

# God's Cure for Stage Fright:

## How to Sing, Preach, Teach or Give a Speech

### Without Nervousness

Glen's pastor was so impressed with something Glen said to him that he asked Glen to share it with the whole congregation. Glen had done some public speaking and didn't think he'd be nervous. He was wrong.

Glen belongs to an enormous church. As he gazed at the church's five thousand seats, television cameras, and bright lights, his palms started to sweat, and his legs felt like cooked spaghetti. Try as he might, he couldn't relax. Suddenly, just seconds before he was called upon, Glen's wife turned to him and asked, **"Honey, are you doing this for yourself or for these people?"**

Glen recalls, "When she asked me that question, it was like a pin bursting a bubble. All of a sudden, I didn't care about how I looked, how my words would come out, or what people thought of me. All I could think of was that I owed them more than someone up there who just cared about himself. When I got up to speak, I was free from fear. I actually had fun. Afterward, it was a joy to hear several people say that what I shared was exactly what they needed."

Glen learned a valuable lesson that all of us can learn. By changing the goal of our hearts, we can be completely free from stage fright.

Nervousness can diminish or even destroy our effectiveness. When I am plagued by stage fright, several nasty symptoms arise:

- 1) Sometimes my mind goes blank. A roomful of people stare at me expectantly, waiting to hear something profound, but I can hardly remember my name.
- 2) I talk too fast. Pausing allows people time to let things soak in, but I'm afraid to pause--lest people use that moment to conclude that the speaker is an idiot.
- 3) I am too flustered to think clearly. Regardless of how organized my notes might be, my presentation is disorganized. I often cover points in the wrong order or leave them out altogether.
- 4) My jokes aren't funny. Because my timing is shot to pieces, all attempts at humor fall flat. If people laugh at all, it's only because they feel sorry for me.

**There are people  
out there!!**



- 5) I fail to establish a rapport with my audience.

These nervous symptoms can short-circuit the communication process so that very little penetrates the minds and hearts of the listeners. **Fortunately, if we are willing to face up to the true cause of our nervousness, God has a cure.**

## Who Are We Trying to Impress?

Glen's experience illustrates a profound truth: **Nervousness is caused by having the wrong goal.** I must ask myself, "**Why** do I get nervous?" I am either seeking to impress others or trying to avoid embarrassment--two sides of the same selfish coin. In both cases it's all about me. I am not focusing on the interests of my audience; I am focusing on my **own** interests. I'm not trying to advance **God's** Kingdom; I'm trying to advance **my** kingdom.



When I'm nervous, what is it that I fear? I'm afraid I'll say or do something stupid. I seek to avoid being humiliated--especially in front of large numbers of people. Tape recorders and video cameras make me even more nervous because then I can make a fool of myself and have the moment immortalized on tape.

The cure? There's only one--I must change my goal. No longer can I seek to impress people or to avoid humiliation. I must seek to benefit those in the audience.

God is calling us to purity of heart, purity of motive. A youth minister recently told me that he never gets nervous when he talks to his youth group but that he always gets nervous when he talks to their parents. "Now I realize why," he said. "I'm trying to impress the parents; I'm trying to help the kids."

John Powell, a Jesuit priest, shares about being gripped by nervousness in the following testimony:

Along with two others from my order, I was chosen to give a presentation at several universities in the Midwest. Our little traveling trio made big waves wherever we went. Finally we came back to speak at Loyola University, where I teach. There in the audience were 115 Jesuits: the men I live with, eat with, teach with. They were my brothers and I wanted to WOW them.

*You've never heard me speak, I thought, and I'm really good, and you don't know it...tonight you're going to know it.* But I was very nervous. And so I said to God, "God, would you relax me? Just put your hands over my heart or something." And nothing happened.

I said, "Oh come on, God, I want to give a good talk tonight, and if I'm nervous, I won't." Then I heard the words that, among other peak experiences with God, have transformed me:

*You are getting ready to give a performance, and I don't want a performance. I want an act of love. You are going to perform for your brothers so they will know how good you are. They don't need to know how good you are. I don't want a performance; I want an act of love.*

I looked out again. When you're self-conscious, you're using everybody for a mirror. *How am I going over, huh? What do you think? What do you think of me?*

Then there's that wonderful moment of love when you begin to look out again at those same people and say, *What do you want? What do*

*you need? Where do you hurt? Can I help you?*

I looked out at my brothers a second time after I heard what I feel sure was the voice of God. I looked at four of our priests who were having a terrible struggle with alcoholism. One of them, poor man, was very sick. All four were going through a terrible trial.

Then there were those who had been forced to retire from teaching due to their age. They felt like they were on the shelf, like nobody cared about them. They didn't say smart things anymore or make bright moves--nobody needed them. I looked out at their faces for a long time.

Then I looked out at those who were physically sick, for whom every step was painful, whose heads ached, whose eyes burned. I looked out at those who were unsuccessful in everything they do. Their students don't like them; their classes are always unsuccessful. I looked at them for a long time and I kept thinking: *And I wanted to WOW you. I wanted to impress you with how good I am. I wanted you to admire me. Oh, you don't need me for that. You need me to love you.*

As I looked out at my brothers, all the nervousness disappeared, and I loved them.

I realized in that moment how cluttered with performances my life has been. I have been a performer. I have been listening for applause after every performance. And in that moment I heard God say to me, **Not another performance, but an act of love.**

God had an act of love in mind when He spoke to Moses about leading two million Hebrews out of Egyptian slavery, but Moses responded, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent,...send, I pray, some other person" (Exodus 4:10,13 RSV). Obviously, something was wrong with Moses' response, because the next verse says, "Then God's anger was kindled against Moses."

God wanted to use Moses to set two million people free, but Moses wasn't thinking about two million people. Moses was thinking about one person. His focus was riveted on himself. Pride is preoccupation with self—regardless of what form it takes. God wanted Moses to humble himself by focusing on those he was sent to help.

Unlike Moses in Exodus 4, the Apostle Paul turned his public speaking opportunities into acts of love by humbling himself. "You yourselves know how I lived among you...serving the Lord with all humility (Acts 20:18-19 RSV). How was Paul's humility expressed? Did it affect his public speaking?

Paul says in verse 20: **"I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable."**

Shrinking back is a form of self-protection--like a turtle pulling back into its shell. **Paul did not shrink back, because he wasn't thinking about himself. He was thinking about how to profit his listeners.** His humility gave birth to boldness.

Paul not only faced the more common fears of public speakers--people falling asleep, rolling their eyes, or walking out--he also withstood beatings, stonings, and imprisonment. However, because he adopted the right goal, Paul didn't shrink back. He lived not for himself, but to advance God's Kingdom by benefiting others.

God began teaching me this principle about twenty years ago. Here is the gist of what He taught me:

**Make love your goal. Concentrate on the individuals with needs. Concentrate on**

**how you can help them, on how you can love them best. In this way you will be pleasing in My sight.**

It's amazing! When I correct my goal, **the nervousness always disappears.** There have been no exceptions. Why? Because unlike taking three deep breaths, listening to tapes of ocean noises, or other methods to reduce nervousness, this method puts the ax to the root of the problem. **Because nervousness is caused by having the wrong goal, we must change our goal in order to cure it.** Nervousness disappears when we say in our hearts: "Lord, I'm not here to impress them; I'm here to bless them."

--Jamie Lash

(Jamie Lash is Director of Student Development at Dallas Baptist University and co-author of the best-selling book "This Was Your Life!" For other helpful resources, visit his website: [www.LifeGivingWords.com](http://www.LifeGivingWords.com))