

## **Mental Resilience**

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**Philippians 4:8-13**

**Resilience: The Art of Moving Forward Sermon Series**

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Things seldom go as we anticipate. There are many variations and transitions that occur. Rarely do we go from “Point A” to “Point B.” There always seems to be “Point C.” Any new and worthwhile endeavor demands mental resilience. I love what Paul says: *“Think about these things.”* We get to choose our attitude. There are certain ways we should think and certain ways we should not think.

“The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” changed my thinking. When we shift our thinking, we change our behavior. *“Think about these things.”* Then put them into practice through behaviors. Then we feel better. “Self-talk” is the conversation we have with ourselves. We need to be careful about the tapes we play inside our heads.

Bill Taylor told me on his birthday in 2019, he had accepted my challenge to memorize 30 scriptures. He said he recently finished memorizing the last one. He says them each night. He confessed he memorized some that were not on “my list” but I told him I wasn’t offended since I’m not the author. Bill was born on July 12, 1932. He was memorizing scripture at the age of 87. He and his wife, Phyllis, are hoping to hit fifty memory verses this year. What a great example to follow.

**APPLICATION:** We can train our brains to focus on good things.

Memorize Philippians 4:8-9 this week. Think about and practice these things: *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”*

There's never been a better time to be alive, yet so many feel glum, lousy, anxious, and that this is one of the most dangerous times in the history of the world. We hear bad news constantly. When everyone gets their news instantaneously on their cell phone (65% of people in the world have access to a cell phone), it's easy to believe the distortion that this is a terrible time. For instance, tornados kill about 50 people per year but 4,000 people die each year from asthma – but tornados are a lot more exciting to watch on TV. They are newsworthy. News doesn't say, *"We're reporting from a country where everyone is at peace and there is no war, or a bomb didn't detonate in this city or a plane didn't crash today or there wasn't a shooting at a school this day."* The news media is not a public service, it is a business. They depend on ratings and viewership. Yet, it seems pessimists try to help while optimists try to sell us something. Spectacular progress for almost every human being in the world has happened– yet it seems we focus on "bad" news. This is why I believe we should read history. Life in former days was nasty, brutish, and short. A simple cut on the finger might get infected, become gangrenous and fatal. Plagues like the Black Death swept through cities, wiping out 2/3 of England's population between 1348-1350, and a 1/3 of France. 1/2 the people in Europe died of disease before their 30th birthday. Anyone taller than 5' 10" was a giant. Leeches were part of a medicinal kit. At another time in history, nearly a 3<sup>rd</sup> of all people died before the age of five. Childbirth itself was often fatal for the mother, as doctors didn't know have germ theory and didn't wash their hands from one procedure to the next. The NY Times bestselling book, Factfulness," says in the last 20 years the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty has almost been cut in half. In the mid-1700's life expectancy in Europe/the Americas was around 35 – where it had been for 225 years. Life expectancy for the world as whole was 29. No country in the world had a life expectancy above 40 in 1800. By 1960 it was 60 in Europe/Americas. The life expectancy in the world in 2015 is now 71.4 years. The # of deaths per year from natural disasters have been

reduced by half. 80% of the world's 1-year-old children have been vaccinated against some disease. Tigers, giant pandas, and black rhinos were all listed as endangered in 1996 but none are today. 80% of the people in the world have access to electricity. 10% of the world was literate in 1800. Today it is 86%. The # of poor people around the world has been greatly reduced. Total wealth is vastly greater today than it was in 1900, so if the poorer half own the same proportion, they are far richer, not as poor. Undernourished people worldwide is now at 11%. 193 countries had legalized slavery in 1800 (3 now). So are oil spills, children dying before their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday (from 44% in 1800 to 4% today). Plane crash deaths are down dramatically. Our problem is when we compare ourselves to the rich – when they get too rich it makes everyone else feel poor. But rising tides raise all boats. Being optimistic ignites resilience. It is better for you in every way than being a pessimist. Pessimists see life in terms of the 3 P's: "Pervasive, Permanent, Personal." When information comes our way, pessimists focus on the bad news. Want to live longer? Be optimistic. Want to live better and be happier? Be optimistic. Smile more. Numerous scientific studies have shown this. Optimists have fewer bouts with depression. They are more immune from infectious diseases (most likely because of the release of cortisol. Optimists choose better lifestyles – they eat better, exercise more, drink less alcohol, use less drugs, and have a more supportive social network.

Fear and pessimism are bound together. Fear narrows our vision. It's called "tunnel vision." We lock into fear and can't see beyond it. When you try to speak to someone who has a fear tunnel vision, they will not reappraise the situation. Fear paralyzes, limits and restricts. It should be "realistic optimism," not blind optimism. Not everything is wonderful. A difference between a pessimist and an optimist is the focus. An optimist knows when to disengage and will do so rapidly. They cut their losses and move on to problems they can solve.

## Philippians 4:8-13

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Why can we be optimistic? Things are improving. Even when they don't, I'm "in Christ."

### 4 ways to become mentally resilient from Philippians:

- 1.) "True, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellence, praiseworthy, *THINK ABOUT these things* Focus on God's word: **Memorize** it. Zig Ziglar used to call it "Stinkin' Thinking" when we think about bad things. Train yourself to think about good things. What we think shapes what we do and that is how we feel. We should be aware of what's happening. Paul counseled the Philippians to be anxious in nothing: 1) anxiety is contagious; 2) today's technology allows anxiety to go viral; and 3) some people are super-spreaders. Lord, may I increasingly be the kind of person who spreads peace and contentment not anxiety.
- 2.) *PRACTICE these things* (and the God of peace will be with you) We are in control of 3 things: "What we think, what we say and what we **do**." Also...find others who practice these things, too. "Show me your friends – I'll show you your future." Cultivate friendships with positive people. You'll be like them. Optimism and pessimism are both contagious.
- 3.) *I have LEARNED in whatever situation I am to be content.* Be content. It's a learning process. We have to unlearn some things. What

appears to be negative often turns out to be good. We have to figure out how to turn things around. We are not born content. We are literally born as crybabies. We're always wanting something. Maybe this is what Paul meant when he said, "*When I was a child, I thought like a child...when I grew up, I gave up childish ways.*" Learn to see things differently. Learn to be grateful.

4.) *I can DO all things through HIM who strengthens me.* Paul is obviously talking about Jesus as the strengthener. Let me also add that sometime people need

Timothy Egan, in his book, "A Pilgrimage to Eternity," tells of his friend, Ron. They both grew up in Spokane. Ron came from one of the few African American families in our overwhelmingly white hometown. Barely a day went by, he told me, when someone didn't cruelly remind him of his race. By the time he got to college, he was full of rage. By the time he was the highest elected official in King County, which covers the heart of the Seattle metro area, race was always in the room with him whenever he spoke. And by the time he walked toward God and Spain in his late 60s, he found a way to let it go – all the petty, bigoted people. "One by one, I got rid of them along the trail, "by the end of my trip, this baggage was gone. I was free of them. I wondered why I even let these people stay in my head for so long."

St. Francis of Assisi's prayer: ***Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, Where there is hatred, let me sow love; Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; Where there is sadness, joy; O Divine Master, Grant that I may not so much seek To be consoled as to console; To be understood as to understand; To be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen***