two lives. I'm not talking about reincarnation or leading a double life, but rather experiencing your life events on at least two separate and distinct occasions. How is that possible? I'm glad you asked. To get the answer, you will have to read on.

LIVING LIFE BEFORE IT HAPPENS

I read something once in a book by Matthew Fox's entitled, Creativity, and it got me thinking about living twice. Fox wrote:

Anais Nin once said: "We write to taste life twice." I agree. I think we write to taste life twice, and we paint and dance and sing and compose

and do all art to “taste life twice.” This opportunity to taste life twice is an invitation to go deeper, to miss nothing, to tell others, to experience the joy a second time in the telling and in handing on the depth and mystery of life. When we behold, we become so struck by what it is we want to share. We call that sharing “art.”

That quote got me thinking about what Stephen Covey wrote in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey said everything that is created is created twice: first in the mind or heart and then in reality. So when you create a business for example, you are living that business twice—once in the theoretical and then the practical. Finally, someone said that our lives are being recorded and will be played back to us in eternity, where we will either weep with joy at the opportunities we took advantage of, or with grief when we see the opportunities we missed.

Since you will live your life twice, either in regret or joy, it is essential that you first focus your mind on what gives you joy and then make every effort to do it. I write *The Monday Memo* in my mind all week and then I sit down on Sunday to actually write it. I dreamed about starting my business and ministry and now I get to conduct business all over the world. So I enjoy *The Monday Memo* all week, and get to experience it twice. I also dreamed of my business and now I am living it. In both cases, I enjoyed my work before I ever did it. There's another way, however, that I can live twice, and you can join me and do the same.

RELIVING LIFE AFTER IT HAPPENS

When I write, I get to enjoy life again after it happens. Last week I wrote about my drive into New York City on my blog. In that situation, I experienced life first and then got to relive it after it happened by sharing it with my readers. I admit that I sat in my hotel room the other night, reading that post and reliving that drive. It was great.

At times I have even relived my most painful memories by counseling and teaching people about what I learned from those experiences. They were hard to live through once, but I have used those failures to make them (and me) into something that could help others. In some ways, I have relived those mistakes, made them right and gave them new meaning by distilling the most important lessons to be learned and creatively sharing them with my audiences.

Since you have many creative ideas, you want to act on those that will provide the greatest benefit for you and others as they are experienced over and over again. I have chosen writing and teaching as my main creative expressions. My books will outlive me and my teaching can help

shape lives and destinies. What can you do? Can you write poetry, write screenplays, paint pictures or develop a cure for a problem that plagues mankind?

You can go through life experiencing things only once, reacting and allowing things to happen, or you can release your creativity and help make them happen or give them new meaning, thus living them at least twice. I hope you will choose the creative path that, even though more difficult, produces greater rewards and benefits for you and others. Have a great week!

Feel free to write your comments on the site where this entry is posted or go to that [site](#) to read previous editions of The Monday Memo.

Monday Memo 339: Seven Years

I started writing The Monday Memo in March, 2001. Little did I know that I would still be writing it seven years later or that it would continue to grow in influence and circulation. I am a better writer than I was seven years ago, and I have learned so much over that period. What's more, I am confident and optimistic that the best is yet to come -- for me and the purpose message. With your permission, I would like to share some lessons I have learned from writing The Memo for these last seven years ago.

1. No one can read what I don't write. I never thought that The Monday Memo would reach this many people. It wouldn't reach anyone, however, if I didn't take the time to write it. I often refer to the verse from James' epistle, which states: "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17). To make a difference in the world, you must stop talking about what you're going to do and start doing it. No can read what you don't write, sing what you don't compose, buy what you don't produce or visit what you don't build.

2. God gives you what you need when you need it. Every Sunday afternoon for the last seven years, I've gone to my computer to write The Memo. I often have no idea what I am going to write, but the ideas always come. Not every issue was brilliant and not every theme was life-changing, but every Sunday God gave me something to give to you. And every week someone would write to say, "That issue was just for me. Thank you." Don't worry about next month or next year when you start to do something. Just use what you have today and trust Him for what you will need tomorrow. He is faithful and will always provide.

3. The Internet is a wonderful vehicle to build relationships. That may sound strange, because in some ways the Internet and email seem impersonal. Almost every week, however, I hear from people who say, “Dr. Stanko, you are my mentor” or “I sit at your feet every week” or “I feel like you’re here speaking to me when I read.” The fact that The Memo is regular and personal has allowed me to “relate” to many people whom I may never meet. What's more, The Memo has also enabled me to multiply my effectiveness and build relationships with many who have written or come to hear me speak or teach. In the meantime, my blog has become a favorite for many as I have expanded my capacity to write and create. In these past seven years, my website has become outdated, but I will announce a major overhaul in a few weeks that will make the site one of the most effective purpose stops in cyberspace.

4. The Monday Memo helps me fulfill my purpose. Every Sunday I get to “create order out of chaos without control.” I take random ideas, put them in some written order and send them out for people to read or not read, to ponder or ignore, to pass on or discard. You receive this Memo because you asked to receive and you may unsubscribe at any time. If I am going to keep your loyalty, I must produce something of value that makes a difference in your life. I like that pressure. I am also glad that I have never asked anyone for any money to receive the Memo. Freely I have received, so freely I want to give.

