

- We are the last week of a 4 week teaching series called “Never waste a good crisis.” It was spurred by the current pandemic crisis that we are in, but it got me thinking about crisis in general.
  - Since crisis is a common experience, we have been looking at how to do more than simply survive but instead use any crisis as a chance to move in a positive direction. It is not always easy. It is often time-consuming. It is rarely straight-forward. But it is possible. And it doesn’t happen by accident.
  - We have looked at three things.
  - Every crisis is an invitation to go deeper and wrestle honestly with God because often a crisis is necessary to get us from where we are to a better place.
  - Second, we saw that we get to decide what we let our minds dwell on in crisis. We must forcibly bring our mind to bear of things that are good while not denying the crisis itself.
  - Third, we have to play the long game, to think beyond our current circumstances, and know that the crisis will not last forever but to have hope because God is playing the long game in us and around us. We suggested praying, “Father, use this until you choose to remove this.”
  - Today is our last week and I want to look at something that brings it all together. Something that without it, it is really difficult to do crisis well.
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- Last summer, I got to do something I had not done before, even though we have lived here for over 20 years. I got to visit Eastern State Penitentiary in Philadelphia.
  - It’s a fascinating place, and it’s where they hold some Halloween events that are probably quite creepy.
  - With the cold, narrow concrete hallways and small cells, it is not a place you would have ever wanted to be incarcerated.
  - One of the things I found really interesting was that Eastern State was where they first practiced, intentionally, solitary confinement.
  - The theory was that people who were removed from the negative influences of others and allowed to simply focus on themselves would be rehabilitated. So inmates were given a bible to read and that was it. The only contact with people for months or years on end was an occasional clergy visit. It was groundbreaking stuff . . . and it was dead wrong.
  - What they found was that rather than rehabilitate prisoners, it sent them down the path to complete psychological breakdown. It did not cure them. It broke them or made them worse.
  - We understand much better today that isolation actually seems to destroy us.
  - It’s almost as though we were fundamentally designed to need people. Hmmm.
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- If we want to not waste a good crisis, **WE MUST PROCESS OUR CRISIS IN HEALTHY COMMUNITY.**
  - We’re going to take a quick look at a biblical example, and then examine a bit on what this looks like and how to make sure it is part of how we deal with crisis.
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- We just finished the Easter season, and many of you read at least part of the narrative of what happened when Jesus died.
  - Suffice it to say, his followers were thrown into crisis.
  - It was not simply that they lost a friend and teacher, although death like how Jesus died was crisis enough. But Jesus had been the focal point of all their desires, dreams and aspirations, and in one 24 hour period, they lost it all. They were devastated.
  - What you notice in the story is how they responded.

- *“the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders”* (John 20:19)
- *“two of them were going to a village called Emmaus”* (Luke 24:13)
- *“I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.”* (John 21:3)
- Consider the fact that Judas betrayed Jesus and Peter denied Jesus. Judas ended up killing himself, alone without anyone who understood. Peter went fishing with his friends and had the opportunity to be restored.
- Then Jesus rose from the dead. The disciples were ecstatic after they wrapped their heads around it. Their dreams were restored. It was all going to turn out. Jesus spent a month meeting with them, handing out with them, eating with them.
- And then he left and the disciples were thrown into another crisis. A different kind, but a crisis nonetheless. What are we supposed to do? How do we do it? You won’t be here to guide us.
- Jesus knew his departure was going to cause all kinds of anxiety, so he told them: *“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”* (Acts 1:4-5)
- This was not an individual command. They were to wait together. That’s exactly what they did. We are told then joined together constantly in prayer. Their number was about 120, roughly the same as our church family, maybe slightly smaller.
- When they replaced Judas with Matthias, the criteria was that he had been “with them” from the beginning.
- Then when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, we are told they were all together in one place.
- When the church exploded in growth, they devoted themselves to fellowship and eating together. They did not just do it when it was convenient, they were devoted to community.

## **I. We were created to be in community.**

- When God created everything, it was amazing. It was good. The first time that we heard God say “It is NOT good” was when he said, *“It is not good for the man to be alone.”* (Gen 2:18)
- Most of us intuitively know this. We seek out relationship. You would nod and agree.
- Even though we know this, when crisis comes, we are tempted to do one of two things.
- First is we desire to withdraw. We find we are tired a lot, physically, emotionally and mentally. That’s why so many in this pandemic have found themselves increasing tired, unmotivated, depressed. It’s what crisis does.
- We don’t want to have to explain everything again. To cry again. To have to relive our situation.
- We isolate instead of seeking out.
- We close off instead of opening up.
- It’s just easier to isolate than to reach out.
- Yet isolation and alienation are opposite of God and his purposes.
- Just to be clear, there is a time and place to withdraw and be isolated. Jesus did it frequently. He would go away by himself. He would pray. He would meditate. But it always led to him re-engaging with the people around him.
- Elijah withdrew in his crisis. We looked at this a couple of months ago. He ran away. He encountered God. God cared for his soul and he was then sent out to re-engage with the nation and with his successor.

