

# 46. IF YOU GOING THROUGH HELL, KEEP GOING



*The ability to rebuild your life after  
tragedy or disappointment is called  
resilience.*

#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

## IF YOU ARE GOING THROUGH HELL, KEEP GOING

*Proverbs 24:16: "The righteous man may fall seven times, but he gets back up again."*

The ability to rebuild one's life after tragedy or disappointment, is called **resilience**. Life's scars are there to remind us of what we've been through. Helen Keller however once said that these scars don't have to dictate where we are going: 'Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.' Our lives can truly be like it says in the verse in Proverbs 24:16: "A *righteous man may fall, but he gets up again.*" If we go through hell, we can and should keep going so that we can make it out successfully on the other side.

I want to use an illustration to demonstrate how one can be mentally and physically fit to get through trials and tribulations. Before they go into battle, soldiers train to be physically fit, to have the muscles to endure and the stamina to cope with the physical strain of the battles that lay ahead of them. The military has recently realised that even though they were training their soldiers in the past to include physical fitness, they now have to also start training the soldiers to be mentally fit in order to endure the trials and hardships that lay ahead of them. We are like those soldiers. We are in the battle of our lives and we need not only be trained physically to endure the trials of life by living a healthy life and being **physically** well, but we also need to be **mentally** and **emotionally** trained to overcome hardship and to get up after defeat.

**RESILIENCE: THE ABILITY TO  
REBUILD YOUR LIFE AFTER  
TRAGEDY.**

Micah 7:8 says: *“Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.”*

My question for you today is this: “Have you ever lost someone you truly love? Have you ever had your heart broken or ever struggled through a divorce or been a victim of infidelity? Have you ever lived through a natural disaster or been bullied or made fun of or maybe had a miscarriage or an abortion or struggled through infertility? Have you or your family members ever struggled with mental illness, dementia or physical impairment in your bodies or being confronted with suicide or attempts of suicide? I bet that every single person reading here right now, can answer ‘yes’ to more than one of these adversities.

**Adversity doesn't discriminate.** If you are alive today, you have probably been through some tough times and you will most likely have to deal with some more tough times in the future. What do you do when all of a sudden you are flung into crises or when you go through loss or tragedy? When all of a sudden you realise that in one moment your entire life has been turned upside down and your identity, your plans, your emotional stability and ability to be happy, have been tossed out the door because of the hardships that happened? How do you deal with unthinkable news? When your hopes are smashed to smithereens, how do you keep going?

There is a term in psychology that they like to use to describe this ability to keep going despite the things that have happened, despite the hardships and the disappointments of life. This term is resilience. *‘Resilience is accepting your new reality, even if it is less good than the one you had before’* – Elizabeth Edwards.

**RESILIENCE: IS THE ABILITY TO  
ACCEPT YOUR NEW REALITY, EVEN  
IF ITS LESS GOOD THAN THE ONE  
YOU HAD BEFORE.**

Resilience is defined by the Oxford dictionary as 'the ability of people or things to **recover quickly** after something **unpleasant**, such as shock or injury, has taken place'. It is the ability to keep going despite hardship and to maybe even come back stronger. Ernest Hemingway defines it in this way: 'The world breaks everyone, and afterwards, some are stronger at those broken places.'

Resilience is to be able to endure and to get through tragedies and to be stronger in the end. It is the process of being able to adapt well and to bounce back in times of stress, to get back onto the horse, to get back onto life's mission and keep living life with meaning. Resilience, some have said, is the key that can heal the wounds and right the wrongs that have happened. It reminds me of the little blue fish in the story *Finding Nemo* (a kid's cartoon that you can go and watch). Her name is Dory. I believe Dory had resilience, because whenever tough times came, she sang the song: "Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming, all you got to do is swim, swim, swim."

I realised resilience is that ability within you, that mental and physical and spiritual ability to endure hardship, to get through hardship and not to let it knock you down, not to let the world kick your feet from underneath you and to keep going despite what has happened in the past. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says: "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain." You need to be immovable and steadfast as Paul says in the Word of God.

How are you going to achieve this resilience so that you can recover after tragedy? So that you can get through it and you can survive?

