



Session 1 - What is Resilience?

Theme passage - Hebrews 12:1-3

Word of Resilience: Jesus is enough.

Session 2 – Shame Resilience: When Grace Seems Far Away

Genesis 2:15-3:24

Word of Resilience: I am a forgiven child of God.

Session 3 – Emotional Resilience: When I Am Overwhelmed

Theme passage - Psalm 116:8-9

Word of Resilience: God is with me in every high and low.

Session 4 - Relational Resilience: When People Disappoint

Theme passage - 1 Corinthians 12:20-27

Word of Resilience: Relationships are worth the trouble.

Session 5 - Spiritual Resilience: When Wrestling Comes

Theme passage: Genesis 32:22-32

Word of Resilience: This is not all there is.

Notes:

- The author used the ESV Scripture translation for this study unless otherwise noted.
- Thanks to Concordia Publishing House for allowing the quotations from *Finding Hope: From Brokenness to Restoration*, by the author of this study
- Consider putting each session's "word of resilience" on a sticky note or a colored index card for your students to take with them and post in their rooms or lockers or wherever to further instill the lesson each session

Session 1 - What is resilience?

Theme passage – Hebrews 12:1-3

When I think of resilience, I often think of spelling bees. First, I have only recently been able to spell resilience without having to go back and make sure the i's and the l are in the right place. Next, spelling bees produce their own kind of resilience. As a bad speller, it seems a cruel fate to ask a bunch of 3rd-8th graders to stand in front of a crowd and wait to fail on a word like donut, or is it doughnut? Yet, what I've noticed comes from the spelling bee beyond public embarrassment is often a crowd of friends or classmates gathered around you saying, "You were robbed!" "I would have missed it that one too!" or "I can't spell either." And participants tend to walk away feeling proud that they gave it their best shot, that they showed up, that they spelled with their whole heart. ;)

And last, spelling bees remind me of this phrase, "Can you use it in a sentence, please?" And for most of us, using the word *resilience* in a sentence might be a bit of a challenge.

Let's start there, *small or large group discussion question*.

Can you use *resilience* in a sentence, please?

(If you'd like to take more time with this, allow your youth to look up resilience on the internet, or search some secular articles about resilience. Ask them to come up with unique sentences from the information, not copied from the internet. The goal is to see what they know and find about resilience. There are lots of ideas out there about resilience from many worldviews. Put your sentences on a whiteboard or large piece of drawing paper to save for later.)

In Colossians 1:16-17 we hear some things God has to say about resilience. God is the creator of all things and He also holds all things together. Resilience is part of His work in holding all things together inside of us and between us. Resilience has a lot to do with our emotions and mental health, our relationships, challenges, struggle, hope, and God's promises.

Read Hebrews 12:1-3.

- Who is resilient in this passage? What words or ideas in this passage make you think they are resilient?

(This is an open-ended question. Allow the youth to share their insights and share your own before moving on.)

When I look at Hebrews 12:1-3, I see lots of resilience.

Jesus is resilient. I like to think of this as the foundation of resilience. Because Jesus was resilient for humankind, offering Himself to the cross, we can have the greatest Hope there is – salvation – a repaired relationship with God, eternal life with Him face-to-face. And because Jesus rose again on Easter morning, we also have the Hope of restoration – that the challenges and struggles in front of us aren't all there is - God is repairing some things in their time and eventually when Jesus comes back again, all things will be made completely new again, repaired forever and for all time.

Hebrews 12:1-3 also identifies that we are resilient people!

There are lots of people in the passage – some running and some cheering the runners on. God gives us resilience for the race of life as well.

Resilience is especially related to the word *endurance* in Hebrews 12:1-3.

- What does it mean to endure?

The original Greek term for *endurance* paints a picture of staying or remaining when something is weighty or hard.

- What kinds of things do people encounter in life that are weighty or hard?

There are a lot of ideas about resilience out there. Many definitions or articles you found on the internet likely talk about bouncing back or returning to normal after something difficult has happened. Picture a stress ball or a memory foam pillow. (Leader: consider bringing a visual example.) Something in life puts pressure on the foam and it is restricted, sunken in for as long as it's held that way. But, when you let go, it returns to the shape it was meant to be.