- This is healthy isolation. It is isolation for a limited period of time for the purpose of resetting and connecting to our heavenly Father.
- Unhealthy isolation does not do this. It looks inward.
- It listens to lies like: “No one understands me.” “No one cares.” “They will judge me in the midst of my crisis.” Don’t believe these lies.
- Unhealthy isolation in crisis puts up walls and keeps people away.
- There is a second kind of reaction though.
- It is to allow only those relationships that sustain my crisis. These are the relationships that will help you wallow in your anger and depression. It is only dealing with the people who in fact might even be causing your crisis.
- It is only talking to those who will tell you are right, that you should be angry. They feed the narrative that you tell yourself in the midst of your crisis. That is why the main idea in not wasting a good crisis is that **WE MUST PROCESS OUR CRISIS IN HEALTHY COMMUNITY.**

## II. In crisis we must press into healthy community.

- Here’s the catch-22. Even though we are designed for community, in crisis we feel the tug to abandon relationships, often blocking out those who are the best for us.
- You choose to be in community – it is not accidental.
- Do you know when the best time to be in healthy community is? BEFORE a crisis hits.
- There are so many reasons that DF’s are the heartbeat of Hope Chapel. It is because healthy community is essential. We need it.
- Don’t wait for community to come to you.
- Ideally you will do this before crisis, but certainly in crisis.
- Don’t put the burden on others. They know I’m hurting. They should call me. They should reach out. Since no one is calling me, they must not care about me.
- Don’t wait for community to come to you.
- What kind of community do we pursue?
- The crisis in that early church, not knowing what to do and what was next, pushed them into this healthy kind of community.
- *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)*
- We could spend a whole lot of time on this, but let me just highlight some things that characterize healthy community.
- A) Healthy community involves time together.
- We read that they devoted themselves to hanging out. They spent time in each other’s homes. They ate together. That all takes time.
- This is why developing this kind of community takes time and if you only do it when you are in crisis, it is difficult.
- You have to fight the isolation, and seek out others.
- B) Healthy community requires transparency.
- Notice that they prayed together. They listened to good teaching and practiced living it out. This takes honesty. It takes openness. It requires laying it out there.
- The desire in crisis is to hold it in.
- I don’t want to “bother anyone” or “burden them.” That is not selfless – it is selfish, prideful behavior.
- I am worried about what they might think if I say what is really going on. Also very prideful.
- Healthy community requires transparency. We need community that we trust and can be vulnerable with. This requires a shared value system and shared experience.

- C) Healthy community draws you towards Jesus.
- If this is not true, then all transparency is, is a chance to regularly complain.
- Healthy community will sit with you. Listen to you cry. Encourage you. Point you towards truth. And if necessary, give you a gentle slap that pulls you back from the brink and challenges your wrong thinking.
- **WE MUST PROCESS OUR CRISIS IN HEALTHY COMMUNITY.**
- We were created to have that kind of community, so press in. Swallow your pride. Reach out. Resist the temptation to wallow and turn inwards.
- The truth is that you can only experience God and learn from him fully in healthy community. Others are necessary to help you not waste a good crisis.
- And if you are not in crisis right now, use it as a time to develop community. Get connected with people that you can spend time with and develop transparency.
- Don't wait for community to come to you.
- One side thing. If you are observing others in crisis, the exact same is true for you. Don't wait for the person in crisis to come to you.
- I have heard (and thought) many people say in the midst of this coronavirus that they are willing to help others but are not sure how. They haven't heard any invitations to engage with people.
- If you wait for people to invite you into their need, you will be waiting for a long time.
- So whose responsibility is it in crisis? The one who is in crisis to reach out of the one seeing the crisis to reach in? Yes.
- **WE MUST PROCESS OUR CRISIS IN HEALTHY COMMUNITY.**
- Let's put this all together. All four weeks.
- You will face crisis in your life. When it does, don't waste it. Remember, we don't choose our crisis but we choose our response to the crisis. So when crisis comes, remember this.
- In crisis, wrestle with God, enlisting others to help you keep your mind fixed on what is good and hopeful.
- Consider that Jesus suffered the worst, most devastating, terrible and dreadful isolation while on the cross, so that our isolation from God the Father could end.