

Surviving Major Life Crisis

10 insights to guide you through stressful events with greater strength
by Dwight Bain

Life is harder than ever it seems, yet not everyone seems to be completely overwhelmed because of it. Why do some people face major life transitions like financial stress, death, divorce, health problems, job loss, or business problems with a hopeful attitude of rebuilding and recovery while others just want to hide in fear? Everyone will face times of major life crisis, but not everyone will know how to respond to move beyond the challenge today to build confidence tomorrow. Here are ten things about crisis that will help guide you through the process of managing stressful situations to come out stronger on the other side.

1) Crisis events are more common than you think

Every time you watch the evening news you are hearing about someone in crisis, but it doesn't really affect you as much because you probably don't know them. Accidents, fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, terrorist attacks, bank robberies, child abuse, sex scandals, corporate fraud, crime, corporate downsizing and on and on the list goes. It's like the only thing you ever hear about on the news is the bad news! Thankfully, these terrible events don't happen to all of us at the same time, which is why some people can hear about it and not really be affected. Their life is insulated from crisis at that moment, so they don't really think about it much; however, stressful events happen all the time and at some point will affect you as well. If your life is going well, be grateful as you count your blessings. If it's falling apart, know that it's part of life and won't go on forever, so hang on as you keep reading about more ways to deal with life crisis.

2) Crisis affects people of all ages and stages of life

There is an old saying that cancer doesn't care where you live, which is another way of saying that disease affects the rich and poor, young and old. Crisis is like that too because it's a common part of every stage of life, but impacts us differently at each stage. Not having a date for the prom can feel like a crisis to a high school student, while being fired from a job may seem like the end of the world to a man in the middle years of life. The level of stress and trauma is based on a lot of factors, including age, gender, personality, educational level, family connection, network of friends, emotional health, physical energy and spiritual maturity. The more life experiences you have gone through, the more likely you will view a major event with a hopeful perspective about the outcome instead of gloom and doom. Life is about growing and crisis events can often force us to change faster than we wanted to, yet with a positive end result if we learn to see it as a predictable part of the lifecycle. This is the process of moving from 'Why me?' to 'why not me?' and is a sign that you are growing beyond the simplistic view of the world as you want it to gain a greater awareness to see

more of the real world with the real difficulties that people are forced to deal with every day.

3) There are no easy answers for traumatic events

"*I know how you feel,*" is one of the worst things that you could ever say to another human being. That is unless you really have walked in their shoes through the same type of life crisis. Everyone who hears about the challenge that you are facing will want to make it better in one way or another, but often there are no quick solutions or instant pop-psychology advice available. Sometimes bad things happen to good people and there just isn't anything to say to make it better, so don't even try to help with words. Rather, help with your presence, or just help with a meal, or arrange for childcare while an exhausted Mom gets a night off, or line up some gift certificates to help out, or pitch in to help pay for a needed car repair, or just remember to pray for someone you know in crisis. While you may not have any real answers, you may have some encouraging words of hope to someone feeling very scared and alone. Better to say, *'hang in there and I'm here to help if I can,'* than to retreat in silence and do nothing because you aren't sure of what to say. Take action to do something positive to get through the day right now instead of spending massive amounts of time and energy trying to figure out the answer to some of the questions that likely could never be answered anyway. Knowing that you have closed the door to all of the *'what ifs'* will allow your mind to open up other doors of options and possibilities, even in the most challenging of situations.

4) Crisis events reveal your biggest fears and deepest beliefs

Thousands of years ago the Psalmist wrote, "*God is a very present help in times of trouble,*" and that's truer today than ever. Critical incidents will instantly reveal more about you than you ever thought possible. What you believe about life, money, love, family, honesty, courage, hope, faith and a whole lot more will come out when everything that you thought that you believed in is suddenly shaken. Know that a crisis may take you straight to the very thing that you fear the most, which will be hard, but ultimately good because you don't have any choice but to face it and get through it the best way you can. None of this is easy, but the character and maturity you develop while struggling to just get through the day will last for years. It is helpful to journal out those fears and spend some time writing down what you believe during times like this because the insights you generate about your own identity can help you get through future events faster and stronger than you ever imagined. This is the process of removing fear to replace it with a deeper faith.