**THE WORLD BREAKS EVERYONE,  
AND AFTERWARDS SOME ARE  
STRONGER AT THOSE BROKEN  
PLACES.**

How does resilience work in helping you to carry on with life, to keep swimming? Because, let's be honest, tragedy and trauma leave us feeling paralyzed. We freeze up. We become depressed. We lose our energy and motivation. It becomes much easier to just give in to the pain and the heartache or to just give up. You come to a point where you say: "You know what, life is not worth living anymore." You give up on your goals. You might have given up on some of your ambitions as well. Maybe you are at the point now where you feel like giving up on life itself. How can you successfully navigate through the effects of loss and pain and disappointment and get through it as quickly as possible so that life can be meaningful again and so that you can start living again? How can you become resilient? How do you keep swimming?

Elizabeth Edwards has a beautiful saying where she says that she stood in the storm and when the wind did not blow on her, that was when she adjusted her sails. You too can learn to adjust your sails when the storms of life are blowing. When the storm calms down a bit, you adjust your sails, you change life, you adapt to life, you adapt to new realities. This is what resilience is all about. The good news about **resilience** is that it **can be learnt**. It involves developing your thoughts and your behaviours and your actions to allow you to recover from traumatic and stressful events in life. To allow you to recover from disappointments where you have let yourself down and your life hasn't quite worked out the way you expected it to work out.

There are three strategies within psychology which can be learnt to get through tough times. There are many more strategies that can be mentioned on how to become resilient and how to be resilient, but I found that these three are very helpful.

**THE GOOD NEWS IS RESILIENCE  
CAN BE LEARNT.**

The **first principle** is that resilient people understand that **bad things happen** (even to good people) and that suffering is a natural part of life this side of heaven as opposed to pretending that stress doesn't exist. Some people try and avoid stress. They distract their minds, they try and suppress their emotions, but this isn't a very effective way of getting through the tough times. Instead of trying to avoid and pretend that it isn't there, accept the reality that bad things do happen.

The **second principle** is that resilient people have learnt to **focus** on the things they can change as opposed to the things that they **can't change**. They have somehow managed to accept the things they cannot change. They've learnt to focus on being realistic in life, realising that some things can be changed and some things can't be changed and accepting that.

The **third principle** of resilient people is that they have learnt to ask themselves the question after tragedy has struck: "Is my thinking, my thoughts, my feelings, my actions doing me more **harm** or are they **helping** me?"

I'd like to take some time to look at these three principles individually and explore them a bit more and maybe help you to become more resilient in the trials and tragedies that have already hit or those that are about to hit.

The first thing that resilient people understand is that bad things happen, even to good people, and that suffering is part of life this side of heaven. This doesn't mean that resilient people welcome suffering – they are not delusional. They also don't go around life, floating through life on a breeze or skating by all life's many challenges unscathed.

**RESILIENT PEOPLE KNOW THAT  
BAD THINGS HAPPEN AND  
SUFFERING IS A NATURAL PART OF  
LIFE.**

On the contrary, it is about experiencing all of the negative and the difficult and the distressing events that life throws at you, but staying on task, being optimistic and high-functioning despite these things, still pushing forward and living life to the best of your ability.

Resilient people understand that suffering has become a real part of their human existence. They don't feel that life is unfair or discriminating because they know that everybody goes through tough times. Terrible things happen to all people. When adversity hits, resilient people realise that their time has come to either sink or swim. It is like the saying that goes: *'The bamboo that bends, is stronger than the oak tree that resists.'* It is true for resilient people. They have learnt how to bend when tough times come, they have learnt how to adapt to the tough times. They have learnt to keep going despite the adversity. Instead of trying to resist the adversity, instead of trying to pretend it hasn't happened, they've learnt to embrace it. Not love it, not enjoy it, but realised that there is good and bad in life.

The reason why many people struggle with resilience and getting through the tragedies of this life is because they live in an age where they somehow believe that they are entitled to a perfect life. Life has become this lie which they believe. They believe that there are no tragedies and heartaches and pain. It is quite evident in social media where we only see happy photos posted on Instagram, for example. We are bombarded by television programmes always having a happy ending. This is not realistic. As a result many believe the lie and demand that their lives must be this way. But it is fake. We need to learn to embrace the good, the bad and the ugly, as they are all part of life's reality.

**THE BAMBOO THAT BENDS, IS  
STRONGER THAN THE OAK THAT  
RESISTS.**

Jaeda Dewalt said: *'When we learn how to become resilient, we learn how to embrace the beautiful broad spectrum of the human experience.'* This broad spectrum includes all things – the good and the bad.