This is a good visual but is maybe a little too simple. Life is wonderful at times, and also very hard at times, isn't it? And we are not stress balls. Sometimes it feels like we can't run anymore. We get tired of friendship challenges and the pressures of school and sports and music and activities. People we love have mental health challenges and we might have our own. It's ok to feel tired and like we can't just "bounce back." God is here with open arms, no matter what we feel like. Jesus's death for us, His epic resilience, is enough resilience for the whole world, you included.

But it's also good to know that God puts His resilience inside of us.

There are two kinds of resilience inside of you –

First, the resilience that is a gift of God. It is the way He created us as human beings.

Second, the resilience that is built inside of us through life's challenges and through hope.

Jesus is our solid ground that we run on, our stability that really helps us access resilience when we need it. We can also share Jesus's hope with other people to help them access resilience as well. Jesus's Hope is not small in all the challenges we mentioned above.

With Jesus Christ in our lives through our baptisms, we have the ability to endure the hard stuff of life and not lose hope or faith, but in fact grow with our struggles and trials. We not only "endure" the challenges of life, but like the Greek term for endurance in Hebrews 12:1-3 suggests, we can do what Scripture calls "stand firm." Our identity in Jesus Christ remains the same always, a part of us, no matter what we go through, which helps us access Hope in Jesus in everything good, bad, or ugly.

Read what Scripture has to say about standing firm in an ESV translation of your Bible.

- What does each passage tell us about our identity in Christ no matter what challenge we go through?

Exodus 14:12-14

Psalms 89:27-29

Galatians 5:1-2

Ephesians 6:12-15

Remember, resilience is a gift of God. We are resilient as people who are in Jesus Christ our Lord. And God is working resilience in you each day, helping you stand firm when life is hard.

Small or Large Group Activity:

On a whiteboard or large piece of art paper, draw a visual representation of Jesus and His cross as our road or "solid ground" to run on and two columns "Made by God" and "Grown by God" above the road.

Fill in the columns by asking –

Made by God: What are some gifts we have from God as His children?

Grown by God: What are some things God is growing inside of us each day or in the hard stuff of life?

Use the following passages for help if you'd like:

Genesis 1-2

Galatians 5:22-25

Psalms 130

Psalms 119:13-18

Matthew 11:28-30

Romans 5:1-11

Here are the definitions I created for resilience based on what God's Word has to say, as well as research on how our bodies and minds work:

Define resilience:

- 1 the capacity to come back from a struggle with renewed hope, life, and a greater ability to respond to future stressors
- 2 the internal capacity of people to recover, gaining new insights, strengths, and capabilities we did not have before a struggle¹

See the word *capacity* in the definitions? Capacity is our ability to hold the junky stuff and the good stuff of life. The capacity is the gift from God. We can do life – the good and the hard – because He made us with the capacity to do it. He also builds our capacity through experience, circumstances, relationships, and processing or talking through to see meaning in life.

You matter to God. The things you go through matter to God. Jesus brings that meaning to life by giving us big Hope in His death and resurrection and in tiny ways each day.

For the rest of this study, we'll look at lots of different ways God builds resilience in us. Always remember Christ as the foundation. He ran with endurance to the cross and resurrection, so that we can run this race of life. He's cheering you on today and every day.

- In what part of your life do you think God may be building resilience in you right now?
(Leader: this is a vulnerable question, so if youth do not answer, consider having someone or a story from your own life that you can appropriately share as an example. Answers may range from friendship, family issues, something hard they've gone through, to some kind of skill development, etc.)

¹ Finding Hope: From Brokenness to Restoration, Heidi Goehmann, pg. 53

Close with prayer

Word of Resilience to remember: Jesus is enough.

Session 2 – Shame Resilience: When Grace Seems Far Away

Theme passage - Genesis 2:15-3:24)

Small or large group Opening:

- What movie or book character comes to mind when you think or talk about resilience?

I always think of Princess Leia seeking hope from Obi Wan, fighting alongside the rebellion, and then leading the resistance in the epic saga of Star Wars. Or I think of Wanda Maximoff from the Marvel Universe, losing her whole family, being indoctrinated in a terrible militant organization, becoming an Avenger, loving Vision, and losing him, creating a village out of her trauma, and learning to let it go and seek forgiveness.

