



Nothing Left But the Center Stripe

by Phil Ware

Big bright orange signs were on each side of the road on our divided street. The sign on the right side said, "Left Lane Closed Ahead." The sign on the left side said, "Right Lane Closed Ahead." "Hmmm," I thought to myself, "That leaves nothing but the center stripe; wonder where I'm supposed to drive?"

Then I got to thinking in that warped way that I often do, and it occurred to me that I have found myself in several life situations that looked very similar. No option on the right. No option on the left. And even the option straight ahead seems awfully tenuous and narrow, without much room to navigate.

The term for this kind of situational thinking is "constriction." Constriction happens when we feel like our options are reduced to one or two bad possibilities. It's either "this" or "that," and "this" is horrible while "that" is disastrous. As they say in my neck of the woods, "stuck between a rock and a hard place." You're stuck with nothing left but the center stripe!

As a friend, counselor, and minister dealing with someone who is hung on constricted thinking, I use several strategies to help them gather their senses, avoid making a hasty decision in panic, and prevent them from doing something rash. I try to use these same strategies when I find myself in the same boat.

The first strategy is **DELAY**. Keep from making a rash move by waiting. As a Christian, my waiting is not inaction; it is waiting on the Lord ([Isaiah 40:28-31](#)). It is time for prayer and for seeking God's will in Scripture. Often I cannot see the real situation and all the other possible options because I'm so caught up in the miseries of the moment. In my driving situation where it appeared both lanes were going to be closing down, I reduced my speed, drove on carefully, and when I reached the next set of signs, I realized that it was just the left lane that was going to be closed; the Velcro strip had just come off the first sign and so it gave the wrong information. So often

in the haste of the moment, we don't have all the facts or have misperceived the situation. A prayerful delay for a short time allows us to refocus and opens our heart so God can show us another way.

A second strategy for constrictive thinking is **DISTRIBUTE**. So often, strong people, Christian people, are the ones that help others and have great difficulty when they have very challenging problems because they do not know how to ask for help. Some pious sounding pride keeps them from sharing their problems with others because they consider themselves the helper and not the person needing help. God gave ALL of us a Christian family for support. Sooner or later, we're all going to face problems too big for us to handle alone. Seeking the prayer, support, and accountability of other Christians helps us distribute the problem, reducing the sense of load we have to carry by ourselves and involving others in helping us find other options and solutions to our situation. (This includes consulting a Christian counselor if we can't get the corner turned on our situation quickly!)

Another strategy is **DELIGHT**. Finding something humorous in our situation and laughing at the humorous side of what is going on can be a helpful pause in our crisis and allows us to gather our senses. Doing something we nearly always have fun doing can refresh us and break the logjam in our thinking. Spending time in refreshing worship or going with others on a spiritual retreat can be ways to open the doorway to spiritual delight and restore our energy and sense of balance. Simply loosening our mental grip on a difficult situation and letting God refresh us with his grace can often help us see things in a different light and find a solution that had remained hidden to us.

No matter which strategy we try, an essential part of each of them is continuing to DO what is RIGHT. When no way seems clear and all our choices seem hopeless, sometimes we have to keep trudging on, doing what we know is the right thing even when we don't feel like it. Engaging the other strategies become self-defeating if we don't follow through with what we need to do — both our daily responsibilities as a person and our Christian responsibilities as a child of God.

Do these strategies work in every situation? Yes, to a certain extent. However, life has some built-in very hard realities that none of us is going to escape and some of these can cascade into problems that tries to destroy us. So if you cannot execute these strategies on your own, or if you still feel overwhelmed after trying them, PLEASE see a minister, counselor, or friend and let that person know you urgently need help. Satan tries to isolate us from other Christians and from Christian help when he wants to destroy us whether by direct attack, disease, or death (see [Mark 5](#) for three groups of people who had come to the end their options and how Jesus intervened to bring help). Don't let the evil one do that with you; if you are going under, get help. If you have a friend going under, please get them help. While it may seem there is nothing but the center stripe open ahead, God wants to help us find the path that brings us hope, healing, holiness, and heaven. Don't quit looking until you find it!