

Monday Memo 351: Why So Surprised?

I have been home now since May 13, a personal record for this century. I am thoroughly enjoying my time and have plenty of work to do. My new website should be up soon and very soon, and I will make sure you are alerted to the launch. It will be worth the wait.

IT'S A GHOST!

I am always surprised when people are surprised that they have the mind of the Lord on certain matters, especially where purpose is concerned. We often act like the disciples in Acts 12. Peter was in prison and the church was interceding for his safety. An angel came to release Peter and he immediately went to the house where he knew the saints would be praying. I'll let Luke tell you what happened in his own words:

When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel." (Acts 12:14-15).

Another translation says that they thought it was Peter's ghost. They were praying but they never really expected their prayers to be answered, at least not in the way that they were. So they dismissed the answer as some spiritual quirk, telling the messenger of the good news that she didn't really understand what she had heard.

ASK AND DON'T DOUBT

James was clear about how to get an answer from God:

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does (James 1:5-8).

When you ask for wisdom, God will give it to you. There is only one catch: you cannot doubt or you will receive nothing. So if you are asking God to reveal your purpose, if you are seeking Him concerning some idea you have (as to whether or not you should proceed), then why don't you believe that you have your answer?

Let's put it another way. The Holy Spirit lives in you, the same Spirit who raised Jesus back to life. He came to give you power to live the life that God want you to live. Part of that involves giving you the mind of Christ. So if you have the

mind of Christ (and you do), then why are you so surprised? Why is that so hard to accept? Yet it is and, what's more, we can do just what the disciples did when our prayer is answered: We can dismiss it as a spiritual quirk or not recognize the day of its coming.

HE WILL CAUSE YOUR THOUGHTS. . .

I have quoted Proverbs 16:3 from the Amplified Version in many seminars and I will leave you with it as a parting thought today. It reads,

Roll your works upon the Lord, commit and trust them wholly to Him, and He will cause your thoughts to be agreeable to His will, and so shall your plans be established and succeed.

Do you have any good ideas that you have dismissed as "ghosts"? Do you have a recurring dream or vision that you have tried to bury, only to have it come back again and again. If so, stop fighting it (or them) and take action. If the Spirit came to give you the mind of Christ, why are you so surprised that you have it? Have a great week.

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

Monday Memo 352: Self Interest is the Best Interest

Every now and then someone asks whether or not it is selfish to pursue purpose. They may ask where the cross of Christ comes in when you are doing something that you love doing. Many people still feel that God will give you an assignment that you hate doing and that is somehow more spiritual than doing something you enjoy. My answer to those who ask those questions is that self-interest is the best interest where purpose is concerned. Before you tune me out, let me explain.

YOUR DESIRES

First, let's look at Acts 13:2: "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (emphasis added). When God assigns you a purpose, He is really doing something for Himself, in His own interests. When God calls you to a purpose, that purpose actually brings you closer to Him. Pursuing your purpose then, which always gives you joy and peace, is not something you do for yourself. It is something you do for God.

Then, let's look at Psalm 37:4: "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." If you will delight yourself in the Lord, then God will grant you the desires of your heart. Why? He will do so because He put those desires there in the first place! When you pursue your God-given desires, which

may seem like self-interest, you are actually pursuing the things of God. God uses your joyful desires to indicate that you are doing something right, not something wrong.

And finally, let's once again look at Proverbs 16:3 in the Amplified Version (I know we looked at this verse last week, but it bears repeating): "Roll your works upon the Lord—commit and trust them wholly to Him—and He will cause your thoughts to be in agreement with His will, and so shall your plans be established and succeed." You may have been taught to distrust your thoughts and desires, but I am urging you to pay attention to them if you are serious about finding your purpose. If the Spirit lives in you to give you the mind of Christ, why are so surprised that you have it?

AT THE CROSS, AT THE CROSS, WHERE I FIRST SAW THE LIGHT. . .

So where does the cross come into the picture? The cross does not require that you deny who you are, but the cross does require that you allow God to determine where and when you express your purpose. Church work has never been my favorite place to fulfill my purpose of creating order out of chaos, but it is the very place where I am most effective. So I submit to God's will for who I am and where I am most effective. To deny my purpose would deny me the power and joy I need to pick up my cross daily and follow Him as I carry out His will.