5) Some very good people may give you some very bad advice

The Biblical story of Job tells of a man who loses everything: kids, money, power, career, big house, company, employees, marital connection to his wife and every single material possession. His health was destroyed and as he scraped his skin to lance the boils the only thing he could hear was the bad advice and judgmental questioning of his three friends. While it is good that they

can to be with him during his time of crisis, their efforts at *'helping'* seemed to turn toward putting more pressure on Job than actually making his life any more bearable. When helping people through a time of crisis I often remind them of the first rule in a crisis, which is *'don't make a bad situation worse.'* No matter what you are facing today, keep in mind that while someone has it worse than you, there are a truck load of people who don't even have a clue! If someone gives you bad advice because they have been blessed to not have experienced the level of pain and suffering that you have, cut them some slack because of their naive view of life, or try to avoid them. In a crisis you don't have time or energy to try to change someone who doesn't understand painful trauma, so sometimes it really would be preferable to just try to avoid that person. Better to seek out others who have walked on the same road of grief that you are on so that you can learn from their insights instead of feeling misunderstood by the lectures of those who haven't been tested in those areas of character development. At some point there is a time to move on to learn the lesson that Job did so long ago. God is always faithful, even when your closest friends let you down.

6) Major world events like terrorism or natural disasters can magnify the stress and pressure you are already facing

Whatever you are going through is intensified by other factors, like terrorism or a community wide disaster. If your marriage is breaking up while you are trying to deal with finding ice or gasoline to run a generator it will feel overwhelming all the time. We can only deal with a certain amount of stress and pressure from crisis events, no matter where they are coming from. If you are totally focused on tuning in to see if the London terrorists are being brought to justice while trying to care for your aged parents who are facing huge financial challenges, you will run out of emotional energy to cope really, really fast. Better to just pray for those people in London and then turn all of your energy toward dealing with what's on your plate right here and right now. Unless you have to watch the video footage from other world events for your job, turn the TV off to turn toward reducing the amount of painful issues on your plate for today. You will make it through seasons of crisis a lot better if you remove any outside source that you don't have to deal with today. This includes things like being overwhelmed by future events like funding your three year old daughters college tuition or if you will keep your job until the next Presidential election. You must manage your emotional energy wisely today by not worrying about things too far down the road during a time of crisis. Stabilize the crisis today so that you can see clearly to deal with the future events when you are at a stronger and more focused place.

7) Strength, confidence and character come on the other side of life crisis

Someone once said that hard times will make you bitter or they will make you better and that is especially true during seasons of trials and discouragement. We know that the difficult challenges can make us prone to anxiety, depression, fears, doubts, resentfulness, hatefulness and bitterness. What we fail to think about is that those very same crisis events can push us to stretch and grow into

a more disciplined and focused human being. Here's an insight though, it's either one or the other. It's been my experience that people either allow the circumstances of life to shape them into stronger people, or they spend their life whining about how unfair life is to them. Hey, a lot of the good things in life are dramatically affected by how you look at it. Some people view being fired from a job that they really didn't like as a blessing, while others may think that it spells out financial ruin and bankruptcy. Learn to see crisis events for what they are-an event. They are not usually the end of life, however they may spell out the beginning of a major change, which will greatly impact life. It's sort of like sweating in the gym while exercising your body to achieve a healthier result. The painful process of pushing your body with weights and aerobic gradually activity brings a better result. St. James said it this way, *"The testing of your faith builds patience and maturity."* To have deep inner faith and personal power you have to press on through the trials of life, instead of just avoiding them or asking others to sort it all out for you. No one can take action to get confidence for you, but you! Get up as you can and move forward so that you can make positive growth in the days ahead.

8) The greater the crisis, the greater you need others to get through it

You can get through a bad hair day alone, but you can't get through a loved one's cancer treatments without major levels of support. We need others to make it through life and that is particularly true during crisis events. The bigger the challenge you are facing, the more supports, coping skills and healthy behaviors are required to move through it. Obviously this issue takes every positive resource that you can find, while avoiding the negatives. So begin to seek out the counselors, pastors, social workers, psychologists, physicians, nurses, attorneys, law enforcement, chiropractors or support groups that will be needed to challenge the process and bring about change. In many regions of the country there are hotline telephone numbers linked to community resource agencies that offer all kinds of help and guidance, much of which is free. (*In central Florida where I live it's accessed by dialing '211' from any telephone, which links to a live operator who has a listing of thousands of people and places to address every issue from Adoption to Alzheimer's. Another great resource on managing crisis events is through the writings of June Hunt at www.HopefortheHeart.com). You and I need others and would likely go out of our way to help others if the roles were reversed, so don't be afraid to ask for help if you find yourself in the position to need it. Letting other people help you can unlock a whole new world of service and insight into how others are dealing and coping to grow to a stronger place on the other side of crisis.*

