

386: The Peanut Man

This month is Black History Month in the United States and I want to write about one of my favorite purpose heroes of color by the name of George Washington Carver. Carver was a botanist, agriculturist and scientist who lived in the deep South right after the American Civil War. Carver urged southern farmers to plant peanuts, but there was only one problem. There were no markets for peanuts. What happened next is a testimony to the power of purpose.

When faced with the dilemma of peanuts and no uses, David Collins tells this story about Carver in his book *Man's Slave Becomes God's Scientist: George Washington Carver*: I retreated into my lab. Only there could I avoid the faces of my students and friends. Only there could I be alone. But somehow I was not alone. Even in the silence and stillness, I felt another presence. Falling to my knees, I begged forgiveness and understanding from my Savior and Creator.

And as I prayed, I was drawn to my feet. Out of the lab I went, into the nearby woodlands and fields. The sun warmed my skin; the soft breezes refreshed my body.

"Oh Mr. Creator," I asked softly, "Why did you make this Universe?"

A wind stirred the trees a bit. "Your little mind asks too much, " came the answer. "Ask something more your size."

Confused, I rubbed my chin. "What was man made for?" I whispered.

Once more, I seemed to hear a voice on the wind. "You are still asking too much, little man. Try once more."

I fell to my knees. "Dear Mr. Creator, why did You make the peanut?"

Once more the breezes rustled through the trees. "Now you are asking questions your own size. Together we will find the answers."

When George Washington Carver got up from his knees, he went on to discover 300 uses for the peanut. While he was at it, he found 119 uses for the sweet potato.

God hasn't unlocked all the secrets of His creation yet. He is looking for other men and women who will know how to pray and then focus their efforts. Are you one of those people? If so, I urge you to pray and then partner with God to fulfill the purpose He assigned you. As you do, I know you will have a great week!

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

387: 50 Years Later at 39,000 Feet

I was thinking while flying over to Kenya the other day at 39,000 feet that if and when I need inspiration or a word from God, I must get on a plane going somewhere, anywhere. I can't explain it, but it's a magical moment for me every time I fly, and I have logged 3.5 million miles since 1989! I can remember when it all started, however, and I was only ten years old, although I would not be on a plane for another nine years after that. If you want to know the whole story, you know the rules. You will have to read on.

A FIFTY-YEAR OLD MEMORY

My family never traveled anywhere. We never took a trip longer than 40 miles from our home and we never had a family holiday or vacation together. I remember playing in my back yard as a child and looking up at the airplanes flying overhead and wondering where they were going without me.

Then one day my young life changed forever.

My father told me that he was taking me somewhere, but would not tell me where. We got in our car and drove 32 miles to visit, not fly out of but just visit, the Greater Pittsburgh Airport.

When you drove into the old airport (they have since built a new one), they had elaborate fountains. We parked the car and went into the airport, which had shops, a movie theater, a game arcade and an observation deck.

Now keep in mind that this was probably in 1959. Most of the planes were still of the propeller variety, but I remember standing on that observation deck and watching them start up, take off and land. I was fascinated. We got there in the early evening and then found out a jet plane was coming in from Chicago at 9 PM, which was the time of the summer sunset. My dad said we could wait for the jet to come in and we did.

I will never, ever forget seeing that TWA jet approach and land while there was still some daylight. I used the deck's binoculars to watch it come in and I was absolutely spellbound and speechless. When we left that night after spending about three hours there, I said to myself as a nine-year old boy, "I will be on one of those planes one day." I have fulfilled my vow over and over again.

WHAT ARE YOUR MEMORIES?

That story is part of who I am. So who are you? What experiences have shaped your life? Are you being true to those experiences? How so? If not, how can you re-connect with those things that helped make you the person you are today? Was it music, travel, art, business, medicine or entertainment? It may not be too late to do something about what you once only dreamed of doing.

I am staying home more this year, so I have placed my love for travel in God's hands. I am not anxious, but I know it won't go away. I cannot distance myself from that 50-year-

old memory, nor do I want to do so. It would be great if you can share any similar experiences with my readers at the site where this entry is posted. In the meantime, I hope you have a great, memory-filled week.

388: A Piano From Heaven

I got back last night from Nairobi and I had yet to finish up a lot of work for the class I began today in biblical counseling as part of my D. Min. program. I had a great trip along with the seven who went with me. If you want to check out my travel blog for our time in Kenya, you can go here and, once you register, find it using the search name CUBM.

Many people tell me they will do anything that God wants them to do, and that's certainly a good thing. Yet when some tell me that, it isn't an expression of faith; it's a statement of unbelief. How can saying, "God, I will do whatever You want" be a statement of unbelief? For that answer, as you know by now, you will have to read on.

A PIANO FROM HEAVEN

When some say, "Lord, I'll do whatever You want," they are really saying, "Lord, I have no intention of doing anything unless you can prove to me beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is something you want me to do." They are saying, "Lord, if a piano falls on me unexpectedly and pins me under its weight, then I will know You are trying to get my attention." All the burden of proof and initiative are on God and you have no role in the transaction except to respond to circumstances just about forcing you to do something.

