

## Preparation for Resilience

We have all lived through difficult times in our lives, and for many, this past year has been especially difficult. Often, we are encouraged to show “resilience” during hard times. Simply put, resilience is the ability to recover from adversity – not just to survive, but to adapt and eventually thrive.

Resilience is not a single or simple characteristic. It is not “bouncing back.” It does not deny the truth of the hard things we have experienced and the changes we have undergone. Resilience accepts and works with the current reality, even when loss and hardship form much of that reality.

Resilience does not require unshakeable optimism. In *The Resiliency Advantage*, psychologist Al Siebert says that it is valuable to express not only positive feelings, but also negative emotions like grief and anger. Being “mentally and emotionally flexible” is key. Resilience allows for “contradictory personality qualities” – “sensitive and tough ... serious and playful.”

Self-care nourishes resilience: good food, exercise, pleasure, sleep, and feeling good. We can seek out positive emotions: gratitude, joy, engagement, connection. Sources of these feelings are as varied as we are: gardening, reading, time with loved ones, art, hiking, music, creativity and curiosity of all sorts. Practicing self-compassion and giving up a sense of control can also contribute to resilience.

We often consider resilience a personal quality because our culture emphasizes self-reliance. But resilience is nourished in relationships and in community. When we tell our stories of hardship and someone hears us, we are strengthened and can find creative energy. Community is important when societal structures are obstacles. Haben Girma, first Deafblind graduate of Harvard Law, says that “disability is not something an individual overcomes ... I’m still Deafblind. People with disabilities are successful when we develop alternative techniques and our communities choose inclusion.”

During the pandemic, our resilience has been tested at many levels – personally, in our families, and in our society. We found ways to nurture ourselves and others – cooking at home, walking in nature, helping children with online learning. We used Zoom to connect with family, friends, and community. Our church began using Zoom, starting with Sunday services and extending to other activities and groups, including covenant groups. The challenges of the pandemic have perhaps made us more aware of our own resources for resilience.

We have also learned about equity and resilience in our society. The facts are clear: COVID-19 has had a more serious effect on the poor and on people of color. As we recover together, our country needs to face this reality and build new structures that support all members of society.

People have different responses to crises, and recovery from hardship or trauma is not straightforward. While resilience is not limited to exceptional people, it does ask us to grow in flexibility, holding in our awareness both hardship and the possibility of joy, both self-care and the call to community. Most of all, resilience combines realism with hope as we look to rebuild our lives and our society.

*As you reflect on resilience, consider these quotes.*

We cannot go back in time to the people we used to be ... What happens to us becomes a part of us. Resilient people do not bounce back from hard experiences; they find healthy ways to integrate them into their lives. *Eric Greitens*

We are powerful because we have survived, and that is what it is all about – survival and growth.  
*Audre Lorde*

So, terrible things happen. But don't let that stop you. That torn place your fear has opened up inside of you is a holy place. Look around while you are there. Pay attention to what you feel, for though it hurts, it is the kind of hurt that leads to life. *Richard Rohr*

We are still here. *Phrase often used by Native community organizers.*

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it. *Arundhati Roy*

If your heart is broken, make art with the pieces. *Shane Koyczan*

Hope is distinct ... from optimism or idealism. It has nothing to do with wishing. It references reality at every turn and reveres truth. It lives open eyed and wholehearted with the darkness that is woven ineluctably into the light of life ... Hope, like every virtue, is a choice that becomes a practice that becomes a spiritual muscle memory. It's a renewable resource for moving through life as it is, not as we wish it to be. *Krista Tippett*

## Questions to Ponder

1. How did your family or your ancestors handle difficult times? How have your family and the culture you grew up in affected your own sense of resilience?
2. Reflect on changes or crises in your life. How would you describe your resilient responses? What did you do to nourish resilience?
3. Have you ever looked to a community to help you through difficult times?
4. As we recover from the pandemic, how can we help foster a sense of resilience within ourselves, our community, and our society?

## Ending of our group:

5. What is something you appreciate about this group as it has been?
6. What do you think about sharing and establishing trust over Zoom? How did it work and not work?
7. What are the insights and gifts of wisdom you've found during the year? In yourself? From the others in your covenant group?

## Words of the Day

Before coming to the Gathering, reflect on some ways you might nourish resilience through self-care, compassion, and joy. The Words of the Day sentence is "I can nourish resilience through ..."

In addition, be prepared to name a characteristic or quality you admire for each member of the group. Your facilitator may contact you with information about sharing these phrases.