

July 14, 2019

Job 2:7-10; 19:25 (Good News Translation)

2 Corinthians 11:24-33 (New International Version)

Love 301: “Wholehearted: Cultivating a Resilient Spirit and Letting Go of Numbing and Powerlessness”

The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

Resilience – the ability to overcome adversity has been a growing topic of study since the early 1970’s. And, I think this is because we all have an interest and stake in knowing why and how some folks are better at bouncing back from hardship than others. We crave and need information on why is it that some people can cope with stress and trauma in a way that allows them to move forward in their lives, and why other people appear more affected and stuck.

Why and how is it that some people can live wholehearted lives despite adversity? There are “protective factors” that keep people bouncy. Current research shows these five most common factors of resilient people:

1. They are resourceful and have good problem-solving skills.
2. They are more likely to ask for help.
3. They hold the belief that they can do something that will help them to manage their feelings and cope.
4. They have a social support available to them.
5. They are connected with others, such as family or friends

There are more factors, but these are the big ones!

Researcher Brene Brown found out that the very foundation of the “protective factors” – was spirituality. In other words, the recognition in resilient people that we are connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings us a sense of perspective, meaning, and purpose to our lives.

Spiritual people can and do live in hope. And this hope is something we can control, because it is not an emotion. Rather, it is a way of thinking (it is a cognitive process). So then, hope happens when we:

1. Have the ability to set realistic goals. In other words, "*I know where I want to go.*"
2. We are able to figure out how to achieve those goals, which needs to include staying flexible and developing alternative routes. In other words, "*I am persistent, and I can tolerate disappointment and try again.*"
3. We believe in ourselves "*I can do this with the help of God.*"

So, hope is a combination of setting goals, having the tenacity and perseverance to pursue them, and believing in our God-given abilities.

The good news is: hope is learned and that we have the ability to teach our children how to hope. It's not a crapshoot. It's a conscious choice.

Now, let's talk for a second about how our culture creeps in on hopeful thinking, if we are not careful. The current cultural belief is that everything should be fun, fast, and easy. Yet, the problem comes, when we realize this is inconsistent with hopeful thinking. We can catch ourselves saying or thinking, "*This is supposed to be easy; it's not worth the effort. This should be easier; it's only hard and slow because I'm not good at it.*" In contrast, hopeful self-talk sound more like this, "*This is tough, but with God's help I can do it.*"

Yet, there is another issue that can sneak into our hopeful thinking and that is "*It is never fun, fast and easy.*" We develop a hopeful mind-set when we understand that some worthy endeavors will be difficult and time consuming and not enjoyable at all. Yet, hope also requires us to understand that just because the process of

reaching a goal happens to be fun, fast, and easy doesn't mean that it has less value than a difficult goal.

Tolerance for disappointment, determination, and a belief in self are the heart of hope.

Now, let's get into how we get to feeling powerless. Power is the ability to effect change. We all need to believe that we can effect change if we want to live and love with our whole hearts. Hopelessness leads to powerlessness.

Another important factor in keeping the "never good enough" gremlins away is for us to practice critical awareness. Which is all about, checking the messages and expectations that make us feel inadequate. This is nothing less than a major battle due to us living in a carefully edited, overproduced, and Photoshopped world. If we want to cultivate a resilient spirit and stop falling prey to comparing our ordinary lives with manufactured images, we need to know how to reality check what we see. We need to move beyond the \$200 billion a year industry, and 3,000 ads we see each day.

And, we can do this, by frequently and regularly asking ourselves these questions:

1. Is what I'm seeing real? Do these images convey real life or fantasy?
2. Do these images reflect healthy, wholehearted living? Or do they turn my life, my body, my family, and my relationships into objects and commodities?
3. Who benefits by my seeing these images and feeling bad about myself? (Remember, it is usually about money and control)

Critical awareness is not only essential to resilience, it is also key to shame resilience. We need to take the zoom lens off the camera

where we only see ourselves: *our muffin-top, just my family is messy, loud, and out of control. Something is wrong with me. I am alone.*

Rather, we need to use a wide-angle lens to look at life. Then, we will see many people in the same struggle we are. *You too! I'm normal. I thought it was just me.*

Once we start to see the big picture, we are better able to reality-check our shame triggers and the messages and expectations that we're never good enough.

Critical awareness of what is true and what is not, and reality checking is what spirituality is about. And when we practice spirituality we move toward truth and away from falsehood, and receive perspective, meaning, and purpose.

Lastly, I would like to look at numbing and taking the edge off. For along with hopelessness and powerlessness, numbing cause resilience to vaporize and disappear. Rather, in contrast to numbing, we need to try to feel the feelings, stay mindful about numbing behaviors, and try to lean into the discomfort of hard emotions.

Most of us numb ourselves to some degree. When we feel vulnerable, in pain, and experiencing discomfort we numb to take the edge off. Numbing is more than a bit of a problem, especially if we do it chronically (which is addiction), and in trying to avoid painful emotions we fail to experience positive emotions. We cannot selectively numb emotions. We anesthetize with a whole bunch of stuff: alcohol, food, drugs, sex, relationships, money, work, caretaking, gambling, staying busy, affairs, chaos, shopping, planning, perfectionism, constant change, and the Internet.

Brene Brown made me laugh when she said, “Today, I am dealing with vulnerability and uncertainty with an apple fritter, a beer, and a cigarette, and spending seven hours on Facebook.” I laughed till I realized that I am dealing with the vulnerability and uncertainty of my upcoming art shows with root beer, chocolate, vacuuming and straightening everything, and by working, working, and working some more.

Wholehearted people are not immune to numbing. Yet, the difference with wholehearted folks is that they are aware of the dangers of numbing and have developed the ability to feel their way through high-vulnerability experiences.

With sores all over his body, and everyone around him telling him it was his fault, along with a nagging wife who told him over and over to curse God. Job sits down to scrape his sores, and then he rises to stand on the hopeful promises that God will come to his defense, that he will see God with his own eyes, and God will not be a stranger. Resilient was Job because of his practice of spirituality. That’s how he was able to declare, “I know my Redeemer lives.”

And then, we have the apostle Paul, and we thought we had a rough day or month or year. What a list, what a set of opportunities to feel hopeless, powerless, and filled with shame. But, instead of numbing, Paul practiced his spirituality through it all.

We worry about whether we will be resilient and able to bounce when the hard times and hardships come. The answer will assuredly be “yes”, if we take the time and make the effort to keep developing, deepening, and growing our faith. Amen, Amen.

