



Resilience for Tumultuous Times

THE GOOD HABIT SERIES

It is written: *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory.* -- Matthew 12:20

It is also written: *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* -- John 16:33

Whether you are dealing with a personal crisis, or struggling with the onslaught of alarming news blasted 'round the world — or both — working diligently to develop the habit of resilience can help you get more productively focused, better confront personal trials, overcome adversity, and take the next right step with joy... come what may.

The Inevitability of Difficult Challenges

Oh, the headlines. Most days it seems like one major crisis after another, slithery like noodles that weave a tangled heap of digital spaghetti on our plates... to say nothing of the spicy meatballs and biting sauce that scalds the roof of the mouth should we dive in with reckless abandon.

It is turmoil on every front and enough to scorch a weary soul! That, on top of the personal challenges folks are dealing with such as unemployment, financial woes, family strife, declining health, violent crime, and other pressing personal tragedies. Yes, we are in the storm, and it is a time of unprecedented upheaval and struggles.

Whatever the source of challenge and disruption in your life, it can take a heavy toll on your mood, physical health, and mental outlook, burdening you with feelings of being overwhelmed and helpless, unable to take a truly productive next right step.

"If you're going through hell, keep going." -- Winston Churchill

Take a Calm, Deep Breath [repeat as needed]

While it is true that there is no way to completely avoid adversity, there is most certainly a way to get through it and get through it with real joy while regaining your sense of purpose. Yes, it is the way of resilience... that good habit that helps you cope with frightening times, trauma, change, and loss that have been a part of life since humanity blew it in the Garden.

Take heart. Fortifying yourself with resilience can help you cope with the current storm, better adapt, and get back on track quicker after facing hardship and sorrows.

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The Habit of Resilience

It has been said: "The bigger they are, the harder they fall." -- Robert Fitzsimmons

While that may be true in a sense, it is only part of the equation. So how about following it up with this? *"The more resilient they are, the quicker they get back on their feet."* And you can quote me on the more positive piece of the equation.

How we tend to look at things pegs us as creatures of habit. While it may seem that some folks easily glide through life, unscathed by stress and sorrow; when others are getting pummeled daily with challenges (and wearing their raw emotions on their sleeves to boot), it really boils down to our perception of habits... good, bad, or indifferent.

Each person has different situations, but resilient folks do have a higher tolerance for emotional distress during tough times, with a stronger ability to better maintain a positive focus.

Time to Roll Up Our Sleeves and Get to Work

If you are in the camp that needs to work on building more resilience -- or any good habit for that matter -- not to worry. You have A LOT of company, and rest assured it is not a character flaw. We are simply human, and as such we need to work hard on things if we expect to make any meaningful progress.

Resilience is not something you can simply toggle on for a quick fix. It is not the easy facade of bravado. Think of it more as a hard-earned good habit, or a well-developed mental muscle if you prefer. However you look at it, it is going to exact some exertion and a healthy amount of sweat -- a process over the course of your life that demands effort to build and maintain something this useful. Be patient with yourself and don a set of work gloves if you have an aversion to calluses.

At the outset, traumatic experiences stink. Ever listen to anyone who thinks they have never failed (or been seriously challenged) talk about personal growth? You may as well listen to water drip if you are going to learn anything useful from such as those. What did you ever learn from ease and success? We learn and grow when we fail, fail, and fail again... but repeatedly get back up to continue the struggle in pursuit of the worthy goal.

Maybe you are one of those that have not faced any real adversity in your life. That is an apparent blessing, right up until the time a crisis strikes, and you realize your resilience is like baby muscle -- not up to the challenge!

If you are an old pro at adversity, thank God for the blessings, because you can draw on the trial and error of past experiences to better cope with any challenging crisis (e.g. - you have tried self-medication and learned that only exacerbates the problem).