God has his own epic of resilience that matches Star Wars or Marvel any day.

Let's look at this epic in short form in the book of Genesis. We'll read Genesis 2:15-3:24 in sections. Think of them as parts of a whole – Episodes I, II, III, IV, with Episode V pending. We'll look for the presence of four ideas within each part of the saga:

Work – the tasks and responsibilities we have been given here on earth

Relationships – the people we've been given to live alongside and the work of those relationships

Challenges – the problems that come into our lives with sin and the existence of sin in the world

Hope – the promises of God and/or the presence of God in every moment

Read each passage below and answer the following question:

What work, relationships, challenges, and hope do Adam and Eve encounter in each of the following passages? Note that in the first one, sin has not yet entered the world, so there are no challenges and no need for hope (but there is work and relationships).

Genesis 2:15-25 –

Genesis 3:1-3:13 –

Genesis 3:14-19 –

Genesis 3:20-24 –

Life is full of lots of good work and good relationships as well as not-so-good work (toil) and very complicated relationships. There are lots of challenges, and also lots of joy and hope.

Individual questions to ponder or group discussion:

- What are some of the work or tasks that are part of your life?
- What are some of the relationships that are part of your life?
- What are some of the challenges that are part of your life?

What are some promises of God's hope in those challenges or ways God is sending help in those challenges? (If hope is hard to see, perhaps the group can help identify God's presence in the challenges?)

The biggest difference between Genesis 2 and Genesis 3 is not only sin, but sin's companion – shame. Adam and Eve had no shame in all their work and relationships, and then the Serpent brought distance and shame into the Garden and into the work and relationships there.

Shame = a belief that something is so inherently wrong with us that we are not able to receive God's grace

Skim Genesis 3 again.

Discussion question:

What actions or words indicate to you that Adam and Eve were having a hard time believing God's grace was available to them?

We are never outside of God's grace, friends. It is God's desire for all people to be saved and all people to receive the grace of Jesus Christ. If you would like a couple of reminders of the grace of God available for every sin and every shame, look at the following verses:

1 Timothy 2:4-6

Ephesians 2:7-9

Hebrews 4:14-16

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Shame sometimes turns to blame when we are trying to avoid looking at our problems and own sin. Adam pointed his finger at Eve, Eve pointed her finger at the serpent. They all had issues. We all have issues. Yet, God answered their issues and even their shame and blame with grace in many ways. Look for each of these ways God offered Grace to Adam and Eve, even during the fall into sin and the curse.

God stepped into their world and asked questions to help them sort out the problems they had created and confess their sin and shame.

God laid out the clear consequences of their actions.

God provided Gospel in the middle of those consequences.

God provided a sacrifice and made suitable clothing for Adam and Eve to protect them from the world out there.

God sent them out of the Garden, but not out of relationship with Him.

- Do you see the big narrative of God's salvation in this mini-narrative of Adam and Eve's experience?
- How are each of the underlined words connected to God's grace, even the less obvious ones?

Grace really does win because Christ has won over sin and death forever by His death on the cross and His resurrection. Shame will creep into our lives, especially when we are faced with challenges and sometimes shame will create challenges. But because Christ stepped into our world, we can confess Jesus as our Savior and confess our individual sins. There will be consequences to our actions, but we are not defined by those consequences. God's sacrifice in Jesus Christ is enough, so that we are enough in Jesus Christ. We have His covering and clothing in our baptisms. We are never outside His Gospel grace with those coverings. We are outside the Garden, but not out of relationship with Him.

Grace is what makes us resilient. Grace is what defines who we are in Christ.

When shame presses in, you are a forgiven and much-loved child of God. You are part of God's story.
Grace is never far away.

Close with prayer.

Word of Resilience: I am a forgiven child of God.

Session 3 – Emotional Resilience: When I Am Overwhelmed

Theme passage - Psalm 116:8-9

What brings you energy and what takes energy from you?

Let me give you an example: I am a reader. My husband and kids can tell whether I'm in a good mental space based on whether there is a book with a bookmark in it setting on the trunk or end table in our living room. Life is better when Heidi is reading. I am also what I like to think of as a stellar friend. I invite people to my house so I can cook for them. I like to hear their stories and cheer them on. I like to be there for them to help them talk through their problems. I make it an important life value to be available to my people. And yet, the listening and the loving and the talking takes a lot of energy from me. Both matter to me very much, the reading and the friending. One gives me a lot of energy and one takes a lot of energy. And so, it's helpful that I have the one to compliment the other. (Adult leader, feel free to use your own example here instead.)