If you cannot accept that life won't always be a hundred percent happy, how are you going to cope? You are going to end up asking God why? You are going to end up asking God **why me?** Why is this happening to me? Well, **why not you?** This is the question that I would ask. This gets us into trouble spiritually. Your faith can become shaken if you don't realise that life is going to be filled with good and bad. You see, Paul understood this and he exclaimed that he has been able to be resilient. He said, with the help of God, he had been able to get through all circumstances. He had been able to endure when he was rich or when he was poor, when he had something to eat or when he had little to eat. He was able to endure hardship and peace. In Philippians 4:13 he explains why he was able to do that: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* Paul understood that hardships would come. You need to learn to be strong for the trials that you are going through and also for the trials that might still come.

The word that is used to describe the ability to **face trials that still lay ahead**, is fortitude. In other words, fortitude is what is needed to cope. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines fortitude as the strength of mind that enables a person to encounter danger and bear pain or adversity with courage. In other words, we will be better equipped to get through hardship when we realise that it is coming. We don't know when, we don't know how, but we know it is coming. We are physically and emotionally and mentally prepared to face the hardships because we know it is coming.

WHEN YOU LEARN TO BE  
RESILIENT, YOU LEARN TO  
EMBRACE THE BEAUTIFUL BROAD  
SPECTRUM OF THE HUMAN  
EXPERIENCE.



Children need to be taught at a young age that the world is not a parade ground, but actually a battlefield. As good soldiers of the cross, all are called to endure hardship this side of heaven. We should learn to quiet our minds and to be strong. Let us teach our children also that the true test of character is found in the willingness to bear burdens, to take the hard places and to do the work that is needed to be done, even though there might be no earthly recognition or reward. We might not see the results of enduring hardship here on this earth, but we will see it when we face Jesus in heaven one day.

In the book of Acts, we see a character by the name of John Mark. John Mark was a person who struggled to be resilient and who struggled to endure hardship and to keep going despite the hardships that came. John Mark was overwhelmed with fear and discouragement while doing missionary work in Pharga and Phampilia with Paul and Barnabas. He wasn't used to hardship and he became very disheartened because of the perils they were facing and the everyday necessities such as food and shelter that were lacking and them being persecuted. Up until this point of John Mark's ministry, he had worked with great success under favourable circumstances, but now, amidst the opposition and perils that so often beset the pioneer worker, he failed to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross. He had yet to learn to face danger and persecution and adversity with a brave heart. As the apostles advanced and they faced greater adversities, John Mark lost courage and refused to go further and he returned to Jerusalem. The good thing of the adversities that John Mark faced was that he learnt resilience and later became a good soldier of the cross.

**CHILDREN NEED TO BE TAUGHT AT  
A YOUNG AGE THAT THE WORLD  
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BATTLEFIELD.**

The way we build resilience is by facing each trial. Sometimes we fail and sometimes we face them successfully, but the point of building up resilience is to keep going, to get up after you have failed. This was not what John Mark did. He got up after he had failed, but he went back to Jerusalem. Only later on, he took up the courage and he kept going and kept climbing the ladder of life. Jesus gave the remedy for us to keep going. John 16:33 says: *"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in Me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world."* This is a very interesting verse where Jesus is saying that we can have peace if we realise that there will be many sorrows. We can also have peace, not only by realising there will be trials and sorrows, but by knowing that He has already overcome them all.

Yes, resilience is about accepting the good together with the bad, but it is also about realising that when the bad comes and we have no control over it, our only hope is to cling to God and to throw ourselves at His mercy – I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Job understood the principle that the bad things in life will come just as much as the good. After all the losses he had suffered, he declared: *"Naked I came into this world and naked I shall depart; the Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord"* (Job 1:21-22). He understood that bad things happen to good people, that you get the good as well as the bad.

This brings us to the second principle which helps people to be more resilient. Resilient people focus on being realistic. What do I mean with this? They focus on the things that they can change and accept the things that they **cannot change**.

