

[481: Daylight on the Night Shift](#)

This week I borrow a classic Monday Memo from the archives in honor of Christmas. Here's wishing you and yours a Merry Christmas and the happiest of holiday seasons!

I receive many emails every year asking about finding purpose. Many say they have "no idea" what their purpose is and ask me for help. While I respond as best I can, after all these years I know that I cannot help anyone see his or her purpose. I know someone who can, however, and how He does it is similar to the story of the shepherds at Christmas, something I call daylight on the night shift. Read on to see what I mean.

THE NIGHT SHIFT

The shepherds in the Christmas story were working the night shift, doing what they and their ancestors had done for centuries. They went to work that night without any thought that anything extraordinary was about to happen. On the night Jesus was born, they were tending their flocks on the hillsides outside Bethlehem, minding their own business. Suddenly God sent them messengers, who brought great light to the night shift:

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, usually a job or role that is less than fulfilling. Suddenly God, the Great Communicator, breaks into your conscious being 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 clarify and fulfill it.

That night the shepherds went to work 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.

YOUR PURPOSEQUEST

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 as you 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 He will.

So have faith and relax this holiday season. Keep asking God to help you see who you are and what you were born to do, and after that, trust Him. You may even want to thank Him for your purpose whether or not you understand what it is. He wants you to fulfill your purpose more than you do. He will show you in the fullness of time, bring you daylight even if you are working the night shift. 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!

482: No More Excuses

Happy New Year! I trust that you had a great holiday season and are now ready to be more purposeful and productive in 2011 than ever before! I will write for a few more weeks and then it will be time to retake your purpose assessment if you accepted my challenge last August to improve your score. Before we get there, however, there are a few more things I want to discuss with you. A few years ago I read an essay entitled *Into the Wonder*, which was about C.S. Lewis, the great Christian author and apologist, and one of the great creative minds of the last century.

AN UNLIKELY CANDIDATE

The essay began by describing a particularly trying time in Lewis's life when he was living with his brother and an elderly woman. The woman was bedridden and increasingly used Lewis as an extra maid to help meet her needs. Meanwhile his brother, who helped him with correspondence and filing, drank himself to insensibility and ended up in a hospital. The pressures of this situation, along with his work load at Oxford, drove Lewis to the point of collapse and he was eventually hospitalized for exhaustion.

It was shortly thereafter that Lewis had a friend over to read him a portion of a new children's book that Lewis was writing. This book became *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, which was the first of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, which to date has sold 85 million copies in 30 languages.

What is so interesting to me about this scenario?

First, Lewis wrote perhaps his most famous work at a most inopportune time in his life. I often feel like I can't be more creative or productive until certain things change, until my life is free of worry, anxiety or mental clutter. Lewis didn't wait for the best time. In fact, in a time of suffering and professional busyness, he began to write fiction for children, a most unusual exercise for a man known more at that point for his theological rather than fantasy work.

Second, Lewis was not married at the time and had no children (he had two stepsons from his marriage to Joy Gresham and maintained a relationship with the boys after his wife's death). I think it remarkable that Lewis could write so effectively for children when he had none of his own.

Finally, Lewis was a loner as a child. His childhood, while not sad or abusive, wasn't filled with the kind of childhood joys upon which he could draw to write his stories.

NO MORE EXCUSES

Lewis produced creative work in spite of his personal difficulties. You must learn to do the same. You can no longer not create because circumstances in your life aren't quite right. Neither can you dismiss your creative ideas because you don't see yourself as qualified or fit. Lewis was neither a happy child nor natural father, yet he wrote children's books that changed the world. What could you do if you stopped hiding behind excuses and limitations and just did it?

It seems that Lewis's hardships prepared him to create; his suffering somehow fueled his drive to write. If you can see that your suffering is preparation and not a hindrance, you will find new freedom to produce when it may not seem like a good time to produce. And please don't tell anyone that you don't have the time to create. You have all the time in the world--24 hours every day. It's not that you don't have time; you aren't using it creatively to create.

