

Getting Through Troublesome Times

By Bob Young

The song says it: “Troublesome times are here...” How do we get through them? “We humble our hearts to God and seek the way pilgrims trod.” Easy to sing, harder to do. How does a Christian, a church, a leadership team get through troublesome times? What do we do when a crisis arises? This article suggests a few tools.

You probably remember--January 2009, the five-minute flight of US Airways 1549. Just a minute and a half after taking off from LaGuardia, the plane struck a flock of geese at 3200 feet altitude. Three and a half minutes later, the Airbus A320 touched down in the Hudson River. The “Miracle on the Hudson” introduced us to Captain Chesley Sullenberger and First Officer Jeff Skiles. Their response averted what could have been a major disaster and provides significant lessons in crisis management.

We know from the cockpit recordings that when the crisis developed, the pilots immediately began working through a checklist designed for such events. Just before the plane struck the birds, Sullenberger says, “After takeoff checklist complete.” When the plane loses power, he immediately instructs Skiles to get the *Quick Reference Handbook* which is largely checklists for troubleshooting problems. The pilots can then be heard working through a series of checklist steps designed to save the flight. Their skills, poise, and coordinated effort are reflected in the way they approached the crisis.

In the same way that two pilots used resources available to confront an emotionally laden, almost impossible situation, in today’s world checklists are used in a variety of situations to solve complex problems. The Bible is not a series of checklists, but applying biblical principles to the situations we encounter can provide us a similar series of helpful steps or suggestions. When problems arise, we can use Scriptural principles to stabilize life’s troubles.

Tune out the chatter and turn down the volume. Most of the time when problems arise, there is lots of peripheral and background noise which has little to do with the real problems. When “everyone” is talking and “they” are saying this or that, one must determine which voices present legitimate concerns. If the squeaky wheel gets the grease, the loudest voices often get heard. Handling life often means turning down the volume. And problems are nearly always best solved in low volume conversations.

Take a long look—backward and forward. This will give you a broader context. Much of the present makes more sense when we see that this is not the first time a particular matter has arisen or the first time a certain problem has surfaced. Many of the issues addressed in a local church by the “issue of the month” club are in reality recycled again and again from times past. Looking forward helps us remember what our goals are and to ask hard questions about those things that genuinely move us toward our goals. Often, the solution to a problem will become evident when the long-term perspective is used and the ultimate goals are kept in mind.

Cut through the fluff—get to the real issues. It is easy to deal with symptoms and not the real problems. Dealing with symptoms may make us more comfortable (think cold and flu relief), but it doesn't do anything to get rid of the problem. With the chatter tuned out and the volume turned down, with the long-term perspective of the ultimate goal, one is ready to see the real issue. The issue must be clearly identified and its importance analyzed before potential courses of action can be listed and evaluated.

Balance emotion and thinking. Many of the problems Christians encounter deal with relationships. While a secular approach may suggest getting rid of emotion, the emotion of the Christian relationship cannot be sacrificed. Thus the proper approach is to use our thinking and our emotions. This requires that the Christian or leader take his or her emotional temperature. Avoid becoming overly involved emotionally in the issue or problem.

Do not react—be proactive! Much harm can be done by kneejerk reactions and sudden movements. Reaction is easy, and often seems essential. But the long-term good is more often served by proactively determining an appropriate course of action and then staying the course.

Do not try to do it by yourself. This obviously suggests that we include God in the dilemma—that we pray in faith and seek his will. It also means that we will seek the help and guidance of other Christians. We need guides in many areas of life, and especially when we are subjectively involved in a problem or circumstance, we need objective guides who can help us see the way more clearly. Wise Christian brothers and sisters can be a steadying presence when the going is tough.