



Some Causes of Stress

There is such a thing as healthy stress: life lived in anticipation and hope that keeps us alert and focused. But healthy stress can easily become distress if we are not good stewards of life. What can lead us to distress?

- **Fear.** Fear is one of the most basic human emotions, and one that potentially can lead from healthy stress to distress.
- **Conflict.** Unhealthy conflict management practices often lead to distress.
- **Frustration.** Life doesn't go as expected; we face obstacles we didn't anticipate; the task is more difficult than imagined. Each of these open the door to distress.
- **Seeing Failure as Our Enemy.** Failure does not need to be our enemy. We can learn tremendous lessons and grow through failure in ways that ongoing success will not permit.
- **Worry Over the Future.** A close ally of fear, worry causes us to look at obstacles rather than solutions; we give in to a false anticipation that freezes us in regard to the future. Faith, on the other hand, frees us to trust in the Lord and move with wisdom and confidence.
- **Not Letting Go of the Past.** Living in past successes or failures robs us of the potential of today.

- **Unforgiving Spirit.** An unforgiving spirit can lead to envy, jealousy, anger, bitterness, and depression—all triggers for distress.
- **Poor Time Management.** We can bring distress upon ourselves by not being good stewards of our time: scheduling too many activities; the inability to say no; not setting aside time for Sabbath and physical and emotional renewal.
- **Satan's Attacks.** Satan's tactics are cunning and his tools are too numerous to list. When we give in to the temptations of Satan, we walk through doors that inevitably lead to distress.

We probably all know these things, but may not always treat them as unhealthy and deal with them effectively. In the next issue we will identify ways to deal with stress in healthy and healing ways.



Unless otherwise noted, SHAPE articles are written by Paul Dreger. He has served the Church of God for thirty-nine years as pastor, area administrator in Tennessee, and currently national director of SHAPE (Sustaining Health and Pastoral Excellence).

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SHAPE on the Go

August

17 W. Pennsylvania Leader Training

The fall schedule will potentially be very full. Let Paul know soon if you desire to plan a fall activity.

Submissions

E-mail SHAPE-related articles and relevant photos to Paul at PDreger@chog.org to be considered for SHAPE newsletter. Submission implies consent for publication.



CHURCH OF GOD
MINISTRIES

A few weeks past I had the privilege of being in a meeting with renowned church leader Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community Church. I was with a group of twenty-two mega-church pastors who invited Bill to spend a day informally dialoguing about leadership. The morning group time focused upon best practices while the afternoon was on how a leader manages his/her own life for success.

I was intrigued when Bill introduced the dual concepts of “skimming and speeding.” As with many high-capacity leaders, there are always more things to do and more opportunities beckoning than any balanced lifestyle can sustain. This is where skimming and speeding are important. **When leaders speed—maintain an unhealthy, unsustainable pace—they skim over and ignore important life issues.** Burnout or failure usually ensue. Burnout occurs when personal output outweighs rest, renewal, and downtime. Failure often follows because the toasty leader can easily give into temptation when in such a vulnerable state.

My good friends Mark Buckley of Living Streams Church and Dan Steffen of Pure Heart Christian Fellowship recently spoke on this issue. The following is an outline of key points on skimming and speeding that I summarized from that meeting.

1. **Why do we speed?** On a deeper level than there is just so much to do, we often speed because of pride, insecurity, and poor boundaries, needing appreciation or feeling guilty when we relax.
2. **What are indicators of speeding and also skimming?**

- a. **Avoiding** relationships, losing contact with friends and family, too busy to spend routine quality time with spouse, children and extended family, being superficial. Do others complain about not seeing you enough?
- b. **Overindulging:** food, sports, alcohol, spending, self-medicating, mind numbing repetitive behaviors (TV), increased porn attraction, over attention to sex, oversleeping, withdrawing.
- c. **Not being emotionally appropriate.** Not mourning a loss, excessive worrying, often angry, impatient, or irritable. Not listening, easily bored, raging on the inside, self-pity.
- d. **Blaming and blame shifting.** Mad at other drivers, defensive with others, “I can’t do any different,” “it’s all their fault.”
- e. **Spiritual decline.** Not reading the Bible, diminished prayer life, less conscious contact with God, blaming God.

3. What can we do to change?

- a. **Recognition** (Awareness) is always the first step. We can’t fix something we don’t fully recognize in ourselves. Ask others what they see. Do your family, and those who know you best, think you are skimming and speeding?

- b. Are you **owning the problem?** Are you blaming the problem on your job or others? You won’t change until you understand and accept that it is *you* that needs to change, not the job or anyone else.
- c. **Look at the deeper issues—the secondary payoffs.** We overwork and over-function because of deeper unresolved heart issues. Is it your pride that keeps you from change? Do you need to learn to say No and overcome people-pleasing in your life? Does speeding gain attention, admiration, or praise from others?
- d. **Learn new skills.** Schedule management and priority planning are two essentials for dealing with multiple demands and busyness. There is always more to do than can be done. Learn how to sift, prioritize, schedule, and delegate.
- e. **Accountability** always helps. Asking someone to pray with you and for you helps greatly. Especially when coupled with honest ongoing transparency. Risk inviting a trusted other to walk with you in embracing your needed change.

It is necessary for all of us to learn a sustainable pace. One wherein we can lay down our lives for a worthy cause in a healthy way. May we all apprehend that for which we were apprehended. (Philippians 3:12)

I love Yosemite National Park. It contains some of the most spectacular views I have ever seen. I first traveled there in my mid-fifties, already at a time when I was physically unable to do some of the things I would love to have done there, yet still young enough to experience many adventures. I have been there three times now. Someday I want to go back and spend a week and hike to places I have not yet seen. But for now I celebrate the times I have been able to visit on short excursions.

