

BUILDING RESILIENCE IN OUR LIVES

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Outline

- **What is resilience? Definition of resilience**
- **Why do we need resilience?**
- **What are the elements which make up resilience? (Discuss)**
- **What do you need to do to nurture and develop YOUR resilience? (Private reflection)**

1. What is resilience? What does it look like in a person or group of persons?

Illustrations

Mo Farah, the athlete

At the Rio Olympics in 2016, Mo Farah, the U.K. athlete, was defending the 10,000 metres title he won at the London 2012 Olympics. Farah tripped and fell partway through the race. Despite that he still managed to recover and beat Kenya's Paul Kipngetch Tanui by half a second in a flat-out sprint at the end. The defending champion admitted that he thought his Olympic dream was over after he tripped and fell behind. But he drew on his inner reserves and years of discipline and training to catch up with the leaders and then to win. That's resilience!

Nelson Mandela, the politician

Mandela served 27 years in prison. Amid growing domestic and international pressure, and with fears of a racial civil war, President F. W. de Klerk released him in 1990. Mandela and de Klerk negotiated an end to apartheid and organised the 1994 multiracial general election in which Mandela led the ANC to victory and became President. As President he did not seek vengeance but led a peaceful transition to black rule. He served as President of South Africa from 1994 to 1999, and, unusually, gave up power with good grace. A lesser man would have caved in to self-interest and vengeance. That's resilience!

Paul, the apostle and missionary

2 Corinthians 11:23- 29

'... I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?'

Yet, he persevered to the end. Down but never out. That's perseverance.

Jesus Christ, Son of God and Messiah

The ultimate example is our Lord Jesus Christ, who persevered to the end, despite injustice, torture, and crucifixion. Philippians 2:5-11

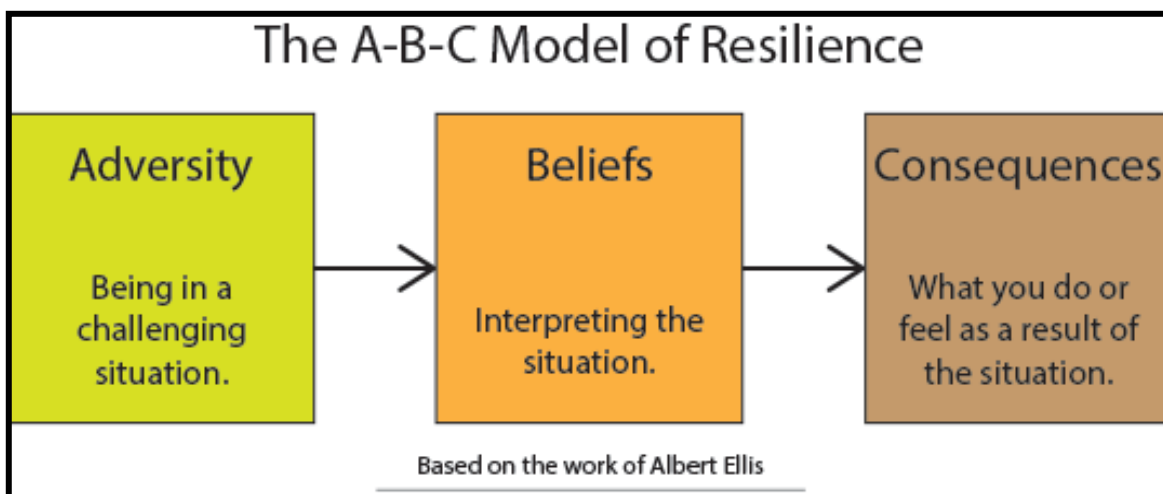
'In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!'

