

*The Monday Memo*  
from the desk of  
Dr. John Stanko  
Issue 41

This week I am writing you from the city of Orlando, Florida. I was in south Florida earlier in the week and came here to be with wife's family for the Christmas holiday. I pastored a church in Orlando for four years and have many fond memories from my time here. That period of my life represented a season when I came to more fully understand my life purpose and how to express it. In 1993, as a result of this understanding, I resigned from the pastorate because I realized one important truth: just because I **can** do something doesn't mean that is what I am **supposed** to do. If that activity isn't related to your purpose, then you may have to stop doing that so you can do what it is that you were born to do. That is what Orlando represents in my life and that is why it will always have a special place in my heart.

In a few days, we will celebrate the birth of Jesus the King. Last week, we looked at Mary and how she responded to the will of God. This week, I want to look at the shepherds of the Christmas story. On the night Jesus was born, they were tending their flocks on the hillsides outside Bethlehem. They were literally minding their own business and God sent them messengers:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us

about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (Luke 2:8-16).

These shepherds were doing what they knew to do at that time in their life and God interrupted them with a special news report. This both scared and thrilled them. That's how it is when you find your life purpose. Often you are doing what you know to do at the time. It is usually a job or role that is less than fulfilling. Suddenly, God, the great communicator, breaks into your consciousness and brings a message of purpose, of what He has always wanted you to do. That not only terrifies you but also gives you a desire to seek it out more clearly and to carry it out.

That night the shepherds went to work that day like any other day. God spoke to them, however, and they were never the same. They started by sitting on a hillside in cold weather; they ended by finding a great treasure in Bethlehem, a treasure that had not been revealed to anyone else but them.

Maybe you have been in a desperate search for your purpose and its expression. As we end this year, I suggest that you be encouraged and remember the shepherds. Finding your purpose doesn't depend on your diligence; it depends on God's grace. Yes, you must search for your purpose, but only God can reveal it to you. I don't know when or how He will do that. It may be one cold, dark night when you go about your business like countless other nights. At that point, God may send His messenger and change your life forever. I don't know when or how He will do it, I just know that He will.

So relax this holiday season. Keep asking God to help you see who you are and what you were born to do, but after that, trust Him. He wants you to fulfill your purpose more than you do, and He will show you in the fullness of time. When He does, you will join with the shepherds as laborers who found more than business as usual one night when they went to work. May the God of purpose speak to you soon and may you have the courage to believe what He says! Merry Christmas!

*The Monday Memo*  
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**Dr. John Stanko**  
**Issue 42**

I said it every day for the last week. I have told my wife daily that this has been a *great* holiday season. We've had good family times, some rest, great food and a chance to reflect on the past year. Even our church service yesterday was a highlight for me. Our service started with a verse from Isaiah 33:5: "The Lord is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge." God is indeed a sure foundation and a rich store of all we need. I thank Him for His mercy to my family and me as we enter another year in His service.

The wise men or magi found out the truth of the statement that God is a rich store. As we conclude this holiday season and year, let's take a look at those wise men and what we can learn that may help us as we seek to be people of purpose and productivity. What were the wise men looking for all those years as they studied the heavens? Whatever it was, they kept looking. If you have searched for your life purpose but haven't found it yet, keep looking. I don't know how long it will take, but a star will appear in your heavens at some point and lead you where you need to go.

Then one day they saw a star. A star doesn't give off a lot of light, but it was enough to take them to Jesus. You may only have a small clue as to what your purpose is. If you only have a little light, follow what you have. The wise men followed that tiny star in the darkness of night and it brought them right to Jesus' door. God knows how to guide His people.

I wonder if the wise men knew what they were looking for as they studied the heavens year after year. When they saw the star, however, they knew it was what they had been looking for. People ask me all the time, "How will I know if I've found my purpose?" My

answer is always the same: "You'll know." You may not know what you're looking for, but when it appears, you'll know what it is.

But following the star wasn't enough for the wise men. They also consulted with other wise men in Jerusalem. Herod consulted all the elders and found out that the Christ would come from Bethlehem. With that insight, the wise men went there with the star's help. If you are going to find your purpose, you may have to rely on what others tell you about yourself. Too often we dismiss what others say as irrelevant because they "really don't know us." But God can use even their casual comments to tell us something critical about who we are, who God made us to be.

Then the wise men followed their heart. God gave them dreams that helped them in their search and journey home. When you are looking for purpose, you should pay attention to everything, especially what your heart is telling you. Often dreams are messages from the heart when our rational "defenses" are asleep. It is at that point that God can speak to us without interference.

