

CRITICAL FIRST STEPS

When an unexpected or unwelcome event bursts into your life, it's necessary to take quick action—delaying can cause you to unravel and make poor decisions.

STEP 1: DETACH IMMEDIATELY FROM YOUR STRESSFUL SITUATION.

Like wrestling with an octopus, it's best to escape before you are hopelessly entangled. Choosing to remain in your overwhelming state will only escalate your emotions, as will trying to reason with yourself or someone else.

Proverbs 20:12 warns about indiscriminately plunging ahead: "The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty."

When you feel helpless, fearful, or angry, remove yourself physically and mentally from poisonous people, news cycles, or other distressing situations. Watch TV, take a walk, go for a drive—do *anything* to get your mind off your out-of-control emotions.

STEP 2: EXAMINE THE FACTS OF WHAT'S UPSETTING YOU.

In the heat of the moment, it's often easy to read wrong motives into behaviors. It is natural to simply react rather than take a hard look at what is *actually* happening. Jesus advised in John 7:24, "Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly."

Yes, you've temporarily lost control—or know you soon will—but you *can* take back some control without making a mess.

Assess the details and evaluate the *facts* of what's upsetting you. Think the situation through rather than over-reacting through panicked feelings.

STEP 3: PRAY ABOUT IT.

Too often, in the panic of the moment, it seems natural to rush our responses of self-protection instead of taking a few seconds to ask God for help. The Bible invites you and me to "cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

We are reminded that "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea" (Psalm 46:1–2).

Next time you are in a crisis, try shooting a quick prayer to God for help—whenever, however you can. Don't try to tough it out alone.

Thousands of people have found that saying the Serenity Prayer is helpful in times of great stress:

God, grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the

difference; living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; *taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it*; trusting that you will make all things right if I surrender to your will, so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with you forever in the next. Amen.

—Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr, emphasis added

I pray these words often, usually adapting them to my specific circumstances.

STEP 4: LOOK FOR A WAY TO ESCAPE OR ENDURE YOUR UPSET EMOTIONS.

God promises there will always be a way *through* or *out of* every trial:

No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Expect God to guide you. The Bible explains God's help during distress: "Those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them *in* their affliction" (Job 36:15, emphasis added).

Poet Robert Frost underscores the way to deal with most obstacles: "The way out is through!"

Sometimes God's escape route is a quick rescue, but usually his way out is patiently trudging through inflamed emotions and chilling anxieties.