

Crisis of Faith

Introduction

“This crisis of faith can cause great suffering and emotional distress and can even resemble symptoms of a depressive episode, for example, feelings of guilt, loss of interest, anxiety. Efforts to participate in spiritual activities such as prayer, attending church, or fellowship with other believers can feel overwhelmingly difficult. Additionally, these spiritual practices can lack the meaning they once held for the believer. These crises of faith can be short-term, or last years, and can potentially become as severe as an individual abandoning his or her faith altogether.” (“The Dark Knight of the Soul” Durà-Vilà and Dein)

Stages

Stage 1: Build-up

“A crisis of faith is the result, over time, of destabilizing elements gradually building up under the surface, often unawares.... over time, as you accumulate sufficient, seemingly irreconcilable experiences and observations with your faith, your faith becomes destabilized.”

Stage 2: The Catalyst

- some significant life event, like a betrayal, a loss, a tragedy, a rejection, hypocrisy that you observe with other so-called believers, and so on.
- dissonance between biblical commands and a sinful lifestyle.

“If a person is claiming a set of beliefs while living in a way that violates those beliefs, he/she will eventually give up on their faith to escape the pressure.”

Illustration - Suzanne Gosselin, Focus on the Family

Stage 3: The Storm

People don't need answers or advice, they need a shelter.

Remedy

D... DARE to DOUBT.

"If you don't have any doubts you are either kidding yourself or asleep. Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving." Frederick Buechner

"A crisis of faith is often an expression of faith instead of a failure of faith. Doubt sets in when the (seemingly) impossible claims and promises of Christian faith collide with the savage, bewildering facts of life. Seeing as how savagery and bewilderment are indeed inescapable facts, crises of faith should be expected and embraced instead of resisted because they're an invitation to a deeper, truer faith. I still have a crisis of faith every time I perform a funeral for a child, and I hope I always do, because if I never have a crisis of faith, it's likely I've traded in the (seemingly) impossible claims and promises of Christian faith for something that causes less pain because it offers less hope. A Christian is destined to die with a broken heart, and we would have it no other way." (Austin Fisher, "Faith in the Shadows: Finding Christ in the Midst of Doubt")

O.... OWNERSHIP

Keep practising good disciplines and habits - prayer, meditation, reading, and other spiritual practices.

Israel...which means "wrestled with God".

Jacob's encounter with God at Jabbok

"I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (Gen 32:26).

"You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed" (v. 28).

Are you willing to wrestle with God?

U ... UNDERSTANDING

Seek deeper understanding.

"We have names for people who have many beliefs for which there are no rational justification. When their beliefs are extremely common, we call them "religious." Otherwise, they are likely to be called "mad, psychotic, or delusional." While religious people are not generally mad, their core beliefs absolutely are." (Sam Harris, "The End of Faith")

"If this book works as I intend, religious readers who open it will be atheists when they put it down." (Richard Dawkins, "The God Delusion")

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” (Dawkins)

B ... BELONG

You cannot get through a crisis of faith alone.

In a crisis of faith—outside of earnestly seeking God in private—is being open and transparent about it with your faith community is the most important thing you can do.

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.” — 1 John 1:5–6

Darkness doesn't just mean living in sin. It also means hiding things from God and those who love us. The longer you let doubt and fear live in darkness, the more power you give them.

“Let everyone be quick to hear slow to speak” James 1:9

T ... TRUST God's Word

Matthew 14: 22-32