

Resilient, Part 1 - 1 Peter 1:1-12 - Resilient Hope

Back in 2002 journalist Diane (Koo-Che) Coutu wrote a landmark article in the Harvard Business Review and in it she tells a story about a man she calls Claus, who she worked with at a magazine early in her career. Claus was in his mid-fifties, and he looked the part of the quintessential newsman. He was curious, funny, cynical, and full of life. He was known around the office for his amazing ability to crank out high-quality stories at remarkable speed and for being a great colleague to the other reporters.

But for those who knew Claus well, he wasn't just a great newsman, he was a survivor. Professionally, he had survived three major changes in the magazine's leadership, losing most of his best friends and colleagues in the process. In his home life, two of his children succumbed to incurable illnesses and a third was killed in a traffic accident. And yet, there he was, day after day, doing his job, mentoring younger reporters, talking about novels he was writing. It seemed he was always looking ahead to what the future held.

After telling Claus's story, Koo-Chee asks this question: **Why do some people suffer real hardships and not falter?**

Why is it, to put it differently, that two people can experience the same setback and one is bummed out for a little while and then bounces back whereas the other seems to never be able to fully recover?

These types of questions are ultimately questions about this thing called resilience, in fact, the title of the article is "How Resilience Works". Coutu calls resilience one of the great puzzles of human nature. It is the ability to recover after a setback. Put differently, resilience is an object's ability to regain its original shape after an outside force causes it to become misshapen.

I find the definition given by the American Psychological Association to be helpful. They say, **“Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. It means bouncing back from difficult experiences.”**

And here are some things that I know about you without knowing anything else about you. You have had some difficult experiences in your life (how did he know??). And you will likely face difficult experiences in the future. But you don't want to let those experiences crush you. You want to be able to bounce back, isn't that true? I've never had someone come to me and say, “Pastor, my hope is to someday become the kind of person who just melts when I face any kind of setback.”

We want to be resilient, don't we? I want to be resilient. I want my kids to be resilient, I want you all to be resilient. I want us to be people who know how to bounce back from tough times. More than that, I believe God has built us to be resilient.

I really like burritos, and in order to minimize the negative health effects of my burrito eating, I'm also a runner. Five years ago stepped on a pine cone and twisted my ankle. Never got better. Now it's stiff and sore, but I know I can push through it.

To use an example from a hobby I actually like- soccer coaching. Had this thought come to me out of nowhere early in the season and now I share it at every practice. We check in, make sure everyone's good, and then I say, “We're going to work hard today and we're going to work hard for two reasons, number one, we play the way we practice, and number two when you work hard you give yourself the best chance to be successful.”

The kids practically have those statements memorized by now, but I say them at every practice anyways. And this last week after I said them, I

asked them, "Hey guys, is winning soccer games really important, like really really important?" And they all said, "Yeah!" And I said, "Guys, I love to win and I don't like to lose, but winning soccer games actually isn't super important. But let me ask you this, is doing your best in school really important? Is doing your best to help around the house and be a good son to your parents and a good brother to your siblings, is that important? And they all said yes, albeit a bit less enthusiastically, and we talked about how when we work hard at one thing it helps us to work hard at other things, too, and I believe that's what resilience is all about, pushing forward and working hard in the face of adversity and setbacks.

Talk of resilience, it seems, is everywhere these days. I work with our Next Gen departments so I read a lot about children's ministry and youth ministry and there is a lot of talk in those spaces about building "resilient disciples," young people who will carry their faith into adulthood. It seems everywhere I look I'm seeing articles about what resilient people do and don't do everywhere I look, and even - now I'm what you would call a playoff baseball fan - meaning I only pay attention during the playoffs - but I'm on an email list for the San Francisco Giants and their big theme for the playoffs this year is, you guessed it, resilient. It's getting a lot of attention and for good reason.

I probably don't need to sell you on the benefits of resilience, but they are very real. Harvard Medical School says **resilience is associated with longevity, lower rates of depression, and greater satisfaction with life.**"

So all that you'll get from developing resilience is you'll be more likely to live longer, less likely to be depressed and more likely to be satisfied with your life. Other than that, it's not so great.