Finally, the wise men worshipped and gave gifts. When the star of purpose stands over the door you've been seeking, it's time to worship. When you find out why you're here and what you were born to do, you not only want to get busy and fulfill your life's work. You also want and need to worship the One who gave you the assignment in the first place.

I trust that 2001 has been a year of purpose and productivity for you. If not, there's good news. A new year is just around the corner. This may be the year when your star shines brightly, even though you've been looking diligently and nothing has appeared. If that's the case, don't give up. Keep looking into your sky for whatever sign may come that tells you who you are. When it comes, follow it to the end and you'll have joy just like the wise men of old. Happy New Year!

*The Monday Memo*  
from the hotel room of  
**Dr. John Stanko**  
**Issue 43**

I received a lot of year-end mail and I thank you if you wrote to wish me a Happy New Year! I trust by now that you have had time to reflect not only on last year and what you were able to do, but also on this year and what you would like to accomplish. By now, you should have a few goals that you would like to complete this year.

One of the shortest messages this week was also among the most meaningful. Someone wrote to say:

Dear Doc,

If only you knew what it is that you've done for me. In this age when the internet is being used for so many horrible things... you're there.  
Thanks. Gideon

I include this not to draw attention to what I've done, but to encourage you in what is yet to be done. When I started *The Monday Memo* last year, I had no idea how popular it would be or how God would use it to impact and direct so many lives. You never know how God will and can use something that you do until you do it. You can plan and hope, dream and execute, but there is still that unexpected, unknown element that can surprise or disappoint you. The bottom line is: You have to give God something to bless *before* He can bless it.

There was a young boy in Jesus' day who gave Jesus his lunch of five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus took that lunch, blessed it and distributed it to thousands. It was just a simple lunch, but in God's hands it fed a multitude at no cost and with plenty left over. This year you need to stop focusing on how little you have in your hands and start seeing how you can get that little bit into God's hands so He can multiply it. In your hands, all you will have is stale bread and smelly fish. In God's hands, you may have a feast that can satisfy many and even provide for you. The choice is yours. Hold on

to what you have until it's perfect, or release it now and see what happens.

You don't know what God will do with the poem you write, the song you compose, the book you produce, the business you start, the class you take, or the trip you make. That's why your goals for this year are so important. If you haven't done so already, why not write down at least three specific things that you would like to accomplish in 2002. Share these three things with someone you love and trust, who can hold you accountable to get them done and will rejoice with you when they are finished. Write down not only *what* you will do, but also by *when* you will have it done. Don't try to over analyze what to do or how to do it. Just get it out there and see how God will use it.

I believe that there are a lot more ideas in you just like *The Monday Memo*, waiting to burst onto the world scene. I can't promise that you'll change the world with what you do this year, but I can promise that you'll change **your** world. You'll never be the same and the joy of achievement will spur you on to even greater things. May 2002 be the most productive and satisfying year you've ever had. The world is waiting for what's in you; don't keep it waiting any longer.

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**Issue 44**

I was not going to write about purpose this week, but I have one more thought I want to share before we move on to another topic next week. Recently, a friend of mine sent me an excerpt from a research article published by the famous Christian researcher, George Barna. The article was published on August 1, 2000 and is entitled "Most People Seek Control, Adventure and Peace in Their Lives." You can access this article in its entirety by going to the Barna Research site at <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=68&Reference=D>.

Below are two paragraphs from the report along with some of my own questions and observations that relate to the issue of purpose.

## Barna Research

Researcher George Barna felt that one of the most stunning outcomes was that born again Christians and non-Christians were equally likely to be seeking meaning and purpose in life. He was also amazed that so many of all born again Christians (half) were puzzled as to their purpose in life. "One of the primary values of the Christian faith is to settle the issue of meaning and purpose in life. The Bible endorses people's individual uniqueness but also provides a clear understanding of the meaning of life - that being to know, love and serve God with all of your heart, mind and strength. The widespread ignorance of that fundamental principle speaks volumes about the shallowness of America's faith - even among those who are most committed to faith matters."

## *The Monday Memo*

1. If you don't know your life purpose, you are not alone.
2. I agree that one of the primary values of Christianity is to settle the issue of meaning and life purpose.
3. I disagree that your purpose statement is to "know, love and serve God with all of our heart, mind and strength." Most people know that this is vague and doesn't satisfy the deep longing to know your specific life purpose that sets you apart from everyone else. In finding and doing that specific purpose, you will in turn know, love and serve God.
4. Not knowing your purpose is not "shallowness of faith," but rather an unwillingness to settle for a trite answer to the question, "What was I born to do?" To answer "serve God," "love God," or "do His will" is like eating part of a meal instead of the whole thing. That can satisfy your hunger only for a short time before your hunger returns.
5. It is this prevalent ambivalent teaching states that we are here to "serve God" that causes people to hunger for something specific that has personal meaning and substance.