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If you are interested in building resilience -- failures and setbacks included -- here are just some of the benefits you will enjoy:

- Learn to stay more focused, agile, and productive
- Be less fearful of terrors (real or imagined) and the uncertain future
- Gain more emotional intelligence, so your emotions are less of a wildfire and more of a contained power source driving your internal 'engine' productively
- Communicate better, which is an essential core strength for improving relationships
- Gain the confidence that a solution is at hand, despite it looking quite to the contrary

Take heart, you can start reaping the benefits now, regardless of who you are and where you are at in life. Just do the work... or at the very least, simply want to do the work and turn to God who gives you strength and help in all things.

Some Handy Tips

Accept the situation. Change is a part of life, and much of what is roiling around us is outside of our control. While we are all wired differently, many will try to regain a sense of control by ignoring the situation. While this may give you a brief pause to regain your wits in a traumatic experience, it just prolongs the pain and suffering over the long term.

On the other side of that is lashing out with unhealthy anger, which is just another false attempt to regain a sense of control. Ultimately, staying in either posture thwarts your ability to adapt to the situation, seek workable solutions, and begin the healing process.

Focus on what you can control. Focusing on what is outside your control will only drain you of energy and leave you feeling anxious and hopeless. Accept your situation, then focus on what is within your control. Regain that valuable time and energy, which you can then apply to more productive matters. If necessary, make a list of things you are currently focused on that are not in your control, then give yourself permission to stop fretting about them. Follow that up with Next Right Stepping, which is simply doing the little you can with the circumstances right in front of you.

Come to Terms With Your Emotions

Are you the sort that runs from painful emotions or puts on a brave face? Do not do that, because those painful emotions will persist for you, squirreled away somewhere, whether you acknowledge them or not. Further, it just fuels the stress and prevents you from getting at the business of healing and growing.

"I can't do it." But you did. *"I can't do it."* But you did. *"I can't do it."* But you did...



Resilience for Tumultuous Times *(continued)*

Whatever your level of resilience, simply remind yourself of all the times you have confronted painful emotions in the past. The trauma eventually fades, and the pain does not last. At some point you learned and grew, or you are somewhere in the process of learning and growing from those trying experiences. Remind yourself often that it will get better. It will if you want it to.

Take Time to Grieve

We all lose stuff, sometimes tragically so. Whether it is the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, or the loss of the life we once enjoyed or imagined for ourselves, grieving the loss is an essential step in the healing process.

Connect With People/Make Friends

No one is an island. Whether we are reaching out so someone can help relieve some of our burdens in life, or simply connecting to help someone in need, it is essential the connections happen. Never feel like you are alone in this resilience building effort.

Once you connect, do not think that you can solve someone's problems for them, nor should you expect that others can solve yours. What folks CAN do is listen to each other, make eye contact, smile, show empathy, encourage, hug... in a word, love. The important thing is not to withdraw in troubled times, whether a person feels burdensome or not.

Be as gentle as doves, but as shrewd as serpents. If you are not up to it, (i.e. - you lack a high degree of emotional intelligence) try to avoid negative people. Some folks are sweet, empathetic, and naturally good at listening... that is easy-peasy. For every one of those, there is a dark cloud who feeds on negative emotions, leaving you more stressed, anxious, and perturbed than before the encounter. In that case, try to avoid anyone who exacerbates your problems. Just say a little prayer for them and leave them to Jesus.

Be Gracious With Advice

In a crisis, you will often hear endless advice from other people. As painful as it can sometimes be, try to be gracious about it without getting defensive, because you never know who God may put in your path to deliver just such a message.

If there is grace in the exchange, both parties will benefit. If you are truly open to guidance (and not just looking for validation) it can help you develop better solutions to problems that you might not have considered on your own. They can add valuable nuance and texture to your thinking -- helping you to overcome biases, self-serving rationales, and other flaws in your logic that may free you up to take the next right step.



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As an engaged listener, you can also learn a lot from the problems that other people lay on your doorstep. Considering the rule of reciprocity, providing good advice often creates an implicit debt that recipients will want to repay in good faith.