Now resilience isn't developed by accident. Like most skills worth having, it takes some work to develop it. And there is plenty in our world that can chip away at our sense of resilience.

But the good news is that there is evidence to suggest that resilience is a skill that can be learned. Certain ones of us may be naturally more or less resilient than others, but wherever we are on that spectrum, resilience is like a muscle that you and I can build. And I believe it's a muscle that our Heavenly Father who loves us desires for us to build.

To go back to Koo-Che's article, she said that as she studied different theories of resilience, she found that almost all of those theories said that resilient people had three things in common:

1. They have a staunch acceptance of reality.
2. They have a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful
3. They have an uncanny ability to improvise.

And because all of that is true I believe that if you are a follower of Jesus Christ you are uniquely situated to become a person of resilience.

Let's go through those three qualities again and filter them through the lens of our faith.

First, I think there are a lot of reasons why people struggle to accept reality. Sometimes reality is scary, sometimes reality doesn't paint us or people we love in a positive light, sometimes telling the truth will cause us to be viewed as disloyal, and the list goes on.

But as followers of Jesus Christ we can be people with a radical commitment to truth telling. We need not be afraid because God's grace is sufficient for us. We need not live in denial because God is doesn't live in the pretend, He is with us in our current reality.

We need not give in to cynical pessimism or naive optimism, but instead with can live with Spirit-led optimistic realism. And if you've never heard of

that before it's because I made it up. We can face reality knowing that the Holy Spirit is present and at work..

Research suggests that most of us, when we slip into denial, it's because it's a coping mechanism. Facing reality without blinking is difficult, draining work. But we have the Spirit of the living God with us, so we can do it. When we give in to deception we remain trapped, but the truth sets us free.

Second, we have a deep belief buttressed by strongly held values that life is meaningful, don't we? When it comes to human beings, we don't believe in accidents. We believe life is precious from womb to tomb and we believe that God has infused our lives with deep meaning, don't we?

Each and every human being is made in the image of God, as the psalmist says, the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it. **Our ancestors in the faith have told us that the chief end of human beings is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.** We're not left scrambling for a sense of meaning, instead that is given to us by God. Some of the greatest stories of resilience in the history of the world come from people who were able to accept the difficulty of their current reality and at the same time find great meaning in it.

Viktor Frankl, in his classic work *Man's Search for Meaning* about his time surviving a Nazi concentration camp says in the book that We must never forget that we may find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, and he talks in the book about how part of how he survived the horrors he saw was by finding meaning in it.

And then third, the ability to improvise, or make do with what we've got. If we believe God is present and at work, that means we can remain creative and open-minded, prepared to face whatever challenges come our way with a combination of faith, grit, and optimistic realism.

So for these next nine weeks, we're going to do some resilience training together so that we can be resilient people for the glory of God because we live in a world where resilience is not just a luxury, but a necessity. And our guide for our training is going to be one of Jesus's best friends, the apostle Peter.

We're going to be studying the book of 1 Peter, which is found near the end of your Bible and was written just a few short decades after Jesus's death and resurrection.

We'll be studying 1 Peter line by line, so if this has felt a bit like a low quality TED Talk up to this point, I promise it will start to feel more like a sermon from here on out. So I'd like to invite you to open to the book of 1 Peter in your Bible or Bible-equipped mobile device. If you're using the Bible underneath the seat in front of you you'll want to look for page 1014.

1 Peter is an amazing book, it's one of my favorites in all of Scripture. It was written, as I just mentioned by Peter, and it was written to a mix of Jews and Gentiles living in five different provinces in Asia Minor. These people were trying to figure out how to follow Jesus in a pre-Christian world, in other words, a world where Christianity had yet to become a significant social influence.