IN THIS WORLD YOU WILL HAVE  
MANY TROUBLES BUT TAKE HEART  
I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD-  
JESUS

I am sure many of you have heard what is called the Serenity Prayer. The Serenity Prayer goes like this: *“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”*

The problem lies in the fact that many people think they can and should change everything around them. This is why they do not endure and they do not get through the trials of life successfully. This is why they cannot take up their crosses and keep going and keep living life. They think they can change the things that don't make them happy. That is really unrealistic. The reason why many give up or don't endure or recover quickly from life's tragedies is because they feel entitled to this Utopia. When they don't get this **Utopia**, they try and control everything around them, including their spouses and how many other things, in order to try and make things to be the way they want them to be. They think that if they change everything around them, they can make their own Utopia. This is not realistic.

As humans we are hard-wired by our fight-or-flight response. We are hard-wired to notice threats as well as weaknesses in others. When we have noticed those things that are going wrong, we think we can change them. In order to try and keep ourselves safe and to try and keep ourselves from these threatening situations or people, we try and control the situations around us. Ask yourself while you are in the negative situation: “What can I change and what can't I change?” Then, as Christians, we go to the Lord and we ask Him: “Lord, help me to face the fact that there are some things that are beyond my control. Lord, may You take care of them? I have faith and whatever You choose, I will be happy with.” Take all of it to God – the things you can change as well as the things you cannot change.

**GOD GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO  
ACCEPT THE THINGS I CANNOT  
CHANGE, COURAGE TO CHANGE THE  
THINGS I CAN, AND THE WISDOM TO  
KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.**

Sometimes we can change things, but maybe it is not a good time to do it. It is understandable that we try to fix things around us because we are living in the era where we are constantly bombarded by threats. Our threat responses and our stress responses have heightened significantly. These stressful experiences are usually the things we cannot change, that are out of our control. So it is understandable that we try and reduce our stress by trying to control the things around us. But when we try to do this, we realise it is useless and that we really cannot change the things which are out of our control.

What resilient people do instead of trying to control everything that can't be controlled, is that they focus on the things which are within their control. They **focus** on what can be changed and that will keep them going. Resilient people don't ignore the negative aspects of life, but they learn to focus on and to even **create** positive experiences amidst the difficulties. It is kind of like the story of Finding Nemo, which I mentioned a little earlier. When Marlin and Dori found themselves inside the stomach of a whale and the water level inside the whale was starting to drop, Marlin, the little clown fish, was terrified and noted to Dory, the little blue fish: "Look, it is already half empty!" To which Dory replied: "Hmmm, it looks half full to me." You see, Dori found something to be grateful for despite the mess that they found themselves in.

Resilience involves switching your focus and attention to include the good amidst the bad. Do things that will bring happiness to your life. So it is not just about focusing on the good, but also creating something good in the midst of trial and tribulations. Do things and make things that make you happy in life. Do things like photography or art or create something beautiful within the mess of your day.

**RESILIENT PEOPLE FOCUS ON  
WHAT THEY CAN CHANGE AND  
THINGS THAT CAN KEEP THEM  
GOING.**

Paul had this ability to see the good with the bad. In 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 he says: *"We are afflicted in every way (the negative), but we are not crushed (the positive); we are perplexed (the negative), but not driven to despair (the positive); we are persecuted (the negative), but not forsaken (the positive); we are struck down (the negative), but not destroyed (the positive)."* This is truly what is going to make us resilient – to see both the good and the bad.

Unfortunately we have the tendency to focus on the bad, the things that are going wrong. We need to mentally practise to focus on what is positive. **Here is a challenge for you to build your resilience: At the end of each day, make an intentional, deliberate, ongoing effort to be grateful by thinking of three good things that happened to you that day.** So, at the end of each day, sit down and ask yourself what three good things **happened** to you today? Which three good things did you **do** today? Also take time to create some good things each day. Through studies, this exercise has been proven to improve gratitude and happiness, reduce depression and get people to be more resilient.

The third principle that will help people to be more resilient is if they ask themselves: "Is what I am thinking, feeling or doing, going to cause me more **harm**, or is it **helping** me?" A lot of times, we don't ask this question. We get ourselves into situations where we say and think and do things which are completely out of character and even shocking at times. This often causes more harm than good. People have been known to act out and become reckless after tragedy, because of thoughts of 'what does it even matter?' The pain makes it so difficult to think straight. This is the time when we need to be more cognitive. A lot of people switch off their thoughts and they just act recklessly.