Definition of resilience

1. Speedy recovery from problems: the ability to recover quickly from setbacks
2. Elasticity: like the ability of some material to spring back quickly into shape after being bent, stretched, or deformed
3. The capacity to prepare for disruptions, recover from shocks and stresses, and adapt and grow from a disruptive experience
4. A set of inner resources, social competencies, and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, but recover, or even thrive after stressful events, and also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000).
5. Resilience itself could be seen as the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation in the face of challenging or threatening circumstances (Veselksa, Geckova, Orosova, Gajdosova, van Dijk, & Reijneveld, 2008).

2. Why do we need resilience?

- Because it is rare for individuals never to be confronted with adversity or challenging circumstances during the course of their lifetime
- People who are resilient tend to be able to harness their inner strengths and resources to rebound quickly and more fully from setbacks



3. What are the elements which make up personal resilience?

Discuss in your group (5-10 mins)

How do you become more resilient? There are no '10 steps to resilience'! However, when you look at the lives of resilient Christians/people, they show a number of the characteristics in the following areas:

- Spiritual
- Social
- Physical
- Psychological and emotional

i. **SPIRITUAL**

- **Resilient people think and live with the big picture of life**

Their theology, worldview, purpose in life, values, and motivation reflect this. Put in another way. What drives you as a person? What is your purpose in life?

Thomas Merton: *If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me **what I think I am living for**, in detail, and ask me **what I think is keeping me from living fully the thing I want to live for**. Between these two answers you can determine the identity of any person. The better answer he has, the more of a person he is.'*

Apostle Paul: *One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil.3:13-14)*

This is where resilient people begin: with the biggest possible picture of things they hear God speaking into their lives. Having a clear sense of purpose, clear values, drive and direction help individuals to persist and achieve in the face of setbacks. They can assess setbacks within the framework of a broader perspective. Life is a race, a journey, a marathon, to which God wants you to **finish well**.

- **A person's worldview or beliefs** have a great bearing on the way someone reacts and deals with anxiety. What you think affect how you respond and act. If God is seen as all-powerful, loving, good, and in ultimate control of the universe (which is the Biblical teaching), then there is a basis for trust and security even in the midst of turmoil. If we believe that God forgives when we confess our sins, that he promises eternal life, and that he meets all our needs on earth, then there is less cause for anxiety or depression or fear.

- **Resilient people have faith in God**

What is your theology of God? Is He sovereign, wise, almighty, all powerful and good? What do you believe about God and his relationship to you? Is He near to you? Does He love you and care about you? If you believe this of your God, then you have confidence to deal with what life throws at you. There is the possibility of feeling competent in coping with stressful situations. A sense of strong self-esteem is important to feeling resilient. These are often tied to what you think about God.

'Internal locus of evaluation' describes the way in which a person is able to evaluate information, rely on their own judgment and to make their own decisions. A person

with an external locus of evaluation will be too dependent on the opinions, advice and guidance of others. If your 'internal locus of evaluation' is anchored in God and, then you have a basis in which to make wise judgements.

ii. SOCIAL

• Resilient people are part of a community

Do you have a support network and cultivate relationships with your family, church, friends and colleagues? We need both personal and professional relationships in order to thrive. Resilient people are prepared to give as well as **receive** support. It is harder to overcome adverse situations by ourselves. That is why, in general, married people survive better, and having trusted colleagues at work make the workplace more bearable.

Mental health problems and loneliness in communities are the two biggest social issues encountered by Church of England clergy, a new research reveals (*Church Urban fund, 2018*). There was an increase of 20% in six years of those reporting mental health problems as a major or significant problem in their local area, rising from 40% in 2011 to 60% in 2017, the findings show. Is there a connection between mental health problems and loneliness?

• Resilient people serve others; self-focus is destructive

Resilient people generally engage in some form of service which gives them a sense of value and meaning. Service, within reasonable limits, is an outward sign that they matter, even if in a small way.

iii. PHYSICAL

• **Resilient people build and train themselves:** physically as well as emotionally and spiritually: good nutrition, regular exercise, enough sleep, relaxation. Taking care of your body is good common sense and proper stewardship of what God has given you. It does involve self-control and discipline.

