

The Monday Memo
from the desk of
Dr. John Stanko
Issue 36

It is a sad thing to see and I see it every week. What do I see? People who are in a situation that is going nowhere, hoping that somehow their circumstances will change. Or they are hoping that they will change and suddenly be who they have never been. Usually they will quote Philippians 4:13, which states, "I can do all things through Him [Christ] who strengthens me."

I don't have the heart to tell them that their interpretation of Philippians 4:13 isn't correct. You cannot be anything you want to be, nor will God change you into someone He never intended you to be in the first place. The context of Philippians 4:13 is about finances. Paul was saying he had learned to be content with a lot or a little; he had learned to be happy with what God provided at any point in time.

Anyone who is trying to be who God didn't intend for them to be is trying to do something in their own strength, not in God's strength. For example, I tried for years to be a pastor, but no amount of trying or hiding behind Philippians could make me a pastor. In the end, I had to face the fact that God didn't create me to pastor. He created me to be who I am.

So who are you? To find out, you may first have to admit that you are not who you are trying to be. Perhaps you have taken on a role that you want, or accepted a role or position that others have given you. At this point, you may have to face the reality that what you're doing isn't working, that in a sense God has withheld His favor and blessing because you are not in the right place, doing the right thing. Only then, when you've accepted who you aren't, can God show you who you are.

God wants you to know your purpose. He will not empower you to be who you are not, but He will empower you to be the fullest, greatest expression of who you are. In that setting, you will be able to do all

things because God is with you in reality. You will not be guilty of wishful thinking.

If I could personally do one thing for you this week, I would release you from trying to be who you are not. I would go on to tell you that you haven't failed; it's just time for you to move on. Furthermore, I would look you in the eye and say, "You *can't* do all things, but you *can* do the things that God wants you to do. So stop pretending and move on. God is with you." Since I can't be with you, I'm doing the next best thing to being there with you. I'm writing this *Monday Memo* to you. May you embrace your limitations this week and then find the path where God can truly enable you to do great things for Him and those around you. Have a great week!

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If I asked you what your purpose in life is, how would you respond? What would you say? Would be able to give me a clear, simple set of words that describes who you are, or would you respond with a phrase that sounds nice, but doesn't really get to the heart of your existence? For the last ten years, I have encouraged and assisted people to find that clear, concise statement of purpose. This is also why I started writing *The Monday Memo* eight months ago.

While doing research for my book, *I Wrote This Book on Purpose . . . So You Can Know Yours*, I discovered author Laurence Boldt. In the introduction to his book, he wrote:

The quest for the work you love - it all begins with the two simple questions: Who am I? And What in the world am I doing here? While as old as humanity itself, these perennial questions are born anew in every man and woman who is privileged to walk upon this earth. Every sane man and woman, at some point in his or her life, is confronted by these questions - some while but children; more in adolescence and youth; still more at midlife or when facing retirement; and even the toughest customers at the death of a loved one or when they themselves have a brush with death. Yes, somewhere, sometime, we all find ourselves face to face with the questions, Who am I? and What am I here for?

And we do make some attempt to answer them. We ask our parents and teachers, and it seems they do not know. They refer us to political and religious institutions, which often crank out canned answers devoid of personal meaning. Some even tell us that life has no meaning, save for eating and breeding. Most of us are smart enough to recognize that canned answers or begging the question will not do. We must find real answers for ourselves. But that takes more heart and effort than we are often willing to give.

Finding your purpose can be hard work, but it is well worth the cost. Your purpose not only gives you peace and a sense of destiny, but also the energy and focus that will enable you to make a difference in your world. Boldt goes on to write:

Failing to find the work you love has costs, not only to your self-esteem, relationships, health, and creativity, but to your world. As a human community, we all lose when people's creative abilities do not find expression in constructive, purposeful action. We lose in terms of needless human suffering and untapped human potential. Around the globe, useless, even degrading work steals the spirit and saps the joy from the lives of millions, while much necessary work goes undone. Giving your gifts benefits the world, not only through the direct contributions you make and the joy you radiate, but through the living example you provide others of what is possible for them. Determine to play your part in creating the kind of world you want to live in.

