

■ by Chad Saxton and Kelly Jo Cox

What to Do When You're Stuck

■ Chad

Thinking back over 33 years in ministry, I realized I have been stuck many times. I thought of relationships that were stuck or broken, times when I was stuck in ministry and wondered if I should be doing this, times when I was stuck spiritually. Stuck can be a frustrating, depressing and lonely place, but it doesn't have to be.

As these memories flooded back, I was reminded that all the "stuck times" produced great times of growth. I came out of being stuck changed, stronger and compelled to live more like God had created me to live.

When I find myself stuck, I spend a lot of time in self-reflection, looking at all the possible solutions. I pray and ask for God's wisdom and discernment. Conversations with my wife help me process and think through situations. I seek wise counsel from a friend or someone I know who has gone through a similar situation. Then it comes down to deciding on a plan of action and making it happen.

A few years ago, I was serving at a ministry I loved. I loved the setting, the relationships, the board I served with and the people I ministered to. I knew I was called to that ministry. I also knew I had been called to lead my family, which at the time consisted of my wife and two children with special needs. Both took more time and energy than I had. I was stuck. If I worked too long, I felt I cheated my family. If I was at home too much, I felt like I cheated my ministry. I had many discussions with my wife and board about how we could make changes to give me the ability to not cheat the other. I spent lots of time in prayer asking God what His plan was. I sought friends in ministry that I knew had also gone through similar situations.

After months of being stuck and not knowing what to do, I took a two-day silence and solitude retreat. I was able to put everything aside and focus on what God had called me to do and the mission He had given me. During this retreat, I came to

a decision that I could not be the husband and father God had called me to be and continue to serve in this ministry. It was the hardest decision I have ever made. Soon after, I had an opportunity to work in a ministry that needed my skills and talents and would allow me to serve my family equally. Eight years have passed, and I still miss that ministry, but I don't regret for a minute the decision I made to serve my family.

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Being stuck is a good thing. Many times, it is God's way of saying stop, slow down, come to Me and let's work through this together.



Chad has served in three different Michigan camps over the last 33 years. He has been involved in all aspects of camping ministry. He and his wife, Michella, have two adult daughters and a teenage son. Their dream is to be full-time RVers and travel to help camps and ministries in need.

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Two leaders share lessons learned during various trials

■ Kelly Jo

I've experienced being or feeling "stuck" in many areas of my life: work, friendships, church life, relationships and my relationship with God. There are "small stuck" times, and then there are "big stuck" times.

Because I'm well versed in the "stuck-ness" feeling, I have a mental list of things I like to do when I run into a "small stuck" problem:

- Write down my thoughts (journal or create a list of pros/cons).
- Do something fun! I choose something that will help me take my mind off the problem for a little bit.
- Go on an adventure! Hike, bike or take a walk somewhere new.
- Talk to a trusted mentor and ask for their take on the situation.
- Plan a weekend getaway and find a change of scenery.
- Go to a place I've encountered God before. Some of mine include visiting a local Monastery where I can book a room and stay overnight, walking along the beach at Cannon Beach, Oregon, winding my way down to the canoe docks at my camp.
- Sit by a big body of water, such as the ocean, a lake, a river — any kind of water will do. This never ceases to make me feel small and makes me in awe of the big God I serve.

For those "small stuck" times, practicing one or more of these helped me take my mind off the problem, clear my head and find a new way to approach things.

Then there are "big stuck" times. One example, a personal favorite, is from 1 Kings 19. Setting the scene: Elijah runs for his life, has a breakdown, falls asleep, gets fed by an angel, sleeps more, travels for 40 days, and then goes into a cave.

Inside the cave, God tells Elijah to "go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by" (v 11). There at the edge of the mountain, Elijah waits to hear, see and experience the presence of the Lord pass by. I can imagine Elijah is ready for God to do something big by this time, save him, fix all the issues and get him out of this mess.

But God doesn't do the expected. The Scriptures say a "great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks ... but the Lord was not in the wind." An earthquake and a fire came, but the Lord was not in those either. "And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out."

A gentle whisper is probably not what Elijah expected — or what he wanted, especially after all the things he just experienced. Sometimes being stuck makes me feel a little bit like Elijah — asking God to rescue me in a big wind, earthquake, fire sort of way. When, instead, God comes in a gentle whisper.

Like Elijah, I've experienced the pattern of hitting the same wall, requiring God to intervene. When I keep hitting the same wall, I realize God can use it to get my attention. Isn't He always trying to get our attention?

Whether your "stuck" is practical or spiritual, God is in both areas. When I am fixated on getting "un-stuck," I am so hyper-focused that I won't focus on anything else. But that also means I can tune out God's whisper, or what could be the direction or answer I need. ■

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—Kelly Jo Cox

Kelly Jo Cox runs marketing and development at Trout Creek Bible Camp (Corbett, Oregon) while co-managing all summer staff during camp. She has a master's degree in counseling, and her favorite camp activity is zip-line. Some of her unique talents include creating awesome Spotify playlists for every possible occasion and being cool enough to hang out with teenagers.

