

September, 2020

Dear Friends,

I've been thinking a lot about resilience.

Who thrives during hard times, who doesn't, and why.

Because I want my friends—including you!—to thrive, in spite of these days. I want to thrive myself. And this crazy year has me realizing that thriving requires resilience.

Spoiler: I'm not going to lay anything heavy on you. We are all weary. I'm asking God for a heavenly provision of resilience!

I was thinking back to what it must have been like to live in occupied Europe during WWII, or besieged England. Never knowing when a bomb might drop, or a tank roll through your front yard. The local baker would go out after the London bombings (sometimes during them) and help pull neighbors from the rubble of fallen buildings, then put on his white apron and open shop next morning. Our grandparents and great-grandparents lived through those rough years with a kind of resilience I think we would each love to have in this hour.

Maybe resilience is part of what God is doing in us right now.

When we were all learning to drive, the idea of a ten-hour road trip seemed overwhelming; but now, many people enjoy them, do them for vacation. I love road trips! When we were learning to read, the size of those adult books on our parents' shelves seemed so daunting; now, people relish long novels, or tomes like *The Lord of the Rings*. Stasi and I reread the trilogy every few years. We have all developed resilience in those areas.

The Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen is hailed as one of the greatest polar explorers ever. He was first ever to reach the South Pole in 1911. As a boy, he dreamed of being a polar explorer, so he would sleep with his bedroom windows open during Norwegian winters to develop resilience. How many parents would let their child do that these days?!

The era we just lived through—what I would call the “Comfort Culture”—may have not prepared us very well for hard times. Before there was any pandemic, universities were reporting that their mental health services were being overwhelmed by freshmen within the first few weeks of a new year (primarily with issues of anxiety and depression). The director of a program designed to prepare freshmen for the college years told me recently, “18 is the new 12. Our students are emotionally underdeveloped. They are much less resilient than any we've ever encountered, and I'm not entirely sure why.”

There are many reasons, of course. Human beings are beautifully complicated. But honestly—when you grow up in a world where everything is done with a few clicks on your phone, it doesn't exactly develop strong “soul muscles.” Anyone living in the developed world has experienced a level of ease no previous generation knew. Let me be quick to say, I have fully enjoyed all the conveniences of our modern moment. But I'm also aware that they have made me soft. The World War II generation emerged from the Great Depression with a sense of reality, grit and resilience.

Maybe we will emerge from this tough time with new resilience. I sure hope so!

Meanwhile, we need some strength. And the wonderful news is, our kind and compassionate Father loves to give his people new strength! The scriptures are filled with prayers, blessings and promises that God himself—Creator of the universe—will strengthen us from the inside out:

*Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:31)*

*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)*

*The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. (Isaiah 58:11)*

*I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being... (Ephesians 3:14-16)*

*May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13)*

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)*

*May your hearts live forever! (Psalm 22:26)*

Isn't it encouraging simply to read those passages?

Maybe we begin here—by praying these verses for ourselves. By asking God to strengthen our resilience in this tough time. Cut out these verses, tape them to your fridge or bathroom mirror and pray them!

May your hearts live! May you be strengthened with a glorious inner strength!

In love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'John' written in a cursive, flowing style.