As we come to this letter, nearly 2000 years after it was written, we are on the other side of the coin. Most people who study these things say that most of the western world is now post-Christian, and that means we today are left asking the question, what does it look like to faithfully follow Jesus in a world where the influence that Christianity holds over society is waning, and where being a Christian no longer comes with a social benefit, but instead may come with a social cost?

1 Peter addresses questions of Christian identity and how to engage with a hostile world. It talks about the goodness and holiness of God and invites us to live in particular ways in response. This is a letter written to people

who were trying to follow Jesus in an environment where they weren't facing government-level persecution, but they were facing social tensions because of their faith, so it has a lot to say about preserving under trials and criticism. As we continue to find our way in the post-Christian world, I believe there is no shortage of divinely-inspired wisdom for us to find in this letter.

-More frequent OT references than any NT book except Revelation

So with that, we are going to begin our nine-part series through the book of 1 Peter called Resilient. **And as we progress through this series, we want to invite you to subscribe to text message updates where three times a week we will send you Scripture, quotes, links, and other material to help you grow in your resilience. You can subscribe to that be texting the word PETER to (855) 475-8095.** We'll also have other resources available throughout the series, including writing pieces written by our own Bridgeway writer's group, at www.bridgeway.church/peter.

Here we go, we've got 12 verses to look at today, we'll spend more time on the beginning of the passage than the end and I've entitled this message Resilient Hope, and I want to give you the fill in the blank if you're following along on your bulletin or the app. We can resilient hope because, **God is with us in the struggle.** Now, 1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

Peter identifies himself as the author of the letter and he notes that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. This is, in a sense, like a law enforcement officer showing their badge. In the first century Church an apostle was someone with authority to bear authentic testimony to the life and significance of Jesus Christ. They had a unique level of spiritual authority.

And he calls his recipients “elect exiles” and he names five provinces in Asia Minor. These provinces cover some 129,000 square miles and they are listed in the order that a mail carrier would have encountered them after disembarking at a port along the Black Sea. Some of these provinces were large cities, others were more rural, and throughout these areas there was a mix of Gentiles and Jews.

And this phrase “elect exiles” is notable. They are elect, meaning they have been called by God, but they are exiles in the sense that they are not in their true home. And I want to draw your attention to one more note from verse 1: It says they are elect exiles of the dispersion, meaning they had been spread out. Around that time the Roman Emperor Claudius was engaged in a policy of urbanization through colonization, meaning he would take groups of Roman citizens and have them move to different colonies for the purpose of populating the new cities and establishing them as Roman settlements.

Some scholars believe that Peter is drawing on that reality that the recipients of his letter were facing to make a point about their spiritual condition. It’s as though he is saying, “You know how you don’t really feel at home where you live? This planet isn’t your true home.” And that remains true of us today, right?

We are elect exiles, chosen by God, and God is with us in the struggle. We’re living here on earth, but we know this is not our home. Then in verse two we see the basis for that identification.

according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

We are called elect exiles by the foreknowledge of God, meaning it has happened by the preordained plan of God. It has been the plan of God

from before the foundation of the world to call a community of people to himself. This isn't a surprise, it's not an accident. God didn't just set the world in motion and hope for the best, He had a plan from the beginning. And that plan included calling us to Himself, and then

Sanctifying us with the Spirit- to sanctify is to make holy. It is the Holy Spirit's work in our lives that opens our eyes to reality of who God is and opens our hearts to faith in Him. In Colossians 1 Paul writes that we have **been transferred from the domain of darkness and into the Kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.** This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit transfers us from darkness to light. He makes us God's people. To paraphrase language from Ezekiel 36, He removes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh. You want a reason for hope? You are being formed and shaped by the Spirit of God. And He finishes what He starts.

And this sanctification is demonstrated by **obedience to Jesus Christ.** I was thinking about this this week. Obedience is not a fun word. No one includes obedience on their list of interests and hobbies. I mean, for most of us, we'll be obedient if we have to or we'll be obedient because we don't want to rock the boat, but no one just naturally gets excited about obedience.