If you are still searching for your purpose, I encourage you not to give up. Keep digging and searching; God will reward your efforts. I can't tell you when, but I can promise that the search will be worth the effort. This may be the week for your realization; or your purpose may delay its arrival until later.

If you know your purpose, I want to point out one sentence from the above quote: "Around the globe, useless, even degrading work steals the spirit and saps the joy from the lives of millions, while much necessary work goes undone." Are you neglecting "necessary work" because you are giving yourself to things not related to your life purpose? If that is the case, what are you prepared to do about it?

If I can help you in your search, don't hesitate to go to www.purposequest.com, where I have included some material that can assist you in your search. Or write me, for often I have been able to help people see what was right before them all along--their life purpose. Do what you can this week to find or fulfill your purpose. Your world is waiting for you.

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I like to get mail. Not the "junk mail" that is circulated from person to person, but personal mail whether by paper or email. I especially enjoy getting mail in response to *The Monday Memo*. It tells me that someone out there is listening to, or rather reading, what I have to say.

This past week I received a lot of mail pertaining to last week's *Memo* on finding your life purpose. Seldom does anyone disagree with what I have to say about purpose; most of the time people have trouble coming to grips with what their specific purpose is.

While I always share tips or techniques that may help you find your purpose, most often finding your purpose comes down to hearing the voice of God. It involves recognizing that still, small voice that doesn't shout over the other voices vying for your attention. The still, small voice simply waits for you and me to stifle all rival voices and then continues to be still and small.

This past week I was reading a book by Henri Nouwen entitled *Making All Things New*. In it he wrote:

From all that I said about our worried, over-filled lives, it is clear that we are usually surrounded by so much inner and outer noise that it is hard to truly hear our God when he is speaking to us. We have often become deaf, unable to know when God calls us and unable to understand in which direction he calls us. Thus our lives have become absurd. In the word absurd we find the Latin word *surdus*, which means "deaf." A spiritual life requires discipline because we need to learn to listen to God, who constantly speaks but whom we seldom hear. When, however, we learn to listen, our lives become obedient lives. The word obedient comes from the Latin word *audire*, which means "listening." A spiritual discipline is necessary in order to move slowly from an absurd to

an obedient life, from a life filled with noisy worries to a life in which there is some free inner space where we can listen to our God and follow his guidance.

A life without purpose truly is an absurd life, a life that hasn't heard the voice of God that defines who we are and what we were born to do. Determine that this week you will discipline yourself to drown out or reduce the noise in your life so you can hear God. Spend some time praying and have faith that you will hear His voice. Be prepared with a pen and paper to write down what you think you hear Him say. After all, if God wants you to do His will, He must tell you what that will is. If you are to be a person of purpose, you must live an obedient life that follows the directions you hear from God. I trust and pray that this week you move from the absurd to the obedient. It really is the only way to live.

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Issue 39

I have been in Dallas this past week and I worked out almost every day this week. I know that isn't very exciting but it represents a significant breakthrough for me. Last April, I wrote about my lack of exercise in **Issue Eight** of *The Monday Memo*. I attributed that lack to not having a value that made exercise a priority in my life. But now I do. (By the way, all the back issues of *The Monday Memo* can be accessed by going to <http://www.purposequest.com/mmemo.htm>. They can be downloaded in groups of five.)

Since April, I have not been trying to work on my discipline to exercise, but on developing a value that would make exercise an important part of my life. Several weeks ago, I edited my personal governing value list to include the following value:

4. I am energetic.

“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power” (Ephesians 3:7).

Paul accomplished his life purpose “through the working of his [God’s] power.” The Greek word for “working” is *energeo*. Paul was energized by God’s grace and power, and those things enabled him to achieve greatness. I want to have and use this same *energeo* in my life and not be found working in my own strength. I will maintain this energy by staying focused on my purpose, eating healthy food, exercising, and getting appropriate rest.