Do Not Feel Guilty About Self-Care

Are you feeling mentally and physically drained often? Is your 'fight or flight' mechanism itching on a hair trigger? If so, it is a good bet you are not coping well with tough times. Being in that constantly heightened state of angst about things can lead to much more serious challenges to your health and mental state.

Why fret over so many negative things when very few concerns are truly worthy of our time and necessary? Part of building resilience includes taking some time for prudent self-care. If your body is strong and healthy, so will your mind be.

Here are just some of the basic areas to give some serious attention to:

- Learning to breathe properly and taking advantage of other relaxation techniques will help you unwind and bring your nervous system back into balance.
- Exercise is not only a proven muscle builder, but also a highly effective stress reliever proven to help with your mental health.
- Getting enough sleep should be a no-brainer, but how often do we deprive ourselves of this vital, rejuvenating gift that God granted us?
- Healthy dietary patterns are essential in the mind-body-spirit connection for better living, helping us to better manage the daily grind of stress. And make no mistake about it: stress is a killer!

Search for Meaning and Purpose

It is easy to get consumed by outrageous headlines or a personal crisis, but those things do not define you as a person. You are not the disturbing headline, nor the personal crisis. By focusing on meaningful work and leisure activities that bring purpose and meaning to your life, you can maintain a better perspective (especially the one God intended for you) and prevent things beyond your control from overwhelming you in pursuit of that vision and mission.

Try not to compare, because we are all so different in how we define and experience purpose and meaning. Do not be limited by the expectations others have for you, because they are not charged with living your life and the mission God entrusted you with.

Help those in need, if you are able, and be a sign of hope. There may be no better medicine for feelings of helplessness and powerlessness than helping someone else in need. In fact, giving support in a crisis can be every bit as effective as receiving help on the road to finding meaning and purpose.



Resilience for Tumultuous Times *(continued)*

Get Some Hobbies

In the midst of the storm, do not cast aside personal interests that nourish your mind, body, and spirit. Hobbies and other leisure interests help bring meaning to our lives and define us as individuals -- all the better when shared with others. Whether it is journaling, hiking, woodworking, iconography, trumpet playing, being a part of a book club... whatever. Having these side interests adds to your ability to cope with stress in challenging times.

Keep Motivated

Persistence and endurance -- which require motivation to pull off -- are essential to coping with adversity. In the spirit of "TNRS" though, you need only be concerned with... taking the next right step.

Tackle challenges one step at a time, regardless of the size of the challenge. If necessary, break up each step into smaller more manageable steps, since it is not a foot race to the finish line. Still no workable solution? Review the tips above, or maybe jot down a list of concerns on paper to help you better focus.

At each step of recovery, be sure to celebrate the small wins. Some stormy challenges are so enormous from our perspective that it is critically important to catch our breath and savor the small respites before the next lightning bolt crashes over our heads. But, hey, it is a clear sign of progress... a step in the right direction. Taking time to note the small wins is a victory itself, and a valuable encouragement to persevere.

Stay Hopeful

It sometimes may seem like a fool's hope, but our Faith informs us otherwise. Do not sap your own hope by blowing your trial out of proportion or conflating it with other trials. Be objective. Take a step back sometimes and try to view the situation as if it were not your own and you were simply going to advise a loved one on a course of action. Is there any positive upside you can focus on? Instead of focusing on the horrific phantasms of what may happen, try focusing on the positive outcome that is firmly in God's hands... with your significant participation, of course.

Be Grateful

Want to send the demons packing? Be grateful and express it. Praise God from the depths of your heart and mean it. Thank Him for everything... your friends, your dog, a shade tree in the yard, a tasty hot dog, a refreshing cup of water... whatever you are thankful for! The more time spent being grateful, the less time occupied with angst and other soul crushers. And besides, God deserves the praise and gratitude.



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Everyone reacts and adjusts to challenges differently, so be patient. Just remind yourself of how much God loves you and act accordingly. Love others. Love yourself. Be kind, and do not berate yourself and others for every mistake and failure made. Rejoice, because that is the stuff of saints.

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs all."

-- 2 Corinthians 4:17