So now you know why I say that self-interest is really the best interest where purpose is concerned. Don't deny who you are, but then don't try to choose the sphere where God wants you to give yourself. I pray that God will grant you the desires of your heart this week as you pick up your cross to follow Jesus. Have a great week!

Feel free to add your comments on the site where this entry is posted.

Monday Memo 353: Visions of Angels

You should have a purpose hero or two, models whom you can study to encourage you along your PurposeQuest. I have a few, some whom are mentioned in the Bible, some not. One purpose hero in the Bible is the Apostle Paul. Since I mention him so often in these Memos, I thought I would write about him for the next three or four weeks.

Paul was a man who had quite a few supernatural encounters in his ministry. I find this interesting because so many today also seek to have such encounters with angels or, better yet, the presence of the Lord. Did you know, however, that each one of Paul's supernatural meetings had a common purpose? They did and to find out what that purpose was, you will have to read on.

COMMON THEME

I can find seven passages where the Lord appeared and spoke to Paul:

1. Acts 9:1-9-- on the Damascus Road, where Saul met Jesus face-to-face.
2. Acts 13:1-3 -- in Antioch where the Holy Spirit set Barnabas and Saul apart for missionary work
3. Acts 16:9-10-- a man calling Paul to Macedonia
4. Acts 18:9-11-- in Corinth, urging Paul to preach without fear
5. Acts 22:17-- while Paul was praying in the Temple
6. Acts 23:11 -- while Paul was held prisoner in Jerusalem
7. Acts 27:24-- while Paul was in the ship doomed to sink on his way to Rome

Can you see the common thread through all of these heavenly appearances? Let me help you out. Each one of these encounters took place to direct or encourage Paul in his purpose. Not once did the Lord appear to Paul simply for the sake of appearing to Him. As far as we know, the Lord did not appear to Paul to tell him He loved him. Not once did He come to give Paul a supernatural experience where Paul clucked, crowed, barked or fainted.

In all seven instances, the Lord appeared for a purpose, not for an experience.

SO WHAT?

I am not against anyone having a spiritual experience. I have never spoken against or condemned some of the bizarre encounters that people claim to have had (and probably did have) with the Lord in the last ten years. I am not ready to conclude that the Lord will only reveal Himself to people, as He did with Paul, for the purpose of purpose.

I am ready to say, however, that some people are seeking for an encounter with the Lord for purely selfish reasons. They want the experience but they want to separate it from any instructions that the Lord chooses to impart. If the Lord chose to reveal Himself to Paul so dramatically and regularly to keep Paul focused on his purpose, I would think He would do the same with you.

When is the last time you had a purpose encounter with the Lord? What did He say or show you? What difference did it make in your life? Are you seeking the presence of God simply for the experience or for some direction in purpose?

God wants you to know and fulfill your purpose more than you do. He has given you something to do and wants you to know what it is. Paul's life demonstrated the means that the Lord can use to encourage men and women of purpose. I hope you are one who is seeking God's face and presence not so you can collect spiritual stories but rather to gain insight and encouragement into the purpose that God has for you. Have a great week!

Feel free to add your comments on the site where this entry is posted.

Monday Memo 354: Is Your Work Your Purpose?

It's up and running! My new and revised website is open for business and it has a lot of new features that I know you will enjoy and find useful. More on that later and you can also look for a special Memo out in a few days outlining the new features of the site.

PAUL'S PURPOSE AND WORK

In the meantime, the last few weeks we have studied Paul's life and purpose. Paul's purpose was to bring the gospel of Christ to the Gentile world. We know that because his "call" on the Damascus road has a prominent place in the book of Acts. In fact, Paul referred to his purpose in each of his letters (see if you can find them if you're interested), usually relating his purpose to an Old Testament passage. When Paul talked about himself, he referred to his purpose, yet that purpose wasn't his occupation.

To earn a living, Paul made tents. Yet Paul never talked or wrote about his occupation. The only way we know that Paul made tents was that Luke wrote about it in the book of Acts. Don't you find it interesting that Paul never referred to making tents? That was what he did, but it wasn't who he was. He was an apostle to the Gentiles and that is what got the choice place in his heart, time, efforts and writings. (Paul returned the favor. Nowhere did Luke ever mention that he was a doctor; Paul told us that in Colossians 4:14. Obviously Luke learned from his mentor the difference between purpose and occupation.)