This of course is not faith. To assume that God must answer all your questions and soothe all your fears before you can be expected to take the first step is anything but faith; it is presumption. You are presuming that God owes you a big, fat confirmation before He can ever expect you to move. So unless something unusual happens, like being trapped under a falling piano that could only have been sent from God, you will carry on with business as usual, since the ball is in God's court.

SO WHAT'S A PERSON TO DO?

You are not to wait for the ultimate confirmation before you act. You must take faith steps today to prove whether or not your idea or plan began in the mind of God. If you aren't sure if God wants you to write a book, then you should write it! If it's not His idea, you will know when you can't finish or publish it. In most cases, however, once you start, you will see that He meets you more than half way. The confirmation you need will not come to help you start, but to help you persevere.

So what can you do today besides waiting for the piano to fall? You can make a trip, compose the song, write a letter or develop a plan to help prove that you have a valid idea. You can stop waiting for God to do what only you can do. You can stop wallowing in presumption pretending that it's faith, that God owes you special treatment so you won't look foolish or fail.

A piano hitting you from on high isn't a good thing, so stop making that the sign before you go forward. Instead have faith and act today. You will be glad you did, for being trapped under a piano sent by God isn't a good place to be. Have a great week!

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389: Purpose Cross

I am glad that last week is over! I had class every day including Saturday from 8 to 4:30, but I feel smarter already, and I need all the help I can get. If you read The Memo regularly, you know that I write extensively about bearing fruit. I don't define fruit as simply being nice or holy (although that is a part), but I define fruit as being productive -- starting the business, writing the book, producing the album and the like.

Yet there is one important aspect of fruitfulness that I have not emphasized and I want to make up for that oversight this week. What is that aspect? Ah, you know that you will have to read on to find out.

ALONE OR ABUNDANCE?

Jesus said in John 12:24-26:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.

It is crucial that you know your purpose. If you are going to be as fruitful and fulfilled as you want to be, however, you must die to yourself and follow Him. There is no way around the death process on the road to purpose and fruit.

MY PURPOSE CROSS

When you die to self and pick up your cross, God will seldom, except for a season, require that you deny who you are or function outside of purpose. The cross in purpose is not trying to be who you are not, but in fulfilling and expressing your purpose in a manner that honors God and acknowledges the fact that He gave you your purpose, perhaps in a manner that is not your ideal situation. Let me give you an example.

My purpose is to create order out of chaos. That is what I love to do and it is what the Lord helps me to do. My death process, however, is that I would rather fulfill my purpose almost anywhere except the local church. I have prayed, "Lord, send me to ABC, CBS, SAA, RBZ, KFHL, KFC, NBC or any other company with an acronym. But please don't send me to the church!"

Yet for 35 years, church work has been my purpose cross. God has seen fit for me to fall into the ground and die in church settings all over the world! Please don't misunderstand. I am not complaining. It is an honor to serve God anywhere and I am delighted to be back in a local church setting as I write. Church work is where His strength is made perfect in my weakness. Church work is where I learn to deny myself and then get a chance to do all the things I love to do. Do you see how God is able to combine the two, my cross and my joy?

When you say, "God, I will do whatever you want me to do," that is the correct thing to say. Don't expect God to place you, however, in a place where you will not express who He made you to be. You can expect, however, that He will do it in such a way that you will have to deny yourself, in the midst of purpose joy, to pick up your cross and follow Him. There is no other way for you to bear the fruit that God and you both want to see from a purposeful life. Have a great week!

390: Holy Action

I just typed the number in the title and realized that I started the Monday Memo eight years ago this month. I didn't know how long I would write, but I was convinced that I would eventually run out of material. Here I am, however, eight years and 390 Memos later and I'm still enjoying it and hope you are, too. What's more, I hope it is still relevant. When it isn't, that will be the time to quit.

You know I am passionate to see you not just talk about your ideas but do something about them. I think the Lord feels the same way. I think I can prove it, but to know for sure, you will have to read on.

INEFFECTIVE AND UNPRODUCTIVE

Let's start by reading what Peter wrote in his second epistle:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:5-8).

I put the two words in bold that I want you to notice: ineffective and unproductive. The King James translates those two words: barren and unfruitful. The Greek word translated barren literally mean "lazy, not performing the work that one ought to perform." The second word translated unfruitful means "not yielding the fruit that one ought to yield."

I think the message is clear. You make every effort to live a holy life and grow in knowledge so you can be fruitful. In this context, holiness is not the end, it is the means to the end.

HOLY ACTION

If you are holy, then you will take holy action. What is holy action for you? It is tied to your purpose and emanates from the ideas and dreams that you have. So ask yourself this week whether or not you are shunning the work you ought to perform and if, in fact, you are yielding the fruit that you were created to yield. If not, what can you do to take steps to do so.

You know my website has a lot of material to help you be purposeful and productive. Why not visit there for some help? Maybe there is someone who inspires or mentors you whom you can visit this week to get your action plan together. Whatever it is you can do, don't put it off any longer. While you grow in holiness, you should also grow in holy action. It is the natural expression of a godly life. Have a great week!

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