Why is that? I think we bristle at the thought of obedience for two other reasons, and there may be others, but those two are **number one, nearly all of us have had a negative experience with required obedience.** Whether that was with our parents, or a boss, or a pastor, or a government official or whoever, we've had a situation in our lives where demonstrating obedience was unpleasant. Maybe they made you follow pointless rules or maybe they were lazy or hypocritical.

And number two, because we have been so baked in the radical individualism of western culture, most of us in our heart of hearts believe we know better than anyone else when it comes to running our lives, and we get a sense of identity out of personal autonomy. We get a

sense of identity out of our personal autonomy. I'm the boss of me. I call the shots. I make the decisions. We like that feeling.

But what about obedience to someone who knows us better than we know ourselves and knows how life works best better than we can every hope to?

And what if autonomy isn't all that it's cracked up to be? If I'm my own highest authority, where can I turn when I fail?

Obedience is only a problem when our leaders aren't competent. Obedience to a leader who is radically committed to our good is a gift. Jesus is that kind of leader. He is infinitely wise and full of infinite grace. We get so judgmental and defensive with each other, Jesus is not that way. See, there's always going to be tension if we view obedience as an obligation when it's meant as an invitation into how life works best.

I think about the words of Jesus in Matthew 7. He says **whoever hears my commands and does them is like a wise man who built his house upon a rock. And the rains fell, and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock.**

What does that sound like to you? Resilience! When we hear His words and put them into practice we become resilient. When we die to ourselves and live for him we find true life and we become resilient.

For obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

In the Old Testament in Exodus 24, Israel is gathered together and God is making his covenant with them. Moses tells everyone what God has said, the people are all fired up and they say they'll do all that the Lord has spoken. Moses writes down the words, young men are sent out to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings. Moses takes some of the blood of the oxen from the peace offerings and throws some of it on the altar and then he sprinkles some of the blood over the people and that confirmed the

covenant between God and Israel. And everyone immediately ran home and put their clothes in the wash.

We do not literally have the blood of Jesus sprinkled on us, but that is a common metaphor for the cleansing of sin when we come to faith.

Hebrews 10:22 says, **“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience,”** Within the sacrificial system, sin and death are transferred to the sacrificial victim, and purity and life are given to those who receive the benefits of the sacrifice. So, by declaring that we are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, Peter is saying that Jesus has wiped away our sin through His life and death.

Why can you have resilient hope? The confident expectation of future events? Because if your faith is in Christ you have been chosen by God before the foundation of the world, the Holy Spirit lives inside you, you have been invited into a beautiful life of obedience to Jesus Christ, your heart has been sprinkled by His blood and you have been made clean. I don't know of a better, more secure reason for hope anywhere on Earth.

You do not need to live with the fear and insecurity that comes with personal autonomy. There is one who is good, and kind, and powerful, and wise and He is on your side, He is with you in the struggle and He graciously invites you and me into a life of obedience.

We've made it through the introduction to the letter, that's two verses down and we've got ten to go so we're going to need to pick up the pace.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Why has God called us to be born again? Because of his great mercy. It's not because you're awesome and it's certainly not because I'm awesome. God is merciful. When you feel like you've got your act together, God is merciful. More importantly, when you don't, God is merciful.

And I want to point something else out here: The text uses the phrase **our Lord Jesus Christ** and it's that very statement that lied at the heart of so much of the tension that the original recipients of this letter faced.

Because if Jesus is Lord, Caesar isn't. And a person who claims Jesus as Lord isn't going to worship the local deities connected with the Greek or Roman polytheism. And listen, we live in a world today where we might not have literal false gods, and we might not use this language, but there is false worship going on everywhere and we live in a culture that is flush with secular religions that seek our devotion. And I believe it's just as counterculture today to say Jesus is Lord and really live like it as it was back then.

You have been born again to a living hope through Jesus, verse 4,

to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Remember, Peter is writing during a time where Christians faced considerable persecution and social stigma. It's very possible that some had even been rejected by their families and that they had subsequently lost their family inheritance, and Peter is saying you have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, and it's not gathering dust in a bank or a storage unit, it is kept in heaven for you. This is the best kind of inheritance you can imagine.

