

Monday Memo 381: New Year Ramblings

Happy New Year! I hope 2009 will be a purpose-filled and productive year for you. Hoping, however won't get the job. Purpose and productivity are never accidents. They occur through focused and specific actions that emanate from a vision of what you want to achieve. Purposeful action is just that -- action -- and is never the result of passive wishing or praying. So with that in mind, I hope you will allow me to think out loud as to what kind of 2009 I intend to have, Lord willing.

HARD WORK

I was reflecting the other day on a verse that has impacted my life for the last 25 years. It is found in 1 Corinthians 15:10: "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." I remember reading an anonymous quote a few years ago that stated, "There are many people who want to change the world who don't know what to do on a rainy Sunday afternoon," In other words, wishful thinking won't impact the world unless the thinking translate into action and hard work.

So I have set these goals and objectives for 2009. Have you set yours yet? If not, there's still plenty of time. That's what January and rainy or snowy Sunday afternoons are for.

2009 GOALS

By God's grace and with His help, in 2009 I will:

1. Improve communication with my audience through Facebook (I already have a page), my website (check out my "Latest New" section on my homepage), my blog and a service called Twitter (where I am @johnstanko).
2. Delegate more of my work to a team of interested people in the U.S and around the world.
3. Publish The Faith Files, Volume 2.
4. Have 90% of my classwork for my Doctor of Ministry completed, including my ministry project.
5. Resume broadcasting on radio and begin on television.
6. Hold more leadership training sessions here in my hometown.
7. Establish a regular savings plan (I have the figure established).
8. Read 50 books (I finished 54 in 2008).
9. Resume teaching college classes (I have two scheduled for the coming term).
10. Work smarter, not harder.
11. Establish better and more regular streams of revenue from books, training sessions and courses I have written and developed over the years.

I won't bore you with all the specifics of those 11 objectives but I have them. I hope to do these in partnership with my local church, but if that doesn't work out, I am prepared to do them on my own time. So what will you accomplish in 2009? Why not take a

moment and share at least one goal for 2009 with the rest of my readers on the site where this entry is posted? Help create a wave of goals from around the world that will stimulate even my most casual reader to take action on a dream today.

Monday Memo 382: More And More and More

I am always perplexed by how many people believe small is more spiritual than big. We should never, ever do anything just for numbers or size, or at least that is the dominant thinking. Consequently, our churches are small, our productivity is sometimes small and our overall results are often meager because we are biased against big. Small thinking leads to small results.

I am not saying that big is always better, but small isn't always better either. If you aren't convinced, read on. If you are, read on anyway. You may learn something!

MORE

I just finished a paper for one of my classes and I talked about the need to measure our effectiveness. That's another no-no for many people, whether we are counting people in church or the money we earn. The reason I stated that we should measure our progress and growth is because God requires it because God requires and expects more. (Oh boy, now I'm really in trouble with some people!) I think, however, that I can prove it. Here are some things to consider:

1. We are to grow in the knowledge of God (see Philippians 1:9-11).
2. Jesus said that we should bear a lot of fruit and that our prayers should be answered (John 15:1-8; this fruit is not simply being nicer to other people, by the way: it's tangible results).
3. We should grow in the grace of God (see 2 Peter 3:18).
4. The early church grew in numbers by leaps and bounds; since many want to have New Testament churches, those churches should grow as well (see Acts 6:7).
5. Our faith and love for others should grow and increase (see 2 Thessalonians 1:13).

MORE AND MORE AND MORE

I think we like small because we are afraid. We are afraid that we can't produce more, that people will criticize us and that we won't be able to handle more. Sometimes we don't more because we are lazy. Paul commended the Thessalonians for how well they were doing and then gave them this instruction:

And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more (1 Thessalonians 4:10 emphasis added).

Now I know that refers to love and doesn't say anything about fruit, books written or people in church. Yet doesn't it stand to reason that if your love for others increases more and more, that you will then do more and more to express that love in tangible ways? Won't you want to touch more, help more, and reach more than you did previously?

