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What Is RESILIENCY and Why Does It MATTER?

Mommmmmmyyyyyy!!”

My scream alerted every mom in the area that a little girl was in trouble. Because I was swimming when I screamed, and sound carries over water, several moms may have found their heart in their throat.

“Mommmyyyy!!”

My mom was visiting with her sister near our lake cabin while my cousins and I swam after dinner. When they heard the second scream, they both looked to the water. My mom admitted later that she thought my cousins and I were just playing and wanted them to see something.

We weren't playing anymore.

I had been swimming underwater and felt something hit my

forehead. When breaking the water, I put my hand to my forehead. I didn't think I felt anything, but when looking at my hand, I screamed again. Blood covered it.

My mom and aunt saw the blood, too, and now came running. Blood covered my whole face. (It looked worse than it was.)

My cousins helped me to the pier and my mom saw the gash in my forehead, figuring out that a rock must have hit me. Before my screams caused them to run away, children at the property next to ours were skipping stones. We all did this, too, but not when others were swimming nearby.

My dad and brother were fishing in the middle of the lake. My mom was able to get their attention and they came back to shore. Since the bleeding wouldn't stop, my mom, dad, and I headed to a nearby hospital where I got my first stitches.

I can remember the fear that gripped my heart. I was seven or eight years old and didn't like the pain or the blood. I can also remember how well my mom and dad took care of me. I remember all the fun, incident-free days of swimming, fishing, skipping rocks, horseback riding, and campfires with s'mores.

I kept swimming that vacation. For a while after that, I checked to see if anyone was skipping rocks nearby, but my mom and dad didn't assume I would be hit by one. My mom didn't hold me close and insist I swim only if she was right there to protect me. My dad took the boat out after dinner to catch fish we'd eat the next day;

he didn't assume he needed to stay close because something terrible would happen. Just because I was hit with a rock once didn't mean it would happen again.

This is how resilient people live. They don't deny what happened, but they're also not controlled by it. They process their pain, fear, and regret so they can learn from it all. Then they move on, better because of the experience. Something negative can lead to something positive.

WHAT IS RESILIENCY?

Resiliency is swimming again after a scary and disappointing accident. It's reading out loud in front of classmates even though some laughed at mistakes you made the day before. Resiliency is dating again after being badly dumped by someone you've dated for a while. It's trying out for a sports team after not being chosen the last time.

Resiliency is going to your doctor's appointment and expecting good news because of recent test results, even though you've had devastating news in the past. It's trusting your dad not to yell if you spill your milk again, because he apologized for his reaction the last time you spilled it. Resiliency is loving your grandma well, even though

This is how resilient people live. They don't deny what happened, but they're not controlled by it.

your other grandma just died and you know it will hurt when you lose another grandparent.

Mindset and Process

Resilience is a mindset¹ and a process of adapting well when facing significant sources of stress.² It's a way of thinking, feeling, and living. For instance, resilient people understand that problems and challenges are opportunities to learn and mature and they know growth takes time.

Recovering

Resiliency is recovering readily from disappointment, failure, defeat, adversity, and trauma. Because it's a process, this recovery isn't always instant, like when you punch a childhood blow-up toy and it immediately springs back as if nothing happened. Resilient children typically don't have to work as hard as other children to recover. They bounce back. When situations are more complex and challenging, “come back” may describe the process better than “bounce back.”³

Choice, Ability, and Character

Resiliency begins as a choice, becomes a learned ability, and then can become a part of who children are—their character.⁴ Children experience disappointments, stress, and a variety of challenges.

They can choose to stand up and step out of the muck and mire. They can learn to successfully navigate the mess. With enough positive experiences, they become resilient. That's the ultimate goal—that children don't have to think about whether to be resilient. They just are.

RESILIENCY AND THE FIVE IDENTITIES

From a big picture perspective, resiliency leads to growth, progress, and success. Depending on children's interests, strengths, weaknesses, and your priorities, resiliency can develop for all five of their identities—physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual.⁵ Resiliency is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Children will have stronger and weaker moments with this quality of themselves just like they do with others.

For example, if *physical* activities are enjoyable for you, you probably want your children to be resilient in that realm. If they don't make the team, you want them to try again. Your daughter might bounce right back up; your son might not. Perhaps he's perfectionistic or fearful. This doesn't mean he can't develop his skills, and it doesn't mean he'll be perfectionistic or fearful in all things. How do you respond to their losses?

Intellectual resiliency means children won't hesitate to sign up for the debate team, do extra projects even when teachers explain it will stretch them, and ask you for help with a writing

assignment. Remember, your reactions to their challenges and defeats will either expand or diminish their internal resources and external support. You matter and you can do this! How do you respond to their mistakes?

