

Building Resilient Practices: A Tool for Reflection



Still Waters Global

behavioral health care for global workers

Building Resilient Practices: A Tool for Reflection

Still Waters Global LLC
Montreat, NC
USA

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In this training, we want to help you develop practices that will enhance resilience. We also have found that understanding resilience can help you to be leaders who will support resilience in the people you lead.

10 Important Resilience Factors

1. Sturdy Role Models

Those who do difficult work need sturdy role models. Resilient role models provide us with a way to help us think through how to respond to difficult situations that arise in our work.

Some role models may be leaders or outstanding examples we've never met, but whose methods we have followed and who have adopted healthy lifestyles or values systems. Think through your role models. Distinguish in your own mind between a "mentor" and a "role model." A mentor is a more experienced person who advises you. A role model is someone whom you look to as an example (so the mentor may also be a role model). Here we are talking about role models.

Questions:

What role models can you think of in relation to what you are going through now? How did they help you in the past? How can their influence help you now? Why have you selected the role models you have? Will this person's example help you weather difficult life circumstances? If so, what resilience factors have you observed in them as they have negotiated difficult life passages?

Although the term "role model" is a new one, the *concept* is very old. Reflect on the following verses from the New Testament as they relate to the concept of role model and jot down your thoughts.

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. (James 5:10-11)

For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. (John 13:15)

Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me--practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)

2. Cognitive Flexibility

People who are flexible in their thinking can better adapt to adverse or rapidly changing environments. This includes learning through failure, finding innovative solutions to difficult circumstances and problems, and the ability to adjust in unexpected adverse circumstances. Cognitive flexibility is indicated by a sense of humor, by the ability to be grateful in difficult circumstances, by the ability to forgive. A cognitively flexible person does not practice "black-and-white thinking."

Take a moment to appraise your own ability to be cognitively flexible. Now think about a real life circumstance that illustrates your self-assessment. Be as honest as you can, and there's no requirement to share your answer with anyone else.

Question:

As you think about the situation above, reflecting on what you have learned about cognitive flexibility, is there anything you would do differently to produce a better outcome?

Like the concept of role models, cognitive flexibility is a modern concept that overlaps with ways of thinking that are exemplified in Scripture. The following are two passages you might use to think about cognitive flexibility in the Christian life. Read and think about these passages and consider how they might be used to understand cognitive flexibility in your own life, especially as this applies to disaster response work.

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear, I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (From the story of Joseph in Genesis 50:20-21)

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.” (John 12:27-30)

Many of the psalms reflect an “active problem solving” attitude. Take time to read these psalms and think through the role of the Christian spiritual life in our ability to find solutions to difficult problems. Try to state your understanding of active problem solving for the Christian who is living “in Christ.”

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah
Come, behold the works of the Lord,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
“Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”
The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Psalm 46

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For it is you who light my lamp;
the Lord my God lightens my darkness.
For by you I can run against a troop,
and by my God I can leap over a wall.
This God—his way is perfect;
the word of the Lord proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

Psalm 18:28-30

4. Realistic Optimism

It's easy to see that unrealistic optimism in the face of difficult circumstances could lead to more trouble – especially if the assessment of the situation or threat was not taken seriously. However, realistic optimism has had proven benefits in building resilience in challenging times. Realistic optimism can also help combat the effects of learned helplessness or times when you may feel stuck.

Questions:

Think of some positive things that you have said to yourself or others when going through challenging times. How can you apply this more positive mindset to the current situation? Think of role models who have positive things to say that lift your mood or boost your motivation level. How can you “tune-in” to those voices when dealing with stressful or difficult situations?

Scriptures for reflection on realistic optimism (and for the Christian, hope).

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 6:19-20)

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. (Romans 8:22-26)

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

5. Social Support

Those who have healthy and consistent social support from family, friends, colleagues and others will have more resilience than others who tend to be loners. Social support can also be improved by thinking through a support “safety net” for yourself. This usually means identifying an individual or small group who is there to provide encouragement and moral support while you go through the more difficult times in your work.

Questions:

What can others provide for you that will help you to keep moving forward?

How can you find at least one or two people who can provide that [moral or emotional support] for you while you work to achieve your goals?