And exactly how much is "more"? It's a little more than you did or had previously. We get into trouble when I compare my "more" to your "more" and I either get discouraged or proud. The answer, however, is not to avoid big; it's to deal with your attitude -- and then pursue more, whatever more means for you and your purpose.

Are you biased against "more"? If so, I hope you will spend some time this week reflecting on what I have written. Where can you do more, be more or touch more in the purpose of God? Where is your attitude small when God's is big? When you find out the answers to those questions, you will be well on your way to bearing much fruit, something that isn't an option if you are serving the God that we serve. Have a great week!

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

Monday Memo 383: Less and Less and Less

Last week, my memo title was More and More and More. This week it is Less and Less and Less. You may be thinking, "I wish he would make up his mind." I have made up my mind and more is better but less is also better so you can do more. Confused? I may be, too, but to find out whether or not I am, you will have to read on.

LESS AND LESS AND LESS

Let's think about a funnel for a moment. A funnel is wide at the top and very narrow at the bottom so that liquids may pour into something with a small opening. When you begin your PurposeQuest, you are at the top of the funnel. The whole world and all its options are available to you. Then something occurs, however, and it can unnerve you and make you uncomfortable. As you progress down the funnel of purpose, you begin to restrict your activity. Things you once did have no meaning or you lose your enthusiasm for things you once had energy to do. You also find that you evaluate everything you do differently. As you go down the funnel, you find there is no energy or time to do some of those things that are no longer related to your purpose. You find that you may actually be doing less and less and less.

You may be concerned that your life will be less meaningful if and when you get to the bottom of that fictitious funnel. To the contrary, however, the bottom of the funnel is your place of greatest effectiveness. It is at that point where you find what you do that no one else can do. While it seems restrictive, that point allows God to send you anywhere in the world that needs who you are and what you do. The narrow point is why the funnel exists; without it, there would be no purpose for the funnel.

LESS IS MORE

Perhaps an example will help. History tells us that Mozart was a virtuoso violinist and pianist. Rarely in history has anyone been a world-class performer with two instruments.

Mozart was so good at both that he gave up playing the violin! Mozart knew there weren't enough hours in the day to practice, so he decided to focus on what would serve him best as a composer. This is what I would call the funnel effect in Mozart's life. Mozart's less become more, however, for he proceeded to create more of the greatest music the world has ever heard once he played and practiced less instruments.

How about you? Are you uncomfortable as you travel down your purpose funnel? Does the thought of restricting your activity according to your purpose scare or concern you? Well, don't worry. Where purpose is concerned, less is definitely more. If you are willing to focus on what you do best, you can actually accomplish greater and more lasting results.

My purpose or the bottom of my funnel is to create order out of chaos. Armed with that knowledge, I know what I am supposed to do and I have eliminated many activities that are not related to my purpose. While I have done less, these last ten years I have done more than ever. My less has certainly led to more, and yours will, too. Spend some time this week thinking about where you are in your purpose funnel. You may need to abandon some activities (less), but that will give you time to do the things that you do best (more). Have faith and continue down the funnel to your point of greatest effectiveness. And as you do, have a great week!

384: Your Less Can Be More

Two weeks ago I wrote More and More and More and urged you not to be biased against more, for it may be God's will. Last week I wrote Less and Less and Less and explained how people of purpose actually restrict their activities over time to those things that yield the greatest results. I want to continue last week's theme in this week's Memo entitled Your Less Can Be More. Or should the title be Your More Can Be Less? Now I'm confused, so I had better keep writing and you had better keep reading so that hopefully we can bring some order out of this mess!

MY LESS LED TO MORE

If you have the faith to focus your efforts on what you do best and were created to do, you may find yourself doing less things, but the things you do will bring greater results. People regularly ask me how I am able to do the things I do. My answer is always the same: I stopped doing the things I can't do so well so I can concentrate on those things that I can do well.

When I was a Sunday-morning pastor in Orlando, the largest crowd we ever had in the church was 258 people. (I don't know why I remember that figure, for it was back in 1992!). This Memo could reach upwards of 20,000 people after it is forwarded from one reader to another. Do you see how my less has led to more? I stopped trying to do it all and concentrated on doing some. My less led to more and yours will too.