Social resiliency is necessary because you don't want your children to isolate or avoid activities with friends and family. It causes children to handle teasing, gossip, and criticism better than others do. They won't stay down long or assume that all people will treat them badly just because a few do. How do you respond to their conflicts?

Children who manage their feelings well have *emotional* resiliency. They won't be afraid to laugh and cry with people. Depression, stress, and anxiety won't overwhelm them typically or last as long. They won't allow themselves to be defined by negative experiences or interactions. Resiliency is strong protection against mental health struggles.⁶ How do you respond to their tears?

If you want your children to have a vibrant and growing relationship with God and the church, *spiritual* resiliency may be the most important resiliency to prioritize. When children are resilient in this domain, they appropriately credit God for the good times and understand He allows the "bad times." These children may be less likely to give up when things are hard, but instead learn to persevere in prayer.⁷ How do you respond to their doubts?

In addition to resiliency's value in these important identity

categories, these specific benefits will encourage you to prioritize raising resilient children:

- It leads to growth and prevents perfectionism.
- It leads to hope and prevents victim mentality.
- It leads to learning and prevents plateauing and mediocrity.
- It leads to creative problem solving and prevents children from giving up.
- It leads to healthy character, including teachability, and prevents disobedience.
- It leads to confidence and prevents fear and whiny, complaining behavior.
- It leads to healthy relationships and prevents anger, blaming others, and pride.
- It causes openness and connection and prevents long-lasting depression and anxiety.
- It leads to healthy dependence and independence and prevents apathy and isolation.

WHAT MAKES RESILIENCY POSSIBLE?

You make resiliency possible. Does that excite or intimidate you? Maybe it's a bit of both. That's understandable. Parents are absolutely the key. Why?

Resiliency requires that children rely on both internal resources and external support.⁸ They need to discover and develop

their emotional stamina, hope, and positive character. But they won't tap into their inner resources and develop more of them if you don't expect them to and give them chances to use them. They need opportunities to use what they have and to be who they are.

You're the Essential Support

Inner strength isn't enough. No matter how strong any of us are, we need to know we will be supported by people close to us who

No matter how strong any of us are, we need to know we will be supported by people close to us who are on our side.

are on our side. This is especially true for children. If your children made a list of trustworthy people, I pray you'd be at the top. Maybe you wouldn't have been a while back and that motivated you to read this book. I'm proud of you for being teachable! It's never too late to learn new beliefs and behaviors. You can learn

when to run to them when they yell, "Mommy!!" and when to wait and discern if they really need you.

Your children do need to know you're there for them. You can earn their trust. Tell them the truth, teach them rather than telling and yelling, willingly enter into their pain, and share about Jesus and His ways. You're their primary support! This is a reason God gave you these children to raise.

For your children to discover and learn that they can rely on

their internal strength and external support, you need to give them space to struggle. You can't bubble wrap them or hover like a helicopter over them. You need to trust them to come out stronger on the other side of their trauma. And you need to trust God and yourself.

You're the scaffolding that holds up your children while they work to repair their weaknesses. You're the solid foundation under their stumbling feet, their training wheels that get them moving in the right direction, and the networker who introduces them to other people who can support them well. You're their strategist who teaches them how to humble themselves and rely on smart strategies and systems that work.

Developing internal resources and external support allows children to weather difficulties and take intentional action so they can get through difficult moments.⁹ Action is the goal. Talk about it. Expect it. Watch for it. Celebrate it!

Love Them Unconditionally

Loving your children unconditionally is one of the best ways to be there for them. You might have thought of that when reading the above section. It's a popular response when I ask parents what they think helps children become resilient. But what is it exactly?

This powerfully important love is love without limitations. It's absolute and unchanging. When you love children unconditionally,

there's nothing they can do that would cause you to love them less, *and* there's nothing they can do that would cause you to love them more. You may be sad, heartbroken, and disappointed by their attitudes, choices, and behavior—many times, you may be proud of them and thrilled with their growing maturity—but, because you love without conditions, none of this changes your love for them.

In 1 Corinthians 13 we read a practical and inspiring passage about love. It's shared during many weddings. What would happen if you applied the truths to your children? For example, verse 7 reads, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." And just in case that's not clear, the beginning of verse 8 nails it: "Love never ends." *This* is unconditional love.

This love frees children to risk learning because they know if they don't understand something right away, your love for them will not change. They can lose a game, make a mistake during a recital, come to you seeking advice about a difficult relationship, and be honest about their cheating because they are secure in your love. When you're positioned to help them, guide them, lead them, and teach them, they'll listen! They'll be safer and more comfortable sharing their heartache, confusion, anger, and victories with you.

