

Confronting Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

How do Christians effectively confront the crises of life?

English Definition

The noun “crisis” [plural: crises] is variously defined as, (1) a stage in a sequence of events at which the trend of all future events, especially for better or for worse, is determined; turning point; (2) a condition of instability or danger, as in social, economic, political, or international affairs, leading to a decisive change; (3) a dramatic emotional or circumstantial upheaval in a person's life; (4) Medicine/Medical: (a) the point in the course of a serious disease at which a decisive change occurs, leading either to recovery or to death; (b) the change itself; (5) the point in a play or story at which hostile elements are most tensely opposed to each other” (dictionary.com).

Greek Definition

Sometimes knowing the derivation of a word is helpful. The English word “crisis” can be traced back through the late Middle English to Latin and finally, to ancient Greek. The Greek word *krisis*, derived from *krinō* (to judge, decide), is defined as “a decision, judgment.” It may refer to the legal process of judgment, such as the activity of God who stands in judgment upon all mankind (both in the past, present and future), the judgment of a human court, such as the Sanhedrin/Jewish Council, or personal decisions regarding right and wrong. In times of crisis, when faced with making a decision, we must choose between two or more options. In physical journeys, do we continue going forward, or turn around? Do we go straight ahead, or turn aside to the left or the right?

- The Greek word *krisis*, derived from *krinō* [to judge, decide], refers to “a decision, judgment” [Thomas 2920].
- BDAG define it as a “(1) **legal process of judgment**, *judging, judgment*; (a) of the activity of God or the Messiah as judge, especially on the Last Day; (b) of the judgment of one person upon or against another, in the nature of an evaluation; (2) **a board of judges, court**, specifically *a local court*; (3) **administration of what is right and fair**, right in the sense of *justice/righteousness*.”

Summary

On a recent trip, Sheryl and I stopped in Meridian, Mississippi. We spent the night at the Country Inn, located on Bonita Lakes Drive, across from Bonita Lakes Mall. I thought, “Tomorrow morning, I’m going

to run around the lake.” Awaking at 5:30 a.m. on Saturday, I donned my running attire, and took off in the wrong direction, and continued 3 km into the country, looking for the lake, which never appeared. Finally, I stopped at the top of a long and steep hill, saying, “This isn’t right.” So I turned around and headed back. The good thing about running, is that it really doesn’t matter where you run, as long as you can get back to where you started. When I made it back to the motel, the sun was up, the fog had lifted, and I could now clearly see that Bonita Lake was just over the hill, ½ km east of the motel, in the opposite direction from which I had run.

Spiritually speaking, we often face similar situations. We may be lost, headed in the wrong direction, etc. Do we continue pursuing our present path, or do we stop, turn around, and go in the opposite direction? If we are striving to do right, will we continue going forward, drawing nearer to God, or will we be guilty of backsliding, and turn away from God?

A TURNING POINT

Negatively

In the definition of “crisis” provided above, one of the spiritually significant meanings is “a turning point.” Consider the negative example of the naïve young man, described by Solomon, who foolishly pursued an illicit affair: “Passing through the street near her corner; and he takes the way to her house, in the twilight, in the evening, In the middle of the night and in the darkness...” (Prov. 7:1-27).

Positively

Reflect upon the positive example of the prodigal son, described by Jesus, who after committing a succession of bad choices, came to his senses and decided to return to his father (Luke 15:11-32).

A CONDITION OF INSTABILITY

Internal

Again, in the aforementioned definition, another spiritually significant meaning of “crisis” is “a condition of instability.” We overcome internal instability by taking advantage of the gifts Christ has given that help us grow and become more spiritually mature (Eph. 4:7-16).

External

We overcome external instability by trusting in the Lord (Psa. 46:1-11).

REFLECTING UPON AN EXAMPLE

Several years ago, the family of Melissa Anderson suffered a grievous loss. Her twin sister, Kimberly Peck, passed away after a courageous battle with cancer. She was only 27 years old. As Sherelyn and I attended the family visitation at the Navarre Funeral Home in Baytown, TX. I was amazed at the calm composure that the family manifested as they spoke with 100s of friends, family and brethren who came to offer their condolences. Yesterday, as we were travelling home, I called Melissa and asked if she would be willing to write a few lines, expressing how she and her family were able to face this ordeal. Here is what she said:

How We Faced a Major Crisis:

I believe it was a tremendous help being trained in the Word and being raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It gave us the knowledge and tools to be prepared to face the trials and tribulations to come (Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:15). Having that upbringing allowed us to each be rooted and grounded in the Word of God and also lean on each other (Col. 2:7).