**ASK YOURSELF IF WHAT I AM  
FEELING, THINKING AND DOING  
GOING TO CAUSE ME MORE HARM  
OR HELP ME?**

We need to take time to think and to ask: "Is what I am about to say or what I am thinking and feeling or what I am about to do really helping me or is it harming me? Are my thoughts and actions helping me to keep swimming or are they actually paralyzing me into inactivity and into getting stuck in the problem which I am experiencing?"

Remember resilience is about getting back onto the horse, to keep swimming, to get up after you have fallen. When you have been symbolically thrown off the horse, to get back up and to face the difficulty. You need to ask yourself the question: "Am I harming myself or am I helping myself to keep swimming, to recover as quickly as possible and to get back on track with life." So you need to ask: "Am I **helping** myself? Am I getting back on track with what I am saying and doing or is it actually just **harming** me? Am I getting stuck inside the pain?" By asking these two questions, you are putting yourself back in the driver's seat, back in control of your life. This can help you so much since tragedy and loss and adversity in life truly do throw one out of control.

Our own thoughts can do so much harm and often do not help us. One of the things that can help us having the mind of Christ is spending time in His Word. The Bible tells us: "*Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus.*" The way in which we learn what God's thoughts are, is by spending time in His Word. There are things in the Word of God that will be suited for your particular circumstances and that are calculated to prepare you to endure trials and equip you for life – so spent time in the Word of God. One of the things that is harming us and we should not be doing, is to go to substances or to things that are numbing the pain. That is making us to not be in the reality of the pain.

REMEMBER RESILIENCE IS ABOUT  
GETTING BACK ONTO THE HORSE,  
TO KEEP SWIMMING, TO GET UP  
AFTER YOU HAVE FALLEN.

What is helping us, is focusing on the positive as opposed to only focusing on the negative. Steve Goodier says: *'We have emotional, spiritual and even physical resources at our disposal to get through the hard times. We may get knocked down, but we don't have to stay down – use these resources.'* At times in your life you may have realised that life is getting harder. The Bible refers to these hardships and trials that we have to endure as Christians, as the narrow road the soldier of God has to walk on. All the tools that we have looked at so far, will help us to get through these hardships. It will help us to face the treacherous path that lay ahead of us. The tools that we've looked at so far, include the following:

- To **realise** that bad things as well as good things happen.
- To **focus** on the things that we can change as opposed to the things that we cannot change and to accept the things that we cannot change.
- To **ask** ourselves whether what we do will harm us or help us.

These tools are going to help us to get through the hardships. These tools are going to help us to walk the narrow path, the small, treacherous path that leads to God's kingdom. As we travel on this road, we will have to throw off everything that is hindering us. When we realise that the Christian path is getting narrower and narrower and times are getting tougher and tougher, there is in the Christian walk, despite all of these tools, only one thing that is going to carry us through and that is Jesus Christ. He is going to be our resilience. We need to go to Him, clinging to Him, saying to Him: "You are the golden cord that is going to help me on this road that is so narrow." There is no longer place for all the other things, because the road is getting narrower and narrower.

**WE HAVE EMOTIONAL, SPIRITUAL AND  
EVEN PHYSICAL RESOURCES AT OUR  
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USE THESE RESOURCES.**

We should cast off all the things that we have tried to help us to get through the hardships of life, whether it be substances or self-help talks. Some of these things might help, but in the end, Jesus is the only way.

Romans 8:18 says: *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that can be revealed to us.”* Paul is writing that the hardship we have to endure might seem terrible, but it is nothing in comparison to the prize that lies ahead of us.

True resilience is about courage. Mary Anne Radmacher once wrote: *“Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes the courage is that quiet voice at the end of the day saying: ‘I will try again tomorrow.’”* Christ is the One who will help us to try again tomorrow. Remember what the Bible says in Isaiah 40:29: *“He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, He increases strength.”* James 1:12 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.”*

Sir Winston Churchill said: *‘If you are going through hell, keep going.’* I want to add to this what David said: *“Even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.”*

Remember when you are going through hell, keep going, because God is with you. God has promised that He will hold your hand and that He will go with you through the waters and through the fires. There is a saying that goes: *‘Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not be bent out of shape.’*

**COURAGE DOESN'T ALWAYS ROAR.  
SOMETIMES THE COURAGE IS THAT  
QUIET VOICE AT THE END OF THE  
DAY SAYING: 'I WILL TRY AGAIN  
TOMORROW**





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