

551: The Jonah Complex

The famous psychologist, Dr. Abraham Maslov, described a life condition and identified it by using a name from the Bible. What name do you think he used? Moses? Joseph? Jesus? Paul? If you answered any of those, you are wrong. He used the name Jonah and the entire term is called "The Jonah Complex." What did Maslov mean when he referred to "The Jonah Complex?" I'm glad you asked. You will have to read on to find out

RUNNING AWAY

We know that Jonah was an Old Testament prophet and has a short book that relates part of his life story. Jonah was given an assignment by God to go and deliver a harsh message to a city and people he didn't like. He didn't want to do it, so he ran. He got on a ship and went in the opposite direction from where he was told to go.

A storm arose during the trip and it soon became clear to the sailors that Jonah was the cause of the storm. When they threw him overboard, the storm ceased and a whale swallowed Jonah. Jonah then spent three days and nights in the whale's stomach. After Jonah relented and agreed to go on God's mission, the whale spit him out and Jonah went on his way.

Maslov used "The Jonah Complex" to describe anyone who was running from his or her true life calling. He went on to say, "If you deliberately set out to be less than you are capable of, you will never truly be happy." This complex accurately describes the condition of many people with whom I have come in contact. If someone you know suffers from the Jonah Complex, they are avoiding or running from the greatness and creativity that is in them. They are afraid not of failure, but of success.

What is it like to be caught in "The Jonah Complex?" According to my experience, these people spend a lot of time trying to weather the storm. They try to stay on the ship where they are instead of jumping into the waves of life. They tell me they are "praying about it," whatever the "it" is for them. Yet day after day and sometimes year after year goes by and they do nothing.

Their prayer can actually be a delay tactic as they wait for God to do something that only they can do. They may not know what to do, but they don't seek advice from or listen to someone who could help them get started. They just hold on and hope that somehow things will change even if they don't do anything to help the change along. Or they are waiting for the "it" to happen all at once, instead of taking faith steps today that will lead them to their destiny.

JUMP SHIP

Are you suffering from "the Jonah Complex?" Are you running from your purpose or from some significant thing that God has for you to do? Is your ship being tossed by the waves of financial lack, unhappiness, and lack of productivity, yet you stubbornly cling to the ship's mast hoping that things will get better? I've found that many know their purpose but are afraid for whatever reason to speak it out. Perhaps it's time for you to face who you are and what God wants you to do. And perhaps it's time for you to take steps to get off your sinking ship and into the purpose of God.

It may look more dangerous "out there," but the only danger lies in you avoiding the great things that God has for you to do. The Chinese say that the longest journey begins with the first step. Maybe it's time for you to take the first steps this week on an exciting journey—your PurposeQuest. I hope you have a great week.

552: Purpose Food

When I meet with people to do some purpose coaching, I often ask them, "What can you do that you lose track of time and perhaps even miss a meal?" They think and can generally come up with some scenario - being in church, going to a sporting event, reading a book - and that gives me something to pursue. I started asking that question because of the story in John's gospel about Jesus and the woman at the well. You may want to read the story [here](#) before or after you read below.

LUNCH

In John's account, Jesus and the disciples were tired and hungry from travel, so the disciples went into town to buy lunch while Jesus rested at Jacob's well in Samaria, not a usual stopping point for Jews (since they did not like to mix with Samaritans). While Jesus was resting, a woman came by to draw water. This was not a usual time to draw, for it was already in the heat of the day. Perhaps Jesus was suspicious as to why this woman was coming so late, so He engaged her in magnificent conversation.

During the conversation, the woman tried to religiously debate Jesus, but He pressed into her personal life and ultimately revealed Himself to her as the Messiah she had been alluding to in her comments. At that point, she ran off to tell her neighbors that she had met a man (I doubt if anyone was surprised at that, for she had 'met' many men in her lifetime), just as the disciples returned with food. They were shocked to find that Jesus was no longer hungry!

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:31-34).

PURPOSE FOOD

Jesus was no longer hungry because He was exhilarated from His encounter with that woman. He had fulfilled His purpose for coming, which is "to seek and save the lost" (see [Luke 19:10](#)) and that fulfillment had satisfied His hunger. If Jesus had purpose food, so do you. What can you do that you can miss a meal? Is it painting a canvas or even a room? Counsel a friend? Travel on a plane? The answers to that question are important clues in your PurposeQuest. Even pursuing that answer can cause you to miss a meal, and that in itself is significant.

This whole scenario makes me think of Deuteronomy 8:3, which Jesus Himself quoted to the devil in Matthew 4: "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

This week, spend some time asking and answering that question about a missed meal and I am confident you will have not only food for thought but ultimately food for purpose. Have a great week!

553: Purpose Prayer

In our around 1981, I found my purpose, having just emerged from a poorly-conceived and failed business venture with some other men. One morning while asking, no begging, God to somehow save the business, I asked the question, "If you did not create me to start this business, what did you create me to do?" Mind you, I was not looking for information, I was venting to God, trying desperately to stave off embarrassment and failure.

To my surprise, I learned something that morning - I found my purpose! God answered my question and, while I did not realize what I had found at the time, I had a purpose that would continue to shape my life and the lives of many others. In 1991, I began to teach and write about purpose, and the rest is history, as

they say. But it's not all history for the best is yet to come, for there is more interest today in purpose than at any time since 1991. So let's talk about it a little more in today's Memo, shall we?

NUMBER ONE REASON

The main reason that you don't know your purpose is that you have not asked or *kept on* asking until you found or understood the answer. Purpose requires a different way of thinking, for you have been conditioned to think or ask about your career but purpose is the essence of who you are. It is not about money, benefits or promotions. It is the song that God has put in your heart to express in a way that only you can do. But I digress from what I want to focus on and that is asking and seeking God for your purpose.