9) Stressful or traumatic events don't go on forever

Someone once said that the often quoted phrase, *'things come to pass'* would be better stated as, *'things come to pass, but they don't come to stay.'* Keeping your focus on getting through the day and moving past the past to move toward a better place ahead is essential if you want to get to a better place after a life crisis. There are seasons in life and they are constantly changing, even when we

don't realize it. Consider an event like a college student moving out of their parents home to their first apartment. If that young person is prepared for the road ahead, this will be one of their most exciting and fulfilling times. If they aren't, then they may find every excuse to avoid dealing the logical progression of reality that will force them to grow up anyway, or over-invest in pushing their Mom to build the nest bigger to keep them from feeling the stress of changing roles, (letting go of their mommy to gain her back as a mentor). Change is hard on everyone, but change is the most common part of life, so when you hear someone tell you that the present trends will continue and that the sky is actually going to fall one day, please ignore them. Nothing lasts forever, including times of life crisis. If you are in a time of testing and trial, know that it won't go on forever, nor will the calmness of those who haven't had a real crisis event in their entire life. To that person I say 'buckle up' because it may be that God will one day take them to some steep places to show that what they said they believed is really true. Oh yes and to show a better way to view maintaining balance in life when you don't have to stay in control of everything that you really couldn't control anyway.

10) Crisis events prove true the promises of God

For well over twenty years I've been honored to work as a counselor with wonderful people who often were at the hardest part of their life because of major crisis or painful trauma. The bad news is that they had been knocked down and thrown off course from the life that they wanted by various critical incidents and crisis events. Someone told me once that *'there is no testimony with out a test'* and I believe that is true because I believe that God allows every thing to happen for a reason. However, the good news is that they were able to get through it and became stronger in the process of moving through the crisis, instead of running away from it. I've seen it thousands of times, regular people facing horrible circumstances became more balanced and focused in every area of life because of it. The crisis was hard, but in the process of just getting through the day they discovered more about what they believed and how much better life could be than they ever before could have imagined. Life takes on a new meaning when what you believe has gone through the fire, because something in the fire burns away the impurities and the wastefulness to plainly reveal what matters most. I've watched people who didn't believe in anything spiritual become filled with a sense of direction and purpose to make a positive difference in the world with God's help. The crisis revealed what they could be, as well as what would have to change to grow to a new level of success.

The hard lessons that come from crisis have long lasting and life-changing results. I've seen people change in more ways than you could imagine because of having a season of carrying the crucible of a crisis. Things like daddy's who were too busy to spend five minutes playing catch with a child become 'father of the year' candidates after an emergency room experience. Mother's who were obsessed with shopping become budget-minded financial managers while rebuilding their life after their husband died. Men who loved their careers more

than they ever would love a wife become softened and surrendered to view that woman as the most important person in their world. Women, who placed their children above all else, become insightful and aware of their own insecurities and need for control to release those kids to become who they were supposed to be, instead of being stuck in the shadows of their mother's expectations. Young people who moved from meaningless relationships and empty jobs to connected friendships and purpose-driven careers. People give up spending money on drugs, gambling, pornography or alcohol to let go of the addictions and grab hold of a stable life with careful financial management leading them to be free from debt forever. I have seen miracles come out of crisis situations so many times, that I can tell you prayer is real and essential to experience peace during the stormy trials of life. I know that God's promises to comfort, protect, guide, cover and bless his children are real. I know it because of what I've seen in walking through crisis with people from every culture, every age group and every background. They got better as they prayerfully moved toward truth and allowed others to help them get back on track to a better quality of life in spite of the difficulties of their painful past. They got better and I'm glad, yet I have one last question, "so how about you?" When is it your turn to have a better quality of life in spite of difficulty? My hope is that you will turn the corner right now to boldly move in a new direction away from the stress and pressure to move toward the strength and purpose that only comes because of a life-changing word...Crisis.

About the author:

Dwight Bain is a Nationally Certified Counselor, Author and Life Coach specializing in bringing positive change to highly complex situations. He is a life-long resident of Orlando, Florida ere he lives with his wife Sheila and their two children. Find more of his practical resources on managing emotions and building relationships visit www.LifeworksGroup.org Or call 407.647.7005 for more information on how the LifeWorks Group can help you build a better quality of life.