

When Life Piles On

On Sunday, we continued our sermon series based on Brené Brown's book called *The Gifts of Imperfection*. This week we focused on cultivating a resilient spirit.

1. Warm-up Question: Years ago, comedian Sean Morey delivered one of the most famous riffs in the history of comedy where he invited us to imagine living life backwards (from aged, to infant, to the womb). If you could live life in reverse, what time in your life (other than the present) would you most want to return to?
2. We wish life was easy, but it's not. As the old *Cheers* theme song says, "Living in the world today takes everything you've got." Every one of us will encounter significant hardship. To survive and thrive requires lots of resilience. So on Sunday we studied Brené Brown's Guidepost No. 3: Cultivating a resilient spirit . . . by letting go of powerlessness.
 - a. Jeff told how Lynnette Bradford found herself homeless as a young woman with an infant daughter during Christmas season, living in a rat infested women's shelter, surrounded by addicts and prostitutes. It was her low point. When was the lowest point in your life? How did you feel?
 - b. Many of us have heard the old story about how people respond to hardship like carrots, eggs, or coffee beans. When boiled in water, carrots fall apart, eggs get hard, but coffee beans get stronger and richer. Tell us about someone you've observed who showed you what it looks like to fall apart or grow hard or get stronger during hardship.
3. In her sociological research, Brown found (to her surprise) that spirituality is the foundation for resilience. Specifically, she identified three spiritual principles that seem to anchor those who have a high level of resilience. **Principle No. 1 – Resilient people possess a unique kind of gritty hope captured in the statement: "This is going to be tough, but with God's help I can do it."**
 - a. Brown contrasts gritty hope with wishful thinking. Wishful thinking says, "This will be fun, fast, and easy." What's something you wish you could get fun, fast, and easy? (Spoiler alert: It probably won't happen that way. ☹)
 - b. The Apostle Paul is an excellent example of gritty hope. Read his litany of hardship in II Corinthians 11:24-28, then read Philippians 4:12-13. What's the difference between wishful thinking and Paul's statement, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"?
 - c. Do you really believe you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you? Tell us about a time you've lived this truth.

4. **Principle No. 2 – Resilient people have a perspective that says tragedy happens to everyone, but God will always make sure I have enough to get through what I’m facing.**
- a. Ecclesiastes 9:11 says, “Time and chance happen to all.” What do you think that means? Do you believe it? Does God protect people of faith from having to experience “time and chance”? If not, why bother to have faith?
 - b. Psalm 23:1 says, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” What does that mean? How do we square Psalm 23:1 with Ecclesiastes 9:11?
 - c. Jeff shared a story about a child watching his mother embroider. From the child’s vantage point on the floor looking up at the backside of his Mom’s embroidery, it looked like a jumbled mess. But from the top down, Mom saw a pattern that she followed to create a beautiful flower. Jeff said, “God is like that Mom, and we are like that child.” Do you buy that? Tell us about a time in your life when God has woven something beautiful out of a jumbled mess.
5. **Principle No. 3 – Resilient people lean into pain, rather than trying to numb it.** Brown says, “The most powerful emotions that we experience have very sharp points, like the tip of a thorn. When they prick us, they cause discomfort and even pain. Just the anticipation or fear of these feelings can trigger intolerable vulnerability in us.”
- a. Our natural instinct is to do whatever we can to avoid emotional pain by numbing ourselves with things like: alcohol, drugs, food, sex, relationships, money, work, caretaking, gambling, staying busy, affairs, chaos, shopping, planning, perfectionism, constant change, and the Internet. We all experience the temptation to use things like the forgoing to distract and numb us from pain. Self-awareness is our first defense. What is your go-to numbing activity?
 - b. Instead of avoiding our pain, the Bible encourages us to lean into it . . . especially through prayer. Read Psalm 88:1-18. Using your imagination, what might the author of this psalm have been going through in life?
 - c. No one knows for sure what the Hebrew word “selah” means. One leading theory is that it marked a pause in the music where the singer and listeners were supposed to pause to think about what had just been expressed. With this in mind, read back through Psalm 88, pausing for a few seconds of silent reflection at each “selah.” Afterward, share what word or phrase in this psalm most resonates with you in this moment – and tell us why (if you know)?
 - d. The book of Psalms is full of prayers of pain and lament. Do you ever pray prayers of pain and lament? Why might this form of prayer be especially important and powerful?
 - e. Is there something in your life right now that’s very painful? Are you letting the pain “pass through you” or seeking to avoid it? What are some practical ways you could embrace the pain and let it pass through you?