It was a great deal of comfort to be able to trust in the Lord and His plans, knowing that He cares for us and no matter what the answer may be, all things work together for good (Prov. 3:5-6; Jer. 29:11; Rom. 8:28). Keeping a positive attitude and counting our blessings was necessary to be able to go to God in prayer, giving everything to Him *with* thanksgiving (Phil. 4:6-7). Being able to glory in tribulations and allowing others to see the hope and peace within us gives us a sense of purpose (Rom. 5:3).

We faced our trials, knowing that we could draw strength from Christ (Phil. 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:9). We held fast to our faith, knowing that He is faithful (Heb. 10:23). Watching someone who was prepared and ready to go made the acceptance of the circumstances much more bearable (Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Tim. 4:7). We mourn with hope (1 Thess. 4:13). We were surrounded by those of like faith to weep with us, rejoice with us and bear our burdens (Rom. 12:15; Gal. 6:2). We have comfort for our future (1 Thess. 4:16-17; Rev. 21:4).

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

How should believers react when faced with either physical or spiritual crises? We should rise to the challenge by being calm, consistent, thoughtful, and prayerful.

Calmly

Be calm. In Psalm 4, entitled an evening prayer of trust in God, David praised God for having relieved him in his distress. Offering counsel to his readers, the Psalmist said, "Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still" (v. 4). Before Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind to heaven, the sons of the prophets confronted Elisha, saying, "Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?" Each time this occurred, Elisha responded, "Yes, I know; be still" (2 Kings 2:1-6, esp. vv. 3 and 5). In contrast with the frenzied rituals of paganism, made all the more frantic because of

the muteness of idols (1 Kings 18:25-29), the Lord God securely sits upon His heavenly throne, powerfully and perpetually present, accomplishing His eternal purpose in the face of all human and satanic opposition (Psa. 2:1-6). Therefore, let all the earth be silent before Him (Hab. 2:18-20).

Consistently

Be consistent. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Spiritual leaders manifest similar stability. Therefore, may we all endeavor to be constant, dependable, reliable (Heb. 13:7-9). Christ's death, burial and resurrection constitute the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-11), demonstrating God's saving power, providing the basis of our hope for the future, and compelling us to steadfast devotion (1 Cor. 15:50-58). Vacillation has no place among the faithful; rather, we live with cheerful purpose, trusting in the promises of God (2 Cor. 1:15-22).

Thoughtfully

Be thoughtful. In times of crisis, we should attempt to quiet "the lizard brain." This concept has been popularized by Seth Godin, an American author, entrepreneur, marketer, and public speaker. The lizard brain is that small voice in your head that resists your dreams, holding you back, and causing you to fail. Lizards only seek survival, desiring the warmth of the sun and living fearfully of others. They don't take chances. They only want to eat and be safe. The lizard brain will fight (to the death) if it has to, but would rather run away.

In a blog post entitled, "Quieting the lizard brain," Godin says, "How can I explain the never-ending irrationality of human behavior? We say we want one thing, then we do another. We say we want to be successful but we sabotage the job interview. We say we want a product to come to market, but we sandbag the shipping schedule. We say we want to be thin but we eat too much. We say we want to be smart but we skip class or don't read that book the boss lent us. The contradictions never end. When someone shows up and acts without contradiction, we're amazed. When an athlete just does the sport, or when a writer just writes the words, we can't help but watch, astonished at the purity of their actions. Why is it so difficult to do what we say we're going to do? The lizard brain" (http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2010/01/quieting-the-lizard-brain.html).

Spiritual parallels abound: Paul communicates a similar concept in describing the conflict between the flesh and the spirit (Rom. 7:14-25). Yet, victory over the flesh is made possible through Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:1-8). Over and over, God says, "Do not fear!" When Israel departed from Egypt, and was seemingly trapped between the advancing army of Pharaoh and the waters of the Red Sea, God said, "Do not fear" (Exod. 14:13-14). After having suffered an initial setback, Joshua was told to courageously attack the city of Ai (Josh. 8:1-2). Foreshadowing the persecution that must inevitably befall Christians, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Do not fear" (Matt. 10:24-31; Rev. 2:9-11).

Prayerfully

Be prayerful. We should pray at all times (1 Thess. 5:16-18), but especially when problems are too big for us to handle alone (1 Pet. 5:6-7). When confronted by the Assyrian army, and the insulting ultimatum of Rabshakeh, personal representative of Sennacherib king of Assyria, Hezekiah entered the house of the Lord and prayed, laying his problem and peril out before the Lord (2 Kings 19:14-19). God marvelously answered. Remember that God is our helper. In the words of the Psalmist, "I will not be afraid, what can man do to me?" (Psa. 56:1-13; Heb. 13:5-6).

CONCLUSION

Remembering that a crisis represents both a turning point, and a condition of instability, let us turn back to God and seek the stability that He affords through His word. Reflecting upon examples from the Bible, and also from our own circles of association, let us rise to the challenge, meeting crises in a calm, consistent, thoughtful, and prayerful manner.