- When you think about a sports practice or a music or play practice, what parts of it have you jumping up to participate and which parts have you dragging your feet to join in? Are you a reader? A video game connoisseur? An artist? The listening friend? Which of your things bring you energy or which take energy from you? Or which hold a little of both?
- Now consider your schoolwork. Do you enjoy a particular subject more than others? Which subjects fascinate you, or at least interest you and which are less pleasant for you?

Our emotions do better when we are balanced. We are limited people, created by a limitless God. We only have so much energy and being aware of where it's going is one way we can be mindful of God, so that our bodies are mindful of emotional overload.

We are made up of many parts. The Bible represents this concept in "heart, soul, mind, and strength."

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7 and/or Mark 12:28-34.

Again, these parts of us are gifts crafted by a limitless God, but we are people of limits – human, vulnerable to exhaustion, suffering, and emotional overload. We are made to first,

love God with these parts and then love our neighbor. God knows we are limited. He isn't judging us for our limits. (See 2 Corinthians 12:9.)

What God does give us is one way to regulate our emotions:
Love God, then love people.

When we focus on God first, the Spirit works in us to bring peace. As exciting as life can be, exciting isn't the only thing worth looking forward to or finding enjoyment in. Spending time in the stillness with God can be as energizing as (often more so) than the good things we enjoy and desire. Being in stillness with God looks like breaking away from all the energy-giving and energy-taking of this world to be with Jesus and His Word. Stillness with God doesn't solve all the world's problems, or even our own, but it does bring the Peace that Passes all Understanding into our life. Our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths thrive in God's peace, especially when the world is swirling all around us.

Emotion Resilience Step 1: Spend time with God each day. Love Him and let Him love on you in the grace of Christ Jesus.

Time with God builds our emotional resilience. Spend time in His Word. He promises to be there. Spend time in worship and Bible study and with His people. He created these things for us to be connected and connection is a big part of emotion regulation, which builds our emotional resilience. Take the Lord's Supper and be connected to God in that way. Soak in His forgiveness of your sins and all your shame. Forgiveness builds stores of emotional resilience because it lifts the heavy emotion of shame.

But what about that swirling world? What about when we fail a test or lose someone we love, or war breaks out somewhere across the globe? What about when we experience heartache and people who are mean, when we experience disappointment, feel left out, or experience embarrassment or humiliation?

Emotional overload happens when life flies at us from a million directions. When the world feels out of control, or at least our little corner of it. Family problems, friend problems, life problems will come. There will be times we feel overloaded. Remember, we are limited people, created and loved by a limitless God. Emotional overload can even happen when life is going well. Because too much of a good thing is still *too much*.

No matter the emotion, they are all emotions God cares about in our lives.

Emotional Resilience Step 2: Spend time with God especially when life or our emotions are on overload.

Read Psalm 116. While you read, on a sticky note or slip of paper, note all the emotion words you hear or see. (This could be done in large or small groups, or as a quiet individual activity.)

Sometimes we have all the feels. That's just the stuff of life. We are created with emotions and we will experience them every day, sometimes on overload. Emotional resilience isn't about "doing better" with our emotions or "being better people." Emotional resilience is about walking through our emotions with a Savior at our side who is with us in every high and low.

Now, read through Psalm 116 and look for words that describe God or God's response or presence in the middle of the messes of life and our emotions.

God is never far off. Sometimes, it is hard for us to see Him at work in the middle of the challenges of life that overwhelm us. People have felt the same way all across time. Remember the Great High Priest Jesus who sympathizes with us because He's been there and that great cloud of witnesses cheering us on in our other studies on resilience? They've been there too. We are not alone.

Our emotions are for a moment, but God's faithfulness is forever.

- What emotion do you need to know that God is still with you in?
- Do you see it in the Psalm?

Offer those emotions in prayer today and know that God hears. He is with you in this.

Close with prayer

Word of Resilience: God is with me in every high and low.