After I had my annual physical several weeks ago and received a good report, I decided that I wanted that report to remain good. So I revised my governing values and now have "exercise" on my daily prioritized task list. I feel

better, not only because I'm working out, but also because I'm working out something that is important to me. Exercise is now tied to a value that is an important part of who I am.

As we close out 2001, maybe it's time for you to develop or revisit your governing values. In doing so, you must ask yourself, "What's really important to me?" "What values are there in my life that guide my daily decisions?" "What values should be there and how can I make them a priority in the midst of my busy life?" With those questions and their answers, you can develop a list of values that can serve as a guidance system for the new year.

As a help to you, I have an article from my book, ***So Many Leaders, So Little Leadership*** on my website for you to download and read. It has specific guidelines to help you identify your governing values. I also have a complete list of my own values for you to use as an example to write your own. You can go to <http://www.purposequest.com/articles.htm> and download the article, "How to Develop Your Governing Values." If you cannot access the site, write me with the word "values" in the subject box and I will send you a copy in Word format.

I would write more, but I have to go now. It's already late and I didn't work out yet today. It's time to run, sweat and encounter some pain, not because I enjoy it, but because it's important to me. Isn't it time for you to do what's important to you?

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I'm sitting in the Memphis, Tennessee airport because my flight home is delayed by rain. In coming through security a few minutes ago, I had a new experience. They made me take my shoes off, place them in a bin, and put them through the xray machine! I guess I have sinister-looking shoes! (My mother will be glad that I had clean socks on.) I have some time on my hands, so this would be a good time to write *The Monday Memo*.

In a few weeks, Christmas will be here. What a wonderful time of the year. While this is the time we celebrate the birth of Jesus, at this time of year I can't help but think of His mother Mary. She was probably a young teenager when the angel Gabriel appeared and announced to her that she would give birth to a son. What would grow within her was a sovereign act of the Holy Spirit. She didn't ask for this and as far as we know, she wasn't praying to be the mother of the Son of God. God chose her and that's the only explanation for why she was the woman who gave birth to Jesus.

When I was pastoring, I delivered a Sunday message that I entitled, "Have a Mary Christmas!" I focused on Mary and her surrender to the will of God. After she questioned the angel as to how it would be possible for her, a virgin, to give birth, she replied, "Be it done unto me according to Your will!" That should be the cry of all our hearts this season. We may not understand what God is doing in our lives or how He will finish the work He has started, but we should all be responding like Mary, "Be it done unto me according to Your will!"

Perhaps you have come to the realization that something is growing inside you. It may be an idea or a dream, but in many respects it's somewhat like Mary's baby. You didn't ask for them; they just appeared one day and you haven't been able to get away from them. You've thought about school, your own business, going to Africa or starting a ministry for a long time. Perhaps you have procrastinated, tried to talk yourself out of, or just ignored this "baby" in you, but it just

won't go away. It just keeps growing; you carry it with you wherever you go.

Maybe you're at the point now where you're asking, "Is this thing inside me the will of God? How do I know if it's the Lord?" I'll answer your question with another question: How do you know it *isn't* from God? What steps have you taken to prove that this "baby" living inside you isn't the will of God? Too often we are waiting for God to confirm His will *before* we take the first step, but more often, God confirms His will *after* we've taken the first step.

So what can you do this week or before the end of 2001 to act on this "baby" within you? Can you make a phone call or take a trip to check something out? Is there someone with whom you could meet to find out more about how to birth this "baby?" In past *Monday Memos*, we've discussed how faith without some action is not faith at all. The message of this season is one of faith; how can you use your faith to allow this baby in you to live and prosper?

There are 14 days left in 2001. Don't put off to 2002 what you can do today. If you truly want to celebrate the spirit of Christmas, then think of Mary and do what she did. She asked a humble question and then surrendered to what God was doing inside her. If you do the same, then you indeed will have a "Mary Christmas." It is my hope and prayer that you do.