

How to Support Resilience in Missionaries

Scripture Study on Resilience

What is the resilience process God gives us for walking through adversity?

What are the positive outcomes God wants to bring about from adversity?

1. Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NLT) – But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit.

2. Romans 8:35, 37-39 (NLT) – Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? No, despite all these things overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. Galatians 6:2 (NIV) – Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

4. Hebrews 12:1b-3 (ESV) – ...and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

5. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 (NIV) – We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

6. Rom 5:3-5 (ESV) – We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

7. 2 Corinthians 4:7-10 (ESV) - But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

8. 2 Corinthians 4:17 (NLT) - For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them all and will last forever.

Resilience Protective Factors

Definition of Resilience: Resilience is the process of responding to adversity with effective coping and positive adaptation leading to a beneficial recovery. This process can be strengthened or weakened by internal and external factors occurring before, during, and after the adversity; and may vary in individuals from situation to situation. (Rutter, 2006)

Protective Factors are necessary for the process of resilience to occur. They can be circumstances or attributes. The following is list of some of the protective factors found in resilience research.

Situations:

- Past turning point experiences
- Controlled exposure to risk
- Resources (financial, housing, etc.)

Behavioral/Biological:

- Self-control
- Good health/physical fitness
- Adaptive changes in brain

Mind/Cognitive:

- Productive critical thinking skills
- Planfulness
- Cognitive flexibility
- Clear thinking
- Optimism
- Belief that things will work out

Heart/Emotions:

- Emotional regulation
- Contentment/Life satisfaction
- Emotional flexibility
- Facing fear

Relationships with others:

- Strong social support
- Support from organizational leadership
- Support from church
- Sense of acceptance from others

Soul/Relationship with God:

- A call from God
- Healthy biblical theology of suffering
- Experiencing God's grace
- Sense of meaning
- Forgiveness
- Able to express strong feelings to God
- Belief in a God who is loving and caring, not punitive and angry.
- Strong faith-based beliefs

Personality Attributes:

- Adaptability
- Believes in her or his self-efficacy
- Hardiness
- Flexibility
- Internal locus of control (vs. fatalistic)
- Active coping style
- Altruism
- Optimism
- Sense of purpose and direction
- Sense of humor
- High expectations

Resilience Building Recommendations for Missionaries and Senders

Soul Care

- Give time to nurture personal relationship with Christ. Model this being a priority at the leadership level and give time and support for staff to do this.
- Facilitate a process whereby missionary teams study what the Bible teaches about God's path for us in and through times of adversity.
- Provide time and process for missionaries to grow in their biblical theology of suffering and risk, including opportunities to explore and discuss their evolving theology of suffering and risk as their mission career develops and as they experience new adversities.
- Use Spiritual Resilience Scale (www.traumaresilience.com) to identify areas of strength and needed growth.
- Give opportunity to explore and discuss individual's call to missions at key developmental stages of missionary career.

Self-care/Personal Stewardship

- Have a program for physical fitness that includes exercise, sleep, and diet.
- Acknowledge individual differences in capacity to handle demands and need for sleep and rest.
- Engage in Sabbath and sabbatical practices.
- Develop a Biblical theology of work and rest.

Social support

- Give adequate time to missionary to build and nurture a solid financial and prayer support base.
- Address family/marital or church related conflicts.
- Develop peer-to-peer support networks within the missions community.
- Proactively address team building and team conflicts.

Leadership/Organizational Support

- Have protocols in place for regular communication from team leadership to staff and from home based leadership to staff – to build trust before the crises come.
- Train leaders in basic crisis response skills and the types of communications that are most helpful during and after adversity.
- Provide training for leadership that encourages good management skills and healthy work environment.

- Conduct periodic performance reviews of leadership. As gaps are identified, offer trainings that improve communication skills, conflict management skills, and self-care practices.
- Periodically evaluate staff care policies and look for ways to increase morale.

Trauma Care

- Following traumatic events, provide supports and resources.
- Holistically assess the impact of the trauma and what supports are needed.
- Assess need for counseling.
- Give space and time for healing and recovery understanding that how the person reacts will depend on a multitude of factors including past trauma, biochemistry, pre-crisis factors, and severity of trauma.

Monitor External Factors

- Assess risk factors in the environment related to crises such as civil unrest, crime, hostility towards hospital/clinic staff. Identify relevant factors for decision making regarding approaching or avoiding risk.

Simulation training (e.g., controlled exposure to risk/stress inoculation)

- Exposure to moderate stress with supports in place can lead to better coping with stress later on. Therefore, simulation training which offers controlled exposure to typical stresses with opportunity for coaching in adaptive responses can increase the likelihood that missionaries will face field related stresses with better coping. (e.g., missionary doctor is in the operating room and the power goes off and a co-worker has neglected to buy fuel for generator).

Websites for Resilience Resources:

www.traumaresilience.com

<https://headington-institute.org/>

<http://www.mmct.org/resources/>

www.resilientmissionary.org

<https://www.chsalliance.org/>