

Coach House Church

BEACONS

RESILIENCE

15TH FEBRUARY 2021

One New Year, we were in Whinlatter Forest in the Lake District and a strong wind was hurling around the hillside. When you looked up at the top of the enormous conifer trees, they were swaying to the extent they looked like they would bend and break, toppling down on us. Yet, they didn't break. They swayed back into their original position as though nothing had happened. The term resilience can be used to describe the majestic conifers in the forest as one of the dictionary definitions of resilience is:

the ability of a substance to return to its original shape after it has been bent, stretched or pressed.

When you listen to current discussions or reports on the news or social media, you may have heard the term resilience used. The situation over the past year has brought this term to the fore and the importance of being resilient, emotionally, mentally and physically. And I would add, for a Christian, to be spiritually resilient.

Another dictionary definition, regarding resilience in people is:

the ability of people or things to recover quickly after something unpleasant, such as shock, injury, etc

It is being able to return to the original state or condition after being under pressure from something unpleasant. In other words, it's how we deal with the pressures of life, how well we stand up again once we have been knocked down.

According to MIND, the mental health charity, it's also how we adapt in the face of challenging circumstances. It isn't a personality trait. It's something we can all take steps to achieve.

So, how does this fit in with being a Christian and what does the Bible have to tell us about it?

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, recognising the pressures of life they were dealing with. Even though they were at their wits end and life was

tough, there was a way to be resilient, to bend but not break, to carry on despite the troubles.

2 Corinthians 4:8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

I think it's good to look at examples of people's lives in the bible. One of the things I notice is that they express their true feelings. We are not expected to be super human or shatter proof. It is about being real. Secondly, they put their trust in God and have faith in the plan he has for their lives.

In 1 Kings 18: 16-45 is the account of Elijah and the amazing events where God showed his power to the prophets of Baal. Yet a short while after this, Elijah admitted to feeling low and alone. In chapter 19:4 he says 'I've had enough!' He goes on to say that despite doing everything asked of him by God, he was still under threat of death by King Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

In Judges 6, Gideon is employed by God to defeat the Midianites who have been ransacking their crops and threatening the Israelites but not without expressing his feelings of doubt and anxiety. Gideon was real in his response to God's request:

15 "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."

Another example is found in Joshua chapter one when Joshua speaks God's command to the people of Israel who are about to enter the land promised to them many years before.

Joshua 1:9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua was realistic and knew, that despite being protected and guided by Almighty God for the 40 years they had been in the wilderness, and despite eventually reaching the land promised to them, they were not super confident in their own strength. They were frightened and they were up against the next challenge.

In the Old Testament, Esther was in the unenviable position of making a choice that could change history. She could choose self-preservation and live her life in the Palace of King Xerxes with the hope of becoming queen. She could choose self-sacrifice and fight for the rights of her people but risk losing her life for daring to approach the King with her request. She chose to follow the wisdom of her close relative, Mordecai, whose trust in God's plans comes through when he says: And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (4:14)

Esther's response is to follow God's plan and stand up for the truth: "I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (4:16)

These examples tell us that it is okay to not always feel on top of the world and that reality can be difficult to deal with. The way forward is to rely on God's promises for us.

We can hold onto the promises such as in Isaiah 41:10

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. So, why do we need this quality of resilience? Why do we keep going despite the set backs, the obstacles and the turbulence that can come with standing up for the truth, for following the plan God have given for your life?

In James 1:12 it says:

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

The key to resiliency is being real to ourselves and with God, to trusting in God's promise that he wants us to succeed and that he put a plan into operation to ensure this happened. Romans 5 tells us that God's plan to save us was initiated 'at just the right time, when we were utterly powerless'.

Through our faith in Jesus, we are looking at the long term plan, God's plan for us all, as it says in John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Resilience is knowing we don't rely on our own strength. We have the Holy Spirit of God to support us every day. Jude 1 encourages believers saying:

20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

One day Jesus will present us to his father and while we continue in this life we can put our faith in our God who keeps us upright when we fall down as it says in Psalm 37: The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; 24 though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.



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