I am always challenged by the call to prayer found in Proverbs 2:3-5:

indeed, if you *call out* for insight
and *cry aloud* for understanding,
and if you *look* for it as for silver
and *search* for it as for hidden treasure,
then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.

Notice the active, aggressive nature of prayer and seeking that Proverbs suggests. You must call, cry, look and search and then and only then will you find that for which you are looking.

PURPOSE PRAYER

If I guaranteed that there was buried treasure in your back yard, and you dug one hole and did not find it, would you give up? No! You would dig again and dig deeper until you found the promised loot. That is how it is with purpose. You have it, but it's often buried and hidden and you must search for it as for hidden treasure, not giving up until you have it. Why is that? I am not sure, but I do know that the more effort you put into finding it, the more valuable and precious it will be once you do.

Are you ready to do some praying and seeking, if not to find your purpose, then to understand how to fulfill it? I trust you are ready and willing to go for it, and not stop until you have reached your objective. You cannot be passive if you are going to pray purpose prayers that are effective, so I encourage you to step up your intensity and watch and see what God does. It was effective for me; I am sure that it will be for you, too. Have a great week!

[554: Purpose Thoughts](#)

The last two weeks we have looked at [Purpose Food](#) and [Purpose Prayer](#). It seems only fitting that I write one more entry to complete this trinity of purpose insights, so purpose thoughts seems just as good as any. Let me share some of my latest purpose thoughts with you in random order of importance.

THE THOUGHTS

1. Purpose is more relevant than when I began teaching it 20 years ago. Why? Because there are more opportunities available today than back then. When there are so many things you *can* do, you must ask the question what it is that you *should* do more than ever.
2. The number one reason why more people don't know their purpose is because they don't ask and keep on asking until they get an answer.

3. The number two reason why more people don't know their purpose is because they try to figure out too quickly how they can make money from it. Thoughts about career, salary and benefits hinder or destroy emerging purpose thoughts.
4. The number three reason why more people don't know their purpose is because they are afraid, not of failure, but of success! Meditate on that for a moment.
5. The younger generation is not as interested in purpose as I would have thought. They are interested in service and meaning, which emanate from purpose. But because they have seen purpose kidnapped by salary and career interests, they react to the concept of purpose for the wrong reasons.
6. Women continue to be the main consumers of my purpose message, probably because purpose was denied them for so long.
7. I still maintain that motherhood is a role and not a purpose - seldom is anyone's purpose defined in terms of serving or helping another person exclusively, unless that person has special needs due to a physical or mental challenge.
8. It is never too early or too late in life to pursue purpose.
9. When I reached my 50s, I thought my development was pretty much over, that I would do what I had been doing, hopefully a little better or for more money. To my surprise, my 50s were my greatest growth years.
10. I get more questions and sometimes opposition when I teach about doing what you love and what gives you joy than anything else I teach. That always surprises me.
11. When I started teaching purpose, I thought every church in the world (well, at least in the U.S.) would want their people to hear that message. They have not and pastors continue to misunderstand and even oppose the purpose message.
12. If I could help churches get more volunteers to usher, work in the nurse's office or sing in the choir, I would be a busy and probably wealthy man.

YOUR THOUGHTS

Those are my thoughts where purpose is concerned. What are yours? Feel free to send me your purpose thoughts this week and I will add them to mine and publish them next week. You can send them to me at johnstanko@gmail.com or post them to the site where this entry is [posted](#). Have a great week!

[555: Pharaoh's Help](#)

If you are like most people, you wonder how you will be able to pay your bills and pursue purpose, assuming they are mutually exclusive. Your first thought isn't, "How can I express my purpose?" but rather, "Who will pay me to fulfill my purpose?" In some sense you don't really believe that who you are and what you do is sufficient to support you; you need to live off someone else's purpose to make a living.

SLAVE MENTALITY

Now there is nothing wrong with working for a company; most people do. Yet this thinking can prevent you from becoming the company that supports others and yourself. It is like I said once in Kenya when asked by someone, "I am accountant. How can I get a job?" My response: "Go start your own bank." The person looked at me like I was crazy. Maybe I am.

At one time in their history, the Israelites worked for a Pharaoh. Initially, Pharaoh was benevolent, but eventually he turned cruel and oppressive. When Moses came to announce that Pharaoh was to let God's people go, Pharaoh basically responded, "No way!" Pharaoh needed them to build his monuments and do his dirty work, and he was not about to let the people go.

The real problem was that the Israelites began to see Pharaoh as their provider. They felt they needed Pharaoh or they could not make it in life. The truth was that the Israelites were an oppressed people whenever they worked for Pharaoh, even when Pharaoh treated them nicely.

When the Israelites did launch out on their own to the Promised Land, they got discouraged because the way was hard. They forgot how oppressive it was to work for Pharaoh, and this is what happened:

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!" (Numbers 11:4-6).

They actually thought that they ate for free, when the price was slavery and oppression. Their food wasn't free, but their memories were distorted and skewed because they had a slave mentality.

PHARAOH'S HELP

I hope the lesson for you is clear: You don't need Pharaoh's help to do God's will. In fact, Pharaoh's help may cause you to lose perspective and give the best years of your life to a cause or purpose far below what God has for you. If God has called you to work for someone, that's fine. If God calls you to work for yourself, God doesn't need Pharaoh to pay your bills and provide your benefits. He can do that all by Himself.

As you seek purpose, who is your help? Is it Pharaoh or the Lord? In whom and where have you put your hope and trust? Don't sell yourself for leeks and garlic of Egypt, when God can set a banquet before you. I urge you to look past Pharaoh to the One who can provide for your purpose and then allow Him to prove to