## Barna Research

Overall, the research paints a portrait of a nation whose adults keep themselves occupied so they do not have to face significant shortcomings, according to George Barna, the director of the project. "Notice that so many people admit to lacking relational connections and meaning in life. Those are two factors are critical to gaining joy and fulfillment in life. The common solution is to keep busy and to stimulate ourselves with a variety of new experiences - that way we are not so likely to feel the pain of those fundamental holes in our life. People have discovered that if they fill the gaps with commitments and excitement, then they're less prone to feel the emptiness of loneliness and aimlessness. Of course, that just prolongs the inner despair that eventually cannot be suppressed any longer."

### *The Monday Memo*

1. Are people busy trying to deaden the pain of not knowing their purpose as the researcher suggests, or are they busy trying various activities in hopes of finding their purpose?
2. Is it enough to point out the lack of purpose? Wouldn't it be better to equip people for the sometimes difficult task of identifying what it is they were born to do?
3. This is written by a man who knows his purpose: to collect research that can help direct the body of Christ (my words). This is specific and beyond the "serving God" purpose statement that the researcher tries to apply to everyone else.
4. If finding your purpose is so easy and elementary as the researcher maintains, why do so many fall short of attaining it?
5. Do the 52% who supposedly know their purpose really know it, or have they settled for a vague statement like, "I'm here to do the will of God" without knowing what that will is for them?

As you seek your purpose, don't settle for a general statement that may satisfy everyone else but you. There is something that you were born to do that only you can do. God really did throw away the mold when He created you. There never has been or will be another person like you on earth. Yes, you were born to do the will of God, but what is that will for your life? Can you state it in a clear and

concise manner? If you can, then maybe you and I need to help the other 48% who can't. Have a great week!

*The Monday Memo*  
**from the desk of  
Dr. John Stanko  
January 21, 2002  
Issue 45**

I know I said I wouldn't do it. Last week I said I would not talk about purpose this week. And I'm going to keep my promise . . . sort of. I want to talk about two terms we often hear about: burnout and midlife crisis. When I discuss these, however, it will lead me to make some comments about purpose. Will you forgive me?

The Bible promises that fire comes to each life. Paul wrote: "If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:12-15 NIV).

When the fire comes, two things can happen. The first is that you will resemble the burning bush that attracted Moses' attention in Exodus 3:2. How are you like that bush? You burn brightly, but you never burn up or out. That happens when you are doing things related to your life purpose. You always seem to have the energy and will to do more.

When you are involved in activities that aren't related to your purpose, you expend a lot of energy and there is nothing to replenish the energy you use. That is the second thing that can happen when the fire comes. This leads to what is often called burnout: a feeling of depression, fatigue, and even despair. But read on, because burnout, as painful and debilitating as it is, can be your friend.

If and when you experience burnout, you will find your energy level depleted. But what you can still do while you are experiencing burnout may be an indication of what your purpose is. If you can paint, write, or play the piano when you're burned out, and those activities contribute to your healing, then there's a good possibility they are related to your life purpose. Why would you want to go back to the activities that drained you when you have found those things that you enjoy? To that extent, burnout can be your friend, for it will help you focus on what it is that you were born to do, that makes you burn like the bush Moses saw.

Then there's the issue of what is known as a midlife crisis. I think this crisis is closely related to burnout. During a midlife crisis, you lose your energy and focus because you have done things up to that point to make money, please others, or fulfill a sense of duty. But now you've used up all your energy trying to be who you're not and you look for something else to do, something that will bring excitement and joy back to your daily routine. I maintain that purpose is the only meaningful direction you can take to get out of burnout or midlife crisis. Everything else is a temporary "aspirin" that will relieve the pain for only a little while.

Richard Leider and David Shapiro wrote the following in their book, ***Repacking Your Bags***:

To have a purposeful midlife crisis, we must turn our gaze inward and examine where we are, where we want to go, and how we want to get there. We need to consider all that we are carrying on our journey to determine if it is really what we need for the road ahead. To put it simply, we must unpack and repack our bags. Unpacking simply means taking a long hard look at what we are carrying and why. It is seeing if our possessions, responsibilities, and relationships are still helping us move forward or if they are dragging us down. Repacking then, is the ongoing activity of re-evaluation and re-invention.

So what about you? Do you need to unpack and repack your bags? Are you tired and don't know why? Looking for fun and adventure? Are you in the midst of burnout, or do you know someone who is? The answer may be medication and rest, but a deeper issue may be

life purpose. I trust that you will take that "long hard look at what we are carrying and why." If you're carrying anything that is taking its toll on you, I urge you to lay it aside and find a load that is better suited to who you are.