It is imperishable, meaning it is free from death and decay.

It is undefiled meaning it is free from moral impurity,

and unfading it is free from the natural ravages of time, I don't care who your granddaddy is, he can't leave you an inheritance like that.

See, resilient people know the hope of heaven. But that hope doesn't lead to escapism where we're just waiting for next life. It helps us understand that eternal life, life in the Kingdom of God, begins now and because God

is with us in the struggle every moment is infused with meaning and purpose.

Verse 6

In this (hope) you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

This is hope that is resilient in the face of trials. And think about it, what is a trial? It's a test to see if something can hold up to strain. I think about clinical trials when it comes to medication where it is determined if medication actually does what its makers hope it can do. Or I think about various trial launches done by NASA during the space race, the purpose of which was to see if a space capsule can hold up with integrity under the grueling conditions of a launch and subsequent space flight.

Peter says that trials are very real and that they may be so severe that they cause grief. Remember, part of being resilient is accepting reality. But look at the analogy he uses. Trials can refine us like heat refines gold, and this is imagery that is found throughout the Old Testament. It is through the refining process that the imperfections rise to the surface to be scraped off by the goldsmith resulting in a more pure piece of gold. In the same way, when we are resilient in clinging to our hope and faith in the midst of trials, it even purifies us and brings honor to our Lord. Another aspect of resilience, finding purpose. There it is. Verse 8

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This is the essence of the Christian faith, is it not? We do not see Jesus. There was a time in his life when Peter did see Jesus, but the readers of this letter had not, we have not. But we read the stories, we believe in Him, we know Him through His Word, we trust His promises and what does that give us? Joy, even joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, and the outcome of our faith is our salvation. For Peter salvation is both the deliverance from earthly struggles and trials and final salvation.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

This salvation is the subject of much Old Testament prophecy, passages like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 come to mind. Peter is reminding his readers as he reminds us today that they are part of a great tradition that began centuries ago with the Old Testament prophets, prophets who in some cases did not know the events about which they wrote. Much like we long to know when Jesus will return, the prophets of old longed to know when the Messiah would come for the first time. And while it was that same Spirit of God that inspired their writings, the Old Testament prophets, of course, went to their grave still wondering when the promises they wrote of would be fulfilled.

It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

God revealed to Old Testament prophets that they weren't writing for themselves, but for future generations, and the prophecies they wrote about had not been fulfilled. That which the prophets predicted has come

true in the person and work of Jesus, and now those things have been shared with Peter's readers by those who first shared the gospel with them.

And then there is this odd phrase, "things into which angels long to look." What the heck does that mean? I want you to consider the circumstances of the recipients of this letter. They were essentially refugees, living in a place that was not their home. They were facing enormous social consequences for following Jesus. Some of them may have been cut off from family, subject to mocking and scorn for neighbors, perhaps they even lost jobs or sources of income. They were grieved by various trials. No doubt their hope was waning.

And Peter is saying, you may not feel privileged, but consider the glorious truth that you know. Jesus the savior of the world has come, He died on the cross, He rose from the dead, He sent His Holy Spirit to live in you, He has assured for you an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. This is the message the prophets wrote about. This is the truth that angels longed to know from eternity past, and it has been revealed to you. You are more privileged than you could every imagine.

And now consider your own life, your own very real struggles, your own very real suffering. And consider the truth that you know. You are a child of God. You have been saved by the blood of God's own Son. You know a truth that our forefathers in the faith, the writers of the Old Testament, longed to know. You know the truths that angels longed to know. You know that your sufferings are temporary and your inheritance is sure. And so you can have hope. You can know that God is with you in the struggle, you can know that He gives you strength for the day and bright hope for tomorrow, you can know that you have been called into the community of faith that is the church and you can be a person of resilient hope because Jesus is alive and His Spirit lives in you. Amen?

This is going to be a great series. Be sure to come back next week for part two. Let's pray.