The commitment of time by older people (aged 55 and over) to social relationships, personal interests and the simple health giving pleasures of taking a walk or sleeping well do reduce risk of mental problems (*Mental Health Foundation, 2017*)

iv. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL

• Resilient people put the past behind them

Resilient people understand the importance of repairing the past. Unresolved guilt, broken and unhealed relationships, and unrepented sins can drag us down. We need to practise repentance and learn from the past. However, they do not live in the past; they accept God's forgiveness and press on with life. They take a new perspective and self-awareness arising from proper, but not excessively introspective, reflection.

Resilient people are quick to forgive.

• Resilient people accept change

They find ways to become comfortable with change by cultivating the right attitude. It may be impossible to change a set of circumstances but there is always the possibility, with God's help, to change the way we view those circumstances.

Flexibility and adapting to changing situations which are beyond our control are essential to maintaining resilience. Resilient individuals are able to cope well with change and their recovery from its impact tends to be quicker.

- **Resilient people accept who they are**

The Mental Health Foundation report (2017) on the mental state of the nation lists, 'accepting who you are' among the 10 ways to look after your mental health. This is borne out by innumerable studies, common sense and our own observations.

- **Resilient people form their identity apart from their job or profession or role in life**

800 professional sportsmen and women responded to a recent State of Sport investigation (2018) into life after sport. Key findings:

- More than half have had concerns about their mental or emotional wellbeing since retiring
- Many report a loss of identity after retiring - experiencing "loss", "regret" and "devastation"
- They struggle to move on in life. This struggle to find a new purpose can lead to more serious problems such as depression, self-harm, addiction and financial problems.
- Even the best-prepared athletes struggle - retirement can be like a grieving process

"The biggest thing I felt was a loss of identity and purpose," said Kelly Holmes, double Olympic champion, who has spoken about the depression she had after retiring in 2014. "Suddenly the structure, the people you call on, it all goes. But with no idea of what you want to do and who you want to be and that's a really lonely place and I got quite depressed around that time."

But resilient Christians are 'called people' who understand stewardship, i.e. nothing belongs to us - careers, our assets, our natural and spiritual gifts, our health. Are these things owned, or merely managed in the name of the One who gave them? When driven people lose these things it is a major crisis. When called people lose them, nothing has changed.

Awareness of our own identity. The inability to separate role from person is often a problem. What they do is indistinguishable from what they are. That is why people who have wielded great power find it very difficult to give it up, and will fight to the death to retain it (e.g. Robert Mugabe, Jacob Zuma). Yet change will come. It is why retirement is difficult for many men and women. And it explains why a mother may suffer depression when her last child has left the home.

E. Stanley Jones, Methodist missionary to India, was an aged man, when he had a debilitating stroke that left him immobile and virtually speechless. But not faithless. *"I need no outer props to hold up my faith", he wrote, "for my faith holds me".*

"I was talking to a bishop who had retired. He was frustrated. When he was no longer in the limelight of the bishopric, he was frustrated and told me so. He wanted to know the secret of victorious living. I told him it was in self-surrender. The difference was in giving up the innermost self to Jesus. The difference was in the

texture of the things that held him. When the outer strands were broken by retirement, the inner stands were not enough to hold him. Apparently he had a case of 'limelight-itis' instead of a case of surrender to Jesus. Fortunately, with me, surrender to Jesus was the primary thing, and when the outer strands were cut by this stroke, my life didn't shake."

4. What do you need to do to nurture and develop YOUR resilience?

Take a few minutes alone and jot down what immediately comes to you.

(Private reflection – but note down your immediate impressions)

- Are there any skills you need to learn to help you build up your resilience – time management skills, stress management, dealing with anxiety, etc.?
- Are there relationships you need to repair or to develop?
- Beneath the surface, what is your relationship with Jesus really like?

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