May 2011 be your most purposeful and productive yet. Together let's do things that will change our generation (and future ones) just like C. S. Lewis did. Have a great week and year!

483: Count 'Em Up

Happy New Year! I trust you had a great holiday season and had some time to reflect on 2010 and the year ahead. Ours was great, but my only complaint is that the days just seem to go by so quickly. And that is the very thing I want to talk to you about this week, so let's start 2011 by doing some basic math.

COUNT 'EM UP

First, let's look at a verse from one of the Psalms: "[Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom](#)" (Psalm 90:12). I reflected on this verse over the holidays and decided to do what the psalmist said and number my days. Here is what I discovered.

I will be 61 in April, and that means I have lived a little more than 22,000 days up to this point in time. My father died when he was 79, so if I live to be my father's age, I will live another 6,935 days. My mother passed away at 92 and if I live that long, I have another 11,680 days.

Of course, the truth is that I could have one more day or live to be as old or even older than my mother. That is in the Lord's hands. My job is to maximize the days I do have and that hopefully includes the 365 included in the coming year. I am determined to make the most of them, not wasting not one of them. Even if I have 11,000 remaining, that is still only half as many as I have had already. The clock is ticking and I am not sure when the alarm will sound.

SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

When you say you are going to do something "one day," something like going back to school, writing a book, going to Africa or starting a business, when exactly will that one day be? What if your 'one day' is past the number of days that you have left? That means you won't ever do what's in your heart, but will only have seen it from afar and talked about it. Why? Because you failed to do what the psalmist directed you to do: number your days so you can act with wisdom.

At the end of January, you will have a chance to take your second Purpose Assessment as part of the Purpose Challenge. If you are going to improve your score, you are going to have to number your days - determining to make each one count by using your time wisely and with some sense of urgency. You can do that by making a plan for the coming year, a faith plan that will require God's help. Without it, I fear that you will not be numbering your days correctly and will lack wisdom.

I hope you have a ton of days left, but if 2011 is the last year you have, how do you want to spend it? I have made my plans in the presence of the Lord, and I hope you have, too. If you haven't, there is still time but it will start by doing the math and facing the fact that you won't live forever, so best live today and tomorrow with zest and enthusiasm. If you do that you will have a great week -- and life!

484: Two Secrets

In just a few weeks, we will bring the Purpose Challenge to a close and you can take the Purpose Assessment again to see if you have improved. One of the things we have been working on is you taking action on the things that are in your heart with the time you have available - not putting things off to 'one day' but rather saying 'this is the day!'

Some wait for more clarity and certainty before they act. Have you ever said, "If only I knew that God wanted me to do this or that," or "If only God would speak to me, then I would do it!"? While it sounds logical and spiritual, it isn't necessarily true, as we will see in this Memo. Who do you think I will pick from the Bible as a character to prove this point? If you guessed Gideon, you guessed correctly.

IT CAN'T BE ME!

In Judges 6, we see that the angel of the Lord came to give Gideon his assignment of liberating the Jews from the Midianites. Yet Gideon engaged the angel in conversation, explaining why he (Gideon) could not be the one. I'm sure you have never done this, but Gideon felt that circumstances were too awful and he was too insignificant to do what God was sending him to do.

Perhaps you have calmly explained to God and others the reasons why you are not the one to accomplish some great purpose. You have pointed out that you are too young, too old, the wrong gender, undereducated and inexperienced. Even though you too may have had an angel of the Lord visit you, you have dismissed the call as irrelevant, saying something similar to what Gideon said: "[But Lord.](#)" Gideon asked, "[how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family](#)" ([Judges 6:15](#)). So it isn't always the case that if God were to speak to you, you would automatically do His will and purpose.

TWO SECRETS

God shared with Gideon two keys to success. Those keys worked for Gideon and they will work for you. The first secret is found in [Judges 6:14](#): "[Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?](#)" Gideon felt like he needed more strength if he was to go; the Lord told him to go in the strength that he had and it would be enough.

