

10 Ways to Stand and Withstand in the Face of Crisis

Does it ever seem that the world is a wheelbarrow filled with harrowing situations and that it is circling the globe like a macabre game of musical chairs? Music stops, wheelbarrow dumps, hope I'm not standing in front of it at the time. It could be anything: diagnosis, car accident, job loss, financial meltdown, relationship breakdown, anything, really, that makes your stomach drop and sends you searching for solid ground in the middle of the storm.

When our crisis first hit, I can't tell you how many times I said, "I don't know what I'm doing—I've never walked this road before!" (read that in Henny Penny's sky-is-falling voice). I like lists and rules and diagrams and charts and I kept looking for some answer that looked like those things. I wanted something solid and didactic with which to plot a safe course while also trying to guide my family through a maze of pain and confusion.

Over the past two years, I've been writing down all the things I wish I would have known before Steve's diagnosis and the things that I've learned since. Some may help you and some you might want to leave on the cutting room floor, but I'd love to share them—just in case you find yourself looking for solid ground of your own:

1. **Talk to someone.** No matter what you're facing and no matter how delicate a matter it seems to be, you need someone you can talk to when you're under the gun. If you have no friends you can trust, see a counselor or a pastor—people you know will be trustworthy. While shoving the situation underground may feel safe, it's

like planting an atom bomb seed in your gut. It will explode at some point and the fallout will be intense.

2. **Don't talk to everyone.** It may be tempting to build your whole narrative around the swells of your storm, but it's unwise for a lot of reasons. A. Some people can't handle it. B. Some people will give you bad advice. C. Constantly articulating your crisis is not any better for relationships than constantly talking about your successes. Stay honest, but stay balanced—it will protect your friendships in the long run.
3. **Come up with a good answer to the question: "*How can I help?*"** Please, oh, please don't martyr this one out. You may be able to handle your crisis and all your normal-life responsibilities in the beginning, but you cannot sustain that pace for the long haul (please believe me here: I *know* this one.) I would love to offer a list of ideas here, but I don't know your story. For me, it's been huge to have help with meals, housecleaning and the yard work. The day my house is cleaned, I walk in from work and smell the bleach and see all the shiny surfaces and I want to weep tears of gratitude and joy and the wonder of it all. It's like rolling a Mac truck off of my shoulders and it makes me feel like a successful homemaker again—something I haven't felt good at in 18 months. One friend makes this possible for me and I cannot tell you what it means to me. Another friend mows our lawn. Another does Costco trips for me. Be ready to ask your friends for help.
4. **Drink water.** Seriously, lots of water. Think of it as crisis coolant.
5. **Eat, sleep, exercise.** I know, I know—it's hard to eat when you're stressed. It's hard to find time to exercise. It's hard to sleep when it feels like the roof is caving. I know these things, but I'm telling you: Forcing yourself to do these three things will reconnect your hands to the steering wheel of your life in really important ways.

6. **Connect with the Word of God.** Clearly, I am a Christian and a pastor and I know many of my blog readers do not share my faith. Totally cool. But I'm still sticking with this one, because there is a peace inside this ancient text that transcends belief systems. Don't tackle a big chunk of it, just a small manageable piece like Psalm 61 or Psalm 23 or 46 or 91 or 139. All of them are beautiful and filled with strength for your storm. You don't need to sign your life up or take on a label you're not ready for, just spend a little time in His story and see how tenderly it cares for those who hurt.
7. **Guard against bitterness.** Like the plague. Because pain tends to make us either more tender and compassionate or more bitter and brittle. I deputized a few close friends to wave a red flag in my face if ever they heard an attitude coming out through my words that was unworthy of all the goodness God has given me. I asked to them to stop me if I started resenting Jesus or doctors or people who have the nerve to NOT have ALS. Heh. I've been tempted to walk down all these roads, but I have loving friends who help me see my way back to the me I really, really want to be. One of those friends, by the way, is Steve. He absolutely does not shake his fist at anyone because of this diagnosis—it has made him more tender, more loving and more in love with his God than he has ever been, and it's a wonder to watch. I want to be like that. So do you. Even if it's hard up front, it creates a much more beautiful life on the back side of the crisis.
8. **Love generously.** It's easy to get stingy in times of crisis and keep a white-knuckled grip on our resources, but that is a tense way to live and more tension is the last thing you need in difficult situations, right? Give stuff away. It just feels good. (For our purposes, "giving" includes approval, forgiveness, blessing, time, compassion and resources. This isn't primarily a money

thing.)

9. **Stay thankful.** Intentionally, extravagantly, outlandishly thankful. When you feel like you're on the bottom of the heap, thank your way to the top. It's amazing how a perspective shift from gloomy to grateful can get me through the darkest moments.
10. really wish I had a number 10, so this list would be well-rounded and complete. Oh! I know! **Write.** Get a journal and a really great pen and let all the words tumble out of your heart and onto the page. This has been fantastic therapy for me. You just might find down the road, that your words are strength for others as well.

So, that's a good start. What did I miss? How have you learned to navigate crisis? Comments are open and I'd love to learn from you.

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