Session 4 - Relational Resilience: When People Disappoint

Theme passage - 1 Corinthians 12:20-27

Who in your life has shown resilience? Or who comes to mind when you think of resilience?

My mom had a lot of challenging relationships in her life. She has had lots of loss and had to restart in new places, new states and towns. She has asthma and other physical health challenges. She went to nursing school when she was 41 years old because she had always wanted to be a nurse who helped people when they were sick. She was a cardiac nurse for 25 years. When she was in her 60s she went to community college to take history classes simply to learn more. She was extremely imperfect, yelled a lot to get your attention (mom style), and had plenty of her own baggage and sin (like the rest of us) - but when I think of resilience, I think of my mom.

(Adult leaders may consider using their own examples here instead.)

- Who in your life has shown resilience?

Let's return to that great cloud of witnesses from Hebrews 12:1-3. Read this passage again and consider the following questions:

- What does this great cloud of witnesses, including our Savior Jesus Christ, help us do in this life?
- How does this work "in real life"? How do people in your life help you in many and various ways?
- Relationships are good and they are also complicated. What kind of problems do people have in relationships?

(Leader: take responses and add to a list on a whiteboard or large piece of art paper.)

Being a Christian and having Jesus in our lives doesn't make us relationship experts, but it does help us to be relationally resilient, meaning when we have problems in our relationship, we have the capacity to grow and heal and sometimes start again. Believing in Jesus means we believe in forgiveness at the heart of everything - our need for forgiveness and other people's need for forgiveness. In Jesus, we expect our relationships won't go perfectly, but we also know we don't have to forgive or heal or grow or start again on our own.

The Corinthian church was having some relationship problems. Read 1 Corinthians 12:20-27 and add some of their relationship problems to the list you created earlier.

- What are some of the ways you see in this passage that God offers growth and healing in relationships through Jesus Christ?

Honor, modesty, being honest about need, and care are all great words to describe what Jesus Christ gives us and then brings into our relationships through His Spirit inside of us. This is easier said than done at times.

- What are some road blocks to honoring or caring for people in our relationships?

I think the key to relational resilience is especially the final idea in 1 Corinthians 12:26. Our relationships are more likely to be resilient when we suffer and rejoice together, when we do what German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "life together." When we have a foundational understanding that relationships aren't only for good times but for junky ones, when we stick by each other through some turbulence, when we mess up with each other and ask for forgiveness, our relationships deepen and have better roots than the ones that are just there for fun.

While this passage in Corinthians is especially about the Body of Christ or our fellow believers in Jesus Christ, Bonhoeffer was especially concerned with how God's honor went out to those who were not believers in Jesus. He was a pastor during WWII trying to stand up for what was right in Nazi Germany. How do we suffer and rejoice alongside friends and neighbors who don't believe in Jesus? (Leader may choose to utilize this as a discussion question.)

It's complicated. But Jesus is the same no matter the relationship. We remain relationally resilient by seeking the wisdom of His Word in our relationship, letting his Law and Gospel, (boundaries and forgiveness) be part of our relationships, and living in the insight of His Spirit that is inside of us from our baptisms.

Possible activity:

Pair up in partners or in groups of three. Each youth consider their relationship with a friend (named or anonymous). Where do you see of the following in this friendship?

- being with each other in hard things or suffering in life
- being with each other in celebration or good things in life
- God's Word that comes to mind or might inform this relationship
- boundaries that apply to this relationship

- forgiveness or grace in this relationship
- the Holy Spirit at work in this relationship

Life is better together. People will disappoint us and we will disappoint them. Jesus is a friend who sticks closer than a brother, who always suffers and rejoices with us each day.

Close in prayer. Pray over specific relationships as you close in prayer.

Word of Resilience: Relationships are worth the trouble.

Session 5 - Spiritual Resilience: When Wrestling Comes

Theme passage - Genesis 32:22-32

I see a lot of memes on the internet, shared by well-meaning Christians, reminding me to have "Faith over Fear!" or to "Be strong and courageous!" or that my "faith will move mountains, [my] doubt will create them."

I know the memes are meant to help. They are meant to encourage and cheer us on from that great cloud of witnesses. Maybe sometimes they do. Maybe you've seen or shared one and been bolstered to walk out into your day, sharing Jesus's love and mercy. But the questions that always rise for me when I see these memes include:

What about when I feel scared?

