



Resilience:

HOW TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE AS A LEADER

By Al Ells, M.C.

Paul did, and you can too!

How *did* he do it?

The Apostle Paul not only survived but *thrived* as a leader and left us an unforgettable legacy in Christ. His journey as an apostle was not an easy one: Paul was tortured, beaten three times, imprisoned, stoned, snake-bitten and shipwrecked (more than once)! He was frequently sleepless, exhausted, without food, thirsty, cold and plagued with infirmity (2 Corinthians 11:22-27). Yet through all of this he was “more than a conqueror.” He was resilient. He was indefatigable, becoming one of the most influential Christian leaders in history. Did God miraculously “fix” him every time, or was there something he learned about how to endure hardships and bounce back?

I can’t help but believe that God was more than gracious to Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9) but I also think he must have learned some things along the way about how to deal with adversity and grow from it. Paul learned *resilience: the ability to experience disappointment, failure and adversity, and bounce back stronger than before.*

Over the years I have collected Biblically based and research-proven strategies for developing resilience. I have compiled the highlights below. See what you think.

Develop the capacity to accept and face down reality.

Research shows that individuals who develop the capacity to discern reality are more resilient. God is a God of reality. His perspective defines reality, our feelings and thoughts don’t (John 8:15-16). My counseling and coaching experience has taught me that most people don’t see issues clearly or identify their own complicity in a matter. You also have blind spots and misperceptions of reality unique to your personal experiences and perspectives. The first hurdle in responding to difficulty is making sure your perception is aligned with God’s perception, including your role in

creating and maintaining it.

Have trusted friends.

If there is one truth I can tell you for sure it's this: Caring and supportive relationships are essential to being resilient. A Fuller Institute of Church Growth study showed that 70 percent of surveyed pastors do not have someone they consider a close friend. Focus on the Family surveys indicate that "most members of the clergy feel isolated, insecure, and rarely affirmed." It's lonely at the top. Trusted friends will tell you the truth about yourself and God's view of the circumstances, and they also encourage. Scripture supports this: Jonathan, David's close friend, "encouraged him in God" (1 Samuel 23:16) when David faced adversity in the wilderness at the hands of Saul. My good friends have been with me through thick and thin. Their support has been integral to my personal and professional achievements.

Control your strong feelings and impulses; don't let them control you.

We all know that adversity, loss, disappointment, failure and difficulty can provoke strong feelings and impulses. Proverbs 16:32 states that "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty. And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city." Every one of us had bouts of anger, bitterness, depression, guilt, fear and shame but you must learn to conquer them. If not controlled these feelings will destroy your ability to bounce back. Get professional help, if necessary, in overcoming and resolving them.

Find meaning in the adversity.

If you can find significance in your difficulty and learn new ways of being and doing you will be more resilient. God is a God of redemption. In years past I had a major failure but God caused it to work out for the good (Romans 8:28). Resilient people find the silver lining in the cloud. If you face failure and disappointment, seek out what God wants you to learn and embrace the new perspective to be had. That's when the hard times yield great riches.

Resilient people let go of the past but hold onto lessons learned.

Sometimes the lesson is about others, but most of the time it is meant for me, myself, and I. As the comic book character Pogo once said, "We have met the enemy and it is us!" Resilience is developed when we face ourselves and see our own shortcomings and sin, and then commit to God and others to be different in the future (James 5:16). Repentance is as necessary a part of letting go and moving on as grieving is. As I've grown older I've recognized the wisdom in facing, grieving and accepting my losses, the things and people I cannot change, and the dreams that will

never come true.

Resilient people forgive, forgive, and forgive!

The research is clear on the negative emotional and physical effects of un-forgiveness on self and others. Letting go of the past in a positive, helpful and resilient manner requires that you not carry resentment and un-forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35). Sometimes, however, the most difficult person to forgive is you. I had a hard time doing this when I failed. To bounce back and move on in the purposes of God you must find release from self-condemnation, self-doubt, shame and guilt.

Resilient individuals “dream again.”

The proof of resiliency is the ability to dream again. Never give up on “apprehending that for which you were apprehended” (Philippians 3:12). Get back up on the horse and ride again! Understand that God created you for a purpose. If you apply your heart, soul and energy into finding and fulfilling your destiny no matter how hard, how long or what the cost, there will be great benefit and fulfillment.

For you to survive and thrive, resilience should become second nature, a reflex, a way of facing and understanding God and the world that become deeply etched into your heart, soul, and spirit.