WHO ARE YOU?

I am not asking what you do. You may sell insurance, but who are you? You may also be a missionary to some people group, while insurance pays the bills. When people ask you what you do, like I just did, how do you respond? Do you say that you're an insurance salesperson or a missionary? If you answer the salesperson, then you are defining yourself by what you do. If you say missionary, you are focusing on purpose and not on what buys your food. You may only get to the mission field once a year on your vacation time, but the other weeks you're praying and working for that mission. You don't have to quit your occupation to embrace your purpose. You may simply need to distinguish between the two.

Os Guinness wrote the following paragraph in his book, *Entrepreneurs of Life* (since he uses the words "calling" and "vocation" instead of purpose, I have taken the liberty of inserting the word "purpose" where appropriate):

Calling [purpose] helps us finish [our lives] well because it prevents us from confusing the termination of our occupations with the termination of our vocations [purpose]. If we ever limit our calling [purpose] to what we do, and that task is taken away from us--we suddenly find ourselves unemployed, retired, or pronounced terminally ill--then we are tempted to depression and doubt. What has happened? We have let our occupation become so intertwined with our vocation [purpose] that losing the occupation means losing the sense of vocation [purpose] too.

Have you either not found or lost your sense of purpose? Then perhaps you have confused the difference between what you do and who you are (parents and spouses included). I would suggest you take this week to reflect on this important distinction. No longer be content to define your life in terms of what you do but rather who you are. It will make all the difference in the world. Have a great week!

Monday Memo 355: Waiting to be the Person You're Not

How early in life does purpose start? How far back can you look and expect to find clues or direct signs of your purpose? I have looked at Paul the last few weeks and would like to do so again for one last time before we move on.

It is my opinion that Paul was partially fulfilling his purpose when he was a Jew by the name of Saul. It's an important point, for I believe that is true for you as well. Most of us have had some experience in our purpose, but we are looking past it, expecting it to be something or someone that we are not. Before I explain that, however, let's look at my theory about Paul.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

We know that this man Saul was from Tarsus, located in modern-day Turkey. Tarsus was one of the most cross cultural cities in the Roman Empire and Saul was truly a man of the Empire. He was a Roman citizen and a Jew at home in a Gentile world. Saul knew four languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Latin, and was a Jewish scholar who studied in Jerusalem. He was a tent maker and probably did a lot of business with non-Jews.

Jesus informed us that there was such a thing as a Jewish evangelist when He said:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (Matthew 23:15).

In Acts 9, we are told that Saul asked for letters of recommendation so he could go to Damascus to pursue and persecute believers. Here is where my theory

"kicks in." No Jerusalem Jew wanted to go to Damascus due to the risk of becoming unclean through contact with Gentiles. Saul volunteered to go because he had been there. He knew his way around and was comfortable in the Gentile world. He could speak their language, move around their world and maintain his ceremonial purity as any good kosher Jew.

Does this prove my theory? Absolutely not, but it is possible that it's true. Saul was already working in the Gentile world when he met Jesus on his way to Damascus. He continued to work with Gentiles after that encounter, only this time he went to convert his audience to Jesus and not to Judaism.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

So what clues does your past hold to your present purpose? What did you love to do as a child? What was easy for you to learn? What did you enjoy doing? It's possible that you have dismissed the answers to those questions as irrelevant for your present PurposeQuest. I maintain that the answers are important, even critical.

I have found many people waiting to be something they are not in order to fulfill their purpose. Often the answers are as close as their own heart, but they look past that with an expectation that God is going to make them someone they are not, someone He never intended them to be. Is this your tendency?

I dreamed of travel when I was young. I collected stamps and loved to gaze at foreign stamps, finding the country on a globe and thinking of how I would get there one day. Today I have visited many of the countries I dreamed of visiting. The clues to my present were there in my past, just as they were for Saul.

It doesn't really matter whether or not Saul was a Jewish evangelist. It supremely matters that he was true to who he was and, by so doing, changed the world. If you are going to impact the world or your world, the same will hold true. You must be true to who you are and who you are is who you've always been.

Spend some time reflecting on your past this week and check out if you're waiting to be someone you're not. The insight you gain from both exercises can provide important evidence as you seek to confirm your purpose. Have a great week!