What's more, when I started The Monday Memo in 2001, I wasn't sure how long it would run. This issue is number 384 and every time I sit down on a Sunday evening, I have something to write. A woman came up to me in church this morning to tell me that I inspired her in her work with nutrition and health. Many have told me that the Memo has mentored and directed them to do what was in their heart, so not only has the Memo readership grown, but the Memo impact has also grown. Once again, my less led to more.

YOUR LESS CAN BE MORE, TOO

If my less can be more, then yours can, too. The challenge is usually in finding the less so that you can embrace the more. What do you need to stop doing? I know, it's a step of faith, because you may not know at this point what you will do. You only sense what you must stop doing. I could not begin writing The Monday Memo until I left the church position I had at the time. Two months later I began writing and I haven't stopped!

The key to productivity isn't to do everything you can think of. The key is to do what you do best, what you do that causes God to partner with you or, better yet, you with Him. Focus this week on how your less can be more and then have faith to scale down so you can gear up. When you do, you will finally discover the more that you have always known should be present in your life and work. Have a great week!

385: Someone Celebrates a Failure

I'm sorry I didn't get a Memo out to you yesterday, but I was still emotionally drained from watching the Pittsburgh Steelers (dare I say my Pittsburgh Steelers?) win Super Bowl XLIII. The Steelers won with 35 seconds left in the game, and I lost my voice on several occasions. I needed a day to heal and recover.

As you may know, every year or so I declare a week to be what I have come to call Celebrate a Failure Week. I try to help you think differently about failure leading up to the celebration and then urge you to examine your failures and celebrate them for what they are - great learning and growing experiences.

The other day I got a great email from someone who wrote me during the last failure celebration and I thought I would share with you (with her permission) the results of her celebration. Let's call our writer Tracy:

TRACY WROTE:

Dear Dr. John,

I just wanted to say how wonderful it is to be having a failure week! And how much it has helped me. I have been stressed senseless about exams I have coming up and more stressed about what a total and utter loser I would be if I failed them! I was petrified I would be in a dark deep hole for eternity hiding in shame. That's drastic I realize, but still

how I felt until I realized that doing my exams was actually a result of something I had learned from a past failure.

I decided not to do my A Levels at the end of my O level year and go onto a college instead. To cut a long story short, I never got to finish the course and could not go onto University as I had never done my A Levels. I always kicked myself for it, and on my gap year here in England when I saw the opportunity to do my A Levels, I jumped at the chance and have been studying them at night. I have exams in 5 weeks and felt stressed witless, more out of the fear of failing than actually doing the exams. It was so bad at one stage that I actually thought I'd just give up while I was ahead and go home and not sit the exams. At least then I would have just given up but would not have to face the chance of failing.

Your failure week and writing on failure has really encouraged me, I'm now happy that I at least took the chance and can write my A Levels, regardless of whether I fail or not. Now at least I know I tried and I can stop asking myself, 'What if I had?'

So thank you and enjoy sunny Africa, I'll see you again soon, hopefully having passed my A Level exams! In the meantime, I'm really learning from failure week preparation!

PURPOSEQUEST WROTE:

Thanks, Tracy, for taking the time to write in the midst of exam prep. You won't fail. Have faith, stay positive and go for it. You're a smart girl.

TRACY WROTE BACK:

I am not sure if you remember me writing to you about your article on Failure week and how it encouraged me...and it still does! I just wanted to update you on what happened with my exams. I passed them and applied to study Fine Art at the local university, which has one of the leading Fine Art degrees in Africa. They accept 35 students a year and had just under 1,000 applicants this year! I had to send them my portfolio, sit for two very long exams and attend two interviews, but I am happy to say that I will be starting my first day of lectures tomorrow!

I am very grateful to you for taking the time to write your thoughts for people to read, and am really appreciative for the encouragement it gave me when I was ready to pack it all in. I am now well on my way to living my dream and praise the Lord....I actually made it!

So what could you do if fear of failure wasn't paralyzing or hindering you? Have a great week!