What about when I am afraid?

What about when I am uncertain?

What of the times it feels like God is far away or worse, uninterested?

What do I do with *that*?

What if conquering fear and conquering faith aren't the only options when we have spiritual questions? What do we need to be resilient in our faith?

Resilience comes in walking through rather than around.

The Bible invites us to trust in God, and to walk through our spiritual questions, rather than around them.

Perhaps the problem is not in the message of the memes, to some degree, but that in our spiritual wrestling and questions memes are too small of answers to large questions. We often need more in our wrestling.

Read Genesis 32:22-32. This is only one example of spiritual wrestling in the Bible. There are many! But it is convenient that Jacob physically wrestled with God while also likely spiritually, emotionally, and relationally wrestling with Him.

Consider what you know about Jacob. Look at the few chapters earlier in Genesis, or throughout the book, wherever you see Jacob's name.

- What were some of Jacob's problems in life?

- What problems were of his own making and what problems had to do with other people's sin or issues?
- What promises of God can you find in this passage about wrestling?

Wrestling often starts with life's problems, and we've all got them.

Sometimes these are problems we create and sometimes what others create, and other times, some problems just are because the world is broken and messy. The whole universe is in need of God's love and restoration in Jesus Christ.

Read Romans 8:21-23

- Who is groaning?
- What are we/it/all creation groaning for?

We all struggle. Let's normalize that. There is not something wrong with you if you are struggling. There is not something wrong with you if that struggle brings up spiritual questions. The good news is that resilience comes through the struggle, not without it. This doesn't make all the brokenness ok or palatable, but it does remind us that struggle isn't all there is in Jesus Christ.

Even Jacob didn't wrestle alone, even though he left his wife and kids and whole support system by the bank of the creek. Wrestling is best handled face-to-face with God, rather than shutting Him out. Jacob had a very physical experience with God and we can too. God gave us the Holy Scriptures and assures us He is there every time we open it. When we wrestle with Scripture wide open, it won't be easier, but we are guaranteed that God reveals Himself in the words there.

- What parts of the Bible do you find most confusing or challenging?
- What parts of the Bible or words from the Bible do you find most encouraging?

When we wrestle, we are invited to remember who we are in Christ. Jacob was called a new name by God and we receive a new name at our Baptism... CHILD OF GOD! Baptism is like a wrestling match on our behalf between God and Evil. As we are drowned in the water of Baptism, God wrestles out sin, death, and the devil from our lives. Then, in those same waters, God's Holy Spirit enters us and God picks us up, dusts us off and calls us child. Martin Luther encouraged Christians to remember their baptisms every day. Luther knew life was often a wrestling match and we needed the reminder that the victory is won!

Turn to your neighbor and remind them: CHILD OF GOD! That's your name.

(Leaders, if appropriate for your group, you can have them put the sign of the cross on one another's foreheads, write child of God on each other's hand, and/or make a reminder card/note for one another.)

Remember that great cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1-3. Let's read it again.

- We don't have to wrestle alone. Who in your life can wrestle with you or who can you turn to when a season of wrestling, questions, or struggle comes?
- What about them makes them seem like a safe and helpful person to go to in your wrestling and questions?

Questions and even doubt are not the problem. Turning from God does make bigger problems though. Spiritual resilience comes through the struggle when we look to God in our questions and doubts, walk through the questions with Christ by our side, a supportive mentor or fellow believer at the ready, and remember who we are in Jesus Christ who took all our sin and shame and nailed it on the cross.

Let's remind ourselves what resilience is and what it is not, as we close out this study. Fill in the chart on a whiteboard or paper before you peek at my answers. My list is not exhaustive. I bet you have lots of insights to add.

Resilience is

Found in struggle's wake
Gifted to us by God
Built in us across life by God
Growth-oriented
Related to hope – struggle isn't all there is
Related to capacity – unique to our experiences, problems, skills, and resources available

Resilience is not

An easy life
An easy faith
Bouncing back immediately
Having it all together
Getting it together
One size fits all

Close in prayer. Consider including areas you are asking God to work His resilience in your life around specific struggles. Alternatively, pray for those you know have spiritual questions and wrestling.

Word of Resilience: This is not all there is.