Unconditional love is like a good trampoline—there are side supports that prevent children from falling off and hurting themselves. Love requires boundaries. When you say no to your children and allow consequences to do their work because of mistakes

and disobedience, you are loving your children. And trampolines also have good elasticity that makes bouncing safe, fun, and even necessary. Simply walking across a trampoline will put a bounce in your steps. Unconditional love does this, too.

Of course, God loves us unconditionally. This is how we know it's a precious love. We've experienced it in the most profound way. He loved us from the beginning—before we could “perform” for Him. We never need to. I praise Him for the freedom, peace, and joy that is birthed and maintained in this love! And this includes clear boundaries of what's best for us. Knowing the path to walk on is part of love.

If we ever doubt God's love, reading Psalm 136 (especially out loud) can change us and boost our confidence. The phrase “His steadfast love endures forever” is repeated twenty-six times. Another go-to passage for me is Micah 7:18—“Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.” When you unpack the meaning of “steadfast” you see that it means loving devotion, goodness, kindness, and faithfulness.

ZIPPING THE ZIPPER! HOW KIDS PROBLEM SOLVE

On cold, snowy days, the second graders I taught arrived bundled in snowsuits with the necessary add-ons of boots, hats, and

mittens. Some also had scarves. When it was time for recess or to go home at the end of the day, it took all my self-control to stand back and watch them put everything on. Or, *try* to put everything on.

I encouraged children to help each other when help was needed. I was there to support them, but I did it quietly. I might have been able to dress all twenty-eight kids faster than watching them bundle themselves back up, but I knew the struggle would pay off.

They figured out that putting their snowpants on first was smart. They learned putting their boots on was easiest if they didn't zip their coats shut first. And they learned to zip their zippers before putting on their mittens.

I loved watching them problem solve and figure things out. I was encouraged when they eventually remembered the best sequence and were able to get dressed more quickly each time.

They became resilient problem solvers. They learned to ask for specific help from friends and receive it without it making them feel stupid. They became more confident and less whiny.

I chose to lower my standard and I became confident in my students. It couldn't be about their perfection. They never would have tried to bundle themselves up if it was about pleasing me. It had to be about them being warm enough to go outside.

We must prioritize resilience because we know it benefits children today and in the future. The goal has to be for them to

learn how to do things for themselves, not that the task get done perfectly.¹⁰ They may struggle more but it will be good for them.

WHAT'S YOUR "SNOWSUIT"?

Maybe for you, it's how well your children clean their bedroom. Maybe it's remembering to get everything ready for their math lesson. Perhaps you want them to remember to practice their piano pieces without being reminded a dozen times. Would you love your children to play well together and not cry and whine when they don't win a game? You can learn to set fair expectations they can achieve.

Because of how you react to your children's losses and pain, they can decide failure isn't fatal and it isn't final. Or they can decide they're terrible people, stupid, and not worthy or capable of doing better. Your healthy responses allow children to try new things again and not panic when they make mistakes.¹¹ Growth happens. Now it's more likely that resiliency will become a part of their character and not just something they are able to do sometimes.

If your children's first difficulties happen when they're on their own, they won't be resilient. They're likely to stay down in the valleys and not bounce back. It could be worse—they could crash and burn.

Your children can learn to be overcomers. They can be their own hero. Their experiences and victories will build their internal strength and confidence in the external support they relied on. They can do this!

EMBRACE LIFE WITH CONFIDENCE

Do you better understand the book's title now than when you began reading? Resilient children are more equipped to embrace life with confidence.

Negative experiences don't define them. They know the difference between mistakes and failure. For resilient children, mistakes are a part of life. They're a part of learning, loving, and all aspects of being and doing. Failure is not final or fatal; it is taking advantage of opportunities to learn.

What's the big deal? Life is big and glorious! It's full of potential. When children are resilient, they walk forward eager for opportunities that will strengthen them. They're not afraid of what's hard. They'll grow.

A friend, Alan, and I were texting about a mutual friend. He wrote, "He's a lot of person." When I read it, I laughed out loud. Alan was right and I think it's how resilient people view life—there's a lot to it!

Resilient children want to live—really live. They'll get as much out of experiences as they can. They may live life with abandon. This doesn't mean they'll foolishly take lots of risks. They know themselves well and are usually able to calculate risk well. They simply want to be fully present to the life they can live.

In contrast, children who lack resilience don't get as much from life. They may doubt life has much in store for them. They'll

give up, give in, and stay down in the valley rather than walk out. If they're young, they will throw more temper tantrums. If they're older, depression, stress, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts can consume them.

Without confidence, growth is almost impossible. Learning, joy, and independence will be rare. Fear and doubt may rule.

Confidence and resiliency go hand in hand. When you empower children to believe in their abilities, teach them to cope with challenges, and guide them to make wise choices, they'll be confident!¹²

Diamonds form under pressure.

And let us not grow weary of doing good,
for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:9