Scriptures for reflection on social support

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23-25)

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42)

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. (Romans 12:15-16)

6. Inner Moral Compass

Those who have developed a strong set of moral convictions, that are not easily shaken when difficult times arise, tend to be more resilient. For many people faith and religious / spiritual beliefs help them to withstand difficulties in life.

Questions:

What beliefs or convictions that you have held previously have you found reliable in difficult or ambiguous situations in the past? How do you draw on or implement those beliefs during adversity? Inner moral compass and cognitive flexibility might seem to conflict. Do you think this is the case? If so, explain why and how you might mitigate the conflict. If not, explain how you avoid the possibility of rigid thinking while still following your inner moral compass.

Scriptures for reflection on Inner Moral Compass

Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times! (Psalm 106:3)

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart. (Psalm 15:1-2)

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (1 Timothy 1:5)

. . . but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:15-16)

7. Religious and Spiritual Resources

Research on resilience clearly identifies religion and spirituality as a resilience factor for many people who have been resilient during stressful times. For some people, their religion is very reassuring to them, and the act of practicing their religion is something that is strengthening and peace giving. Resilience researchers also speak of spirituality, referring to something less clearly defined than a formal religious point of view. Despite common belief, it is controversial whether or not spirituality is better than religion in helping people cope with difficult circumstances.

Samaritan's Purse is an explicitly Christian organization that accepts employees from a wide variety of Christian backgrounds. As you think about your own relationship with God, would you put yourself more in the category of religious (finding great value in regular Christian practices) or spiritual (focused more on your personal awareness of God's presence in your life)? Another way of describing these points of view are referring to "extrinsic religion" and "intrinsic religion." Extrinsic religion can be seen as lifeless, but on the other hand, habitually involving yourself in Christian practices such as daily prayer, attending worship services, and taking communion are very helpful to many people. Intrinsic religion focuses on an inner awareness of God and a personal commitment to living day by day in relationship with God. This can be seen as overly subjective by some, but for others this is also strengthening and life-giving.

It is clear that faith in God reinforces many other resilience factors, including moral compass, social support, ability to find meaning and purpose in life, and even cognitive flexibility.

Questions:

What spiritual practices do you engage in that help you to manage life and difficulties? How can those be strengthened?

What part of your spiritual heritage can be applied to your current situation?

As you have developed in your spiritual life over time, what new insights, disciplines or practices have you found useful in maintaining your personal resilience?

Scriptures for reflection on Religious and Spiritual Resources

For God alone my soul waits in silence;
from him comes my salvation.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken. (Psalm 62:1-2)

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices! (Psalm 37:7)

8. Physical, Mental and Emotional Training

If you prepare and are intentional about strengthening mental, emotional, physical and social areas of life, you will probably do better when facing opposition or relational difficulties. You may want to explore areas of training or personal development that will aid you in attaining your resilience goals.

Questions:

What are you doing now to build physical and mental stamina for your job?

How might you learn to build emotional intelligence or manage conflict (for example)?

Scriptures for reflection on Physical, Mental and Emotional Training

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

9. Ability to Identify Meaning and Purpose, Even in Times of Adversity.

Those who find meaning in a variety of adversities are often more able to cope with other difficulties later in life. It can be helpful for you to reflect on previous times of adversity in order to surface meaning.

Question:

Is there any meaning that you can perceive now in terms of the adversity that you went through (or are going through now)?

Scriptures for reflection on Ability to Identify Meaning and Purpose

The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands. (Psalm 138:8)

I cry out to God Most High,
to God who fulfills his purpose for me. (Psalm 57:2)

10. Taking Responsibility for Personal Emotional Well-Being

Those who take responsibility for their own personal emotional well-being do better than those who do not take responsibility or who delay pursuit of well-being for themselves or their work teams. This concept is also known as "self-efficacy." People who are resilient are self-starters. They're people who appropriately take initiative toward getting back on track when facing adversity.

Questions:

As you think about this idea of taking responsibility, how does this relate to the notion of seeking social support? How does taking responsibility relate to reliance upon God?

Here are some passages of Scripture that touch upon the theme of taking responsibility as it relates to our relationship to God. Read each one and after reflection, write down any thoughts the verse stimulates regarding this theme.

Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he is and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:12)

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)

What steps will you take in terms of developing sound emotional well-being?