My most recent trip was in March of 2015. During this visit I hoped to see snow cover the valley and surrounding mountain tops. But it was 65 degrees and the only snow I saw was a little on a mountain beyond Half Dome. It was a beautiful day and I was able to view magnificent sights, took lots of pictures, and even spent time with a small herd of deer near the road. I hoped to see a bear, but no luck there. But something else I did see were signs reading, “Controlled burn today: do not report.” All day I waited to see the controlled burn. But it was not until I was leaving the park that signs became more ominous: “Controlled burn ahead.” “Smoke on roadway.”

Okay. I can handle a little smoke. Eventually I came to a stop sign held by a park ranger and waited to be waved through. Well, I thought, there must be enough smoke to warrant one-lane traffic in the burn area. Being the first in line at the stop sign, I was able to sit and talk to the ranger for a few minutes. It seems the burns take place occasionally to clear out over-forested areas where underbrush is especially susceptible to fires that may threaten communities like nearby

Wawona. Soon the signal was given for us to proceed and I led the parade of cars that had come behind me by that time. We passed ranger trucks, then fire trucks and fire fighters there to control the fire—but no smoke, until about a quarter mile up the road and around a curve, when suddenly smoke swallowed the entire landscape with a fierceness I had never experienced. Not expecting such an encounter, my windows were down and soon the interior of the car was filling with thick, gray smoke. I began to cough. Quickly I rolled up the windows and came to a dead stop.

I could see nothing. Barely seeing the front of the car, there was nothing beyond. Glancing in the rearview mirror I was happy to see the SUV behind me come to a stop a few feet away.

How long did I sit? Ten seconds? Twenty seconds? More? What was coming up? Another curve? Which way? Would I go off the side of the road? Would I run right into the fire itself? What actually lay ahead? How many were coming behind me? If I led them astray would they follow right along?

Leadership

Sometimes leadership is routine and we know to handle situations as they arise: building an effective team, making critical decisions, dealing with conflict, managing change well, facing the unexpected with confidence. We know the basics.

But what happens when the smoke rolls in and we have no clue what is ahead? When that happens, what do we do? Here are some things I learned as I sat there on the highway in Yosemite National Park, engulfed in smoke:

- Remain calm; don't panic. Stopping too abruptly or accelerating through in blindness can be devastating, as I was to learn. God knows where you are and what is next and what you need to do, even when you don't.
- Sometimes you are the only one who can make a decision. I wish someone would have been there with me in the car to help, but I was alone. There are times when we must make that singular decision. Remember that God is there with you and knows the situation. Be courageous, but don't be foolish.
- Know that you are not alone. While others wait for you to make a decision, know that they may become impatient (no one honked their horns that I could tell!) and may not understand your hesitation. But you must remember that your decision will affect them, and you must resist being bullied into making a decision that may do more harm than good. Make your choices with more than yourself in mind. And when you can, involve others in the decision.
- Wait on the Lord to show you a way. When in doubt, don't. But when the way becomes clear, do not hesitate to make the decision to move. Fear is an enemy we must constantly fight. Caution, courage, and wisdom, when we exercise faith in the Lord, become our greatest allies.

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- When you know the way, even though you can't see the end, proceed at the proper pace until the way becomes clear and you can regain your forward momentum. Pray for wisdom as how to proceed.

So, how was I to proceed? I knew I couldn't stay there until the burn was over. Others were waiting and I had a meeting to attend in a few hours! Peering through the smoke I looked to the only place I believed could provide me guidance: the line at the side of the roadway (you know, for Christian leaders, that is the wisdom and knowledge and will of God). After a few moments of peering intently I saw to the left front of the car a small strip of white, perhaps no more than a foot or two long. With that as my

guide I cautiously inched forward: one mile-per-hour, three miles-per-hour. In a matter of seconds I encountered a firefighter in full gear standing on the line I was following. If I had proceeded recklessly through the smoke I surely would have hit him! But continuing to follow the slice of line I could see I slowly began to emerge from the smoke and discovered more and more persons in full firefighting gear standing in the roadway and watching the advance of the fire. In ten or fifteen seconds I was out of the smoke and shortly back on my way to the south entrance of the park.

In the days that have followed, scriptures that I have known for years have taken on new meaning:

*They that wait on the Lord...
...by his light I walked through the
darkness...*

*Even the darkness will not be dark
to you...
Even in darkness light dawns for the
upright...
Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and don't lean on your own
understanding...*

Leadership is not always easy. No matter how uncertain the future looks, wait on the Lord. To sit with no vision for the future is to entertain death. To move forward without Divine guidance can also spell disaster. Yes,

They that wait on the Lord...

You have hope. You have a future. With God's guidance and strength, lead.

God knows the way forward. Trust him.

Here and There: SHAPE Happenings

- Leader training for Cohort Three in W. PA continues in anticipation of a fall launch. New cluster leaders for Cohort Three are: Curtis Clark, Doug Crump, Bill Hunley, and Lee Rupert. SHAPE W. PA is under the leadership of Regional Director Rebecca New-Edson and Regional Coordinator John Milliron.
- SHAPE Barbados will officially begin this fall with training of leaders and development of the leadership team.
- Paul will be at the Annual Retreat in E. PA to help re-ignite SHAPE in the E. States. Conversation is taking place with three other regions for launch of SHAPE in the coming months.
- **Existing Regions: Please let Paul know of your plans for future development as soon as possible.**

Pastor Kevin Clouse of Cushing, OK, recommends the following book for your consideration:

Sifted: Pursuing Growth through Trials, Challenges, and Disappointments

by Wayne Cordeiro and Francis Chan.
Thank you, Kevin, for this contribution.