5. The Monday Memo has inspired others to be creative. There are countless publications today that someone started because they read The Monday Memo. Others have started businesses and ministries, and still more have changed jobs and careers. The Memo has given countless thousands permission to be who they are, who God made them to be, because I found a way to share my own freedom. I would hope that many more people will start writing and expressing their own creativity because they receive The Monday Memo. What an honor that would be! So if you are reading this and have an idea but don’t want to seem like you’re copying this Memo, please act on your idea. Call it the Tuesday Tidbit, Wednesday Wisdom, Thursday Trivia, Friday Fill-Up, Saturday Sampler or the Sunday Sermon. And if The Memo helped you start it, feel free to move on and become bigger and be more creative than I could ever hope to be.

There’s so much more that I have learned over these last seven years, but I won’t take the time to bore you. I want to say thank you for being a loyal reader, whether for two weeks or all seven years. When people thank me for The Memo, I often say, “If you keep reading, I’ll keep writing.” It’s an act of love every week to sit down and produce this for you. It’s an

honor when you write or when you pass an issue on to your friends and associates.

So with tears in my eyes, I pray God's purposeful blessing on you as you read and ask Him to give you creative wisdom of how you can produce your own creative expressions that will honor God. I don't know how much longer The Memo will continue, but I dedicate every future issue to God, to you and to the readers all over the world who are yet to come. May God be glorified by what you do and may many be encouraged by your courageous PurposeQuest. Thank you, God bless you, and have a great week!

It would be great if you could take some time and share with my readers what The Monday Memo has meant to you. Feel free to write your comments on the site where this entry is posted or go to that [site](#) to read previous editions of The Monday Memo. Thank you!

Monday Memo 340: It's That Time Again

It's that time again. What time is it, you may ask? Why none other than to celebrate failure. That's right, I am declaring the week of April 27 to be Celebrate a Failure week the world over. If you have read this Memo since the beginning, you will know that this is the fourth such celebration we have held since 2001. If you are new to the Memo, let me explain to you what Celebrate a Failure Week is all about.

THE GROUND RULES

I would recommend that you take every chance during the last week of April to talk about failure, its role in your life and the lessons you have learned from past failures. Here are some ideas of what you can do:

1. If you are a pastor, you can talk about failure in your Sunday services on April 27 or during your midweek gatherings. Someone wrote me that there is no failure in the Bible. See if they're right. If not, then share what you find that can help people who have failed. You have plenty of them sitting right in front of you every Sunday.

2. If you are a business leader, why not talk about failure with the other leaders and staff. Do you have any failures to celebrate as a business or team? What did you learn from them? What is stopping you from creating new failures? What could you possibly achieve today if you weren't afraid of trying and failing?

3. You can celebrate as a family. You may want to study a biblical character who failed, like Samson, Moses, David or Peter. Maybe there is some family story of failure that can be discussed and examined. Maybe

you can even focus on some historical figure like Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela or Winston Churchill, who were great leaders who also experienced great failures at some point.

4. Classroom settings need not be left out of our celebration. If you teach, I would imagine that you can find enough teaching material to make up a classroom session or two. History and science are full of failures that eventually led to success, of failures that provide significant lessons for your students.

WHY?

Why the need for such a celebration? And is it truly possible to celebrate failure? Should it not be tolerated at worst and avoided at best? We should celebrate failure because it is an inevitable part of life. We avoid failure because we believe it is somehow a measure of inadequate spirituality, and in some ways it is, because you will never measure up to the ideal of perfection on this side of heaven or the Lord's return. If you are going to do anything for God, whether to fulfill your purpose or achieve your goals, you will need to embrace the learning process that only failure can provide.

You can read what I have written about failure in past Memos, but let me quote one of my favorite authors, Parker Palmer and what he had to say about failure in his book, *The Active Life*:

If I allow my life to be deformed by the fallen angel called “fear of failure,” I will never be fully alive. I will withhold myself from actions that might fail, or ignore evidence of failure when it happens. But if I could ride that fear all the way down, I might break out of my self-imposed isolation and become connected with many other lives, because failure and the fear of it are universal. I would learn that failure is a natural fact, a way of discerning what to try next. I would be empowered to take more risks, which means to embrace more life, and in the process I would become more connected with others. The monster called fear of failure (or ridicule, criticism, or foolishness, or any of the other fears that are so easy to regard as mortal enemies) would become a demanding but empowering guide toward relatedness.

But on this side of such an experience, we may wonder why we should anywhere near the monsters, let alone ride them all the way down. After all, they are monsters, and they do harbor powers of destruction as well as of creativity. Even if riding the monsters is the only way to reach safe ground, there is no guarantee that we will get there. People have fallen off before the end of the journey and have been stranded in some bad places. So why take the risk of riding the monsters in the first place?

[The reason is that] some monsters simply will not go away. They are too big to walk around, too powerful to overcome, too clever to outsmart. The only way to deal with them is to move toward them, with them, through them. We must learn to befriend some of these primitive powers that seem so much like enemies. In the process we will find them working for us, not against us, working for life, not death.

What are you afraid of? Is some past failure or the fear of a future one keeping you ineffective and paralyzed? Are you so afraid of missing God's will for your life that you are missing God's will for your life? This is why we need a Celebrate a Failure Week. It's not to glorify failure but to set the stage for success. That may not make sense at this point, but if you follow along for the next few weeks, I think you'll understand how it works.

So get ready for a big celebration, for we all have some colossal failures to celebrate and some important lessons to review. We want to get failure working for us and not against us, so with that in mind, let the party begin. Have a great week as you make preparations for the big event.