You can put a whole slew of words in that verse and they would all be secrets of godly and purposeful success. "Go in the time you have; go in the wisdom you have; go in the knowledge you have; go with the gifts you have; go in the faith you have; go in the money you have." You won't get any more until you need it, so it's best to start right where you are today and obey God with what you have now.

The second secret is in [verse 16](#): "[The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."](#) When God speaks to you to do something, you become partners with God. You and God always comprise an insurmountable majority, no matter how improbable your success may seem to you at the start.

So there you have it. It may not be enough for God to speak to you, for your bias against yourself and your abilities may try to overrule God. If you are going to go and do anything, you must go in the strength you have today, but you can go in the confidence that God goes with you. If you can somehow apply these two secrets to your life and purpose this week, I know you will have a great week. I know I intend to do just that.

Feel free to write a comment to this entry on the [site](#) where it is posted.

[485: What Are You Wearing Right Now?](#)

In a few weeks, you will have a chance to retake your Purpose Assessment, provided you have taken it once before since I issued the Purpose Challenge last August. In preparation, you may wish to review the Memos I have written to help you with the Challenge, all of which can be found [here](#). One of the statements in the Assessment is "I examine how I feel for clues to determine what I should or should not do with my life." Why is this a statement on the Purpose Assessment?

It's hard to walk in someone else's expectations, especially when those expectations don't relate to your purpose. You can try to please society, your family, and even your own expectations of what you think you should be or do, but eventually you will fail. It will deplete your energy and creativity and you will be miserable - and only you will know. So what's the answer?

It's simple; just don't do it.

You must resist every attempt when someone, well-meaning or otherwise, tries to get you to fulfill their vision for your life. You must learn to have and pursue your own vision, for it is the only road to happiness and success, and one of the roadsigns for that vision or purpose is the joy or lack of it in your own heart.

That's what David had to do before he was king and it served him well. You may want to read the story to which I am referring in 1 Samuel 17 before we proceed.

TRY THIS ON.

The story of David and Goliath is known in many cultures and lands. Every day, Goliath and the armies of Israel would line up across from one another and nothing would happen. One day, David came to check up on his brothers and heard Goliath taunting the armies of Israel. That made him angry and he wondered why no one was doing anything about it.

When he heard that there was a reward for anyone who would kill Goliath, David immediately volunteered to do the deed.

When David told King Saul that he [David] would be the one to kill Goliath, Saul laughed, dismissing him as too young and inexperienced. David would not relent, so Saul eventually gave in and sanctioned the encounter. Before he let David go, however, he gave David his personal armor to wear:

[Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine \(1 Samuel 17:38-40\).](#)

David could not function in Saul's armor because Saul was a head taller than all his peers (see 1 Samuel 9:2). Instead David took off the armor and took up what he felt most comfortable with--a slingshot and some stones.

WHAT ARE YOU WEARING RIGHT NOW?

Do you see the lesson here? Saul had expectations that David could only fight dressed in body armor, so Saul gave him his. Others have tried to give you what fits them and you have tried to walk in it. It's not possible, however, for you to be a man or woman of purpose and walk in what someone else gives you. You must find your own joy, creativity and passion.

What's more, you can't explain it to anyone so they can understand. You don't even understand it! You just know what your heart is telling you and that is what you pursue, whether it makes perfect sense or not. Remember what the wisdom writer told us:

Each heart knows its own bitterness, and *no one else* can share its joy (Proverbs 14:10 emphasis added).

You know how much you love music, art, travel, writing, business, preaching, or medicine. No one knows better than you what is in your heart, no matter how much they love you or well-intentioned they are. Only you are equipped to hear and follow your heart. Are you up to the task?

This week it's time to be honest. Are you trying to fulfill someone else's expectations for you? Have you put on someone else's armor? If so, take it off immediately! Don't face your Goliaths this week in someone else's image for you. Face them in your own; that is good enough to get the job done. You will be lighter, nimbler and happier than you have been in a while, and it will be a significant step to identify and embrace your purpose. As you do, I know you will have a great week!