



RESILIENT

**Sermon outlines for restoring
the weary souls of your
congregation in these
turbulent times.**

Based on John Eldredge's Resilient
video Bible study.

RESILIENT

STAND ALONE MESSAGE

I. Introduction

We have an astonishing capacity to rally in the face of calamity and duress. We rally and rally, and then one day we discover there's nothing left. Our soul simply says, I'm done; I don't want to do this anymore, as we collapse into discouragement, depression, or just blankness of soul.

Everything about the hour we are living in is pushing our souls to that very point. Some folks are nearly there.

We entered the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 worn out by the madness of modern life. Right now we're in a sort of global denial about the actual cost of these hard years (which are not over). We just want to get past it all, so we're currently trying to comfort ourselves with some sense of recovery and relief. But folks, we haven't yet paid the psychological bill for all we've been through. We would never tell a survivor of abuse that the trauma must be over now that the abuse has stopped. And yet that mentality is at play in our collective denial of the trauma we've been through.

We need to be kinder to our souls than that. In our compromised condition we're now facing some of the trials Jesus warned us about as we approach what the Scriptures refer to as "the end of the age" (Matthew 24:3).

Extraordinary times can be thrilling, but they also tend to be very demanding. Our hearts will need guidance and preparation. It would be a good idea to take the strength of your soul seriously at this time.

There is hope, great hope. Jesus Christ knew that humanity would face hard times, especially as history accelerates toward the end of the age. He gave us counsel on how to live through such trials, and now would be a good time to pay attention to what he said. The Creator and Redeemer of our humanity has given us a path toward recovery and resilience. We would be fools to ignore it or push it off to “some other time.” Whatever you believe about the coming years, I think we can all agree that greater resilience of heart and soul would be a very good thing to take hold of.

II. Teaching

In this hour we don’t need inspiration and cute stories. We need a survival guide. We need the supernatural resilience provided in Christ. It is always available—we simply have to take hold of it.

Primal Drive for Life

God has given each human soul a capacity and drive, a primal aspiration for life. This is as fundamental to you as your own survival.

The epicenter of our being is the deep longing to aspire for things that bring us life, to plan for those things, to take hold of them, to enjoy them, and start the cycle over as we aspire toward new things! This is the essential craving for life given to us by God. John Eldredge calls this capacity the Primal Drive for Life.

- The exodus of the people of Israel and their journey through the Sinai desert is one of the greatest survival stories of all time. More than two million people wandering through a land of sand and barren rock, homeless, looking for the land of abundance, a place to call home.

There were no real sources of food in that desert. Water was about as scarce as it is on the surface of the moon. A “barren wilderness—a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and death, where no one lives or even travels” (Jeremiah 2:6 NLT).

- This is more than a moment in Jewish history. It is recorded for us as one of the great analogies of human experience, our journey from bondage to freedom, from barrenness to the promised land. Ultimately, it is the pre-cursor to our journey of salvation, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God.

It is a story about the Primal Drive for Life—where will we take our thirst?

This is the choice, the test. Always has been, always will be.

This Primal Drive for Life was so compelling it caused thousands of those rescued slaves to mount a rebellion to go back to bondage in Egypt just to have their familiar ways back. Sobering.

“The heavens are shocked at such a thing and shrink back in horror and dismay,” says the LORD. “For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me—the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!” (Jeremiah 2:12–13 NLT).

The great alarm the Scriptures are sounding is that our longing for life to be good again will be the battleground for our heart. How you shepherd this precious longing, and if you shepherd it at all, will determine your fate in this life and in the life to come.

We must lovingly shepherd our famished thirst back to the source of life.

Primal Love

The assurance of abundance is something we learn from our mothers—although saying that we learn it sounds way too cerebral, like learning to read. The assurance of abundance—or not—is imprinted in our souls and becomes a core conviction.

Before we even learn speech we are forming our deepest beliefs about the world and our place in it through our interactions with our mothers. We learn primal love. We learn primal nourishment. When a child is nursing, it gets to drink its fill, assuring the developing soul of the child, My needs matter, I will be sated, I will be satisfied, I will have enough.

Resilience is bestowed upon us by being adored and by experiencing our deep hunger satisfied with overwhelming abundance. Physically, emotionally, soulfully, spiritually, God designed that we would receive resilience and immunity through our attachment with our mothers.

That was the original intent, at least.

Dallas Willard was only two and a half years old when his mother died. It was 1938; his mother and father had gone bankrupt during the Depression and lost their family business just before Dallas was born. (*The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 117.) They lived a hard rural life. Dallas's mother Maymie suffered an injury jumping from a hay wagon. A subsequent surgery was botched, and she never recovered. Maymie wrote her children poems from the hospital—another beautiful picture of the emotional assurance a mother offers her children—but she would never return home. The loss of his mother was “incomprehensible” to this precious little boy not even three. During the funeral or wake, little Dallas tried to climb into his mother's casket. (Gary W. Moon, ed., *Eternal Living* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 16.)

The little boy who lost his mother before the age of three, the man who went on to become one of the most brilliant voices for Christianity in the twentieth century, discovered at the end of his life his most important lesson—salvation is a new attachment, the soul's loving bond to our loving God.

Losing a mother, never having a mother, or living with a mother who in many ways could not offer the mothering we needed is simply devastating.

We've all heard a good bit about our heavenly Father, but in human development mother comes before father, and a new world of love opens to us when we discover that God offers to mother us too—to come and heal our souls here, in this essential place. God yearns to bring us the assurance of abundance: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!” (Isaiah 49:15).

God loves you more tenderly and more irrevocably than the best of mothers. If this is new terrain for you, remember—God created motherhood, mothering, mother-love, and the mother-need in each human soul. God is the source of all mothering.

For the soul to be truly saved, for us to come home, our soul needs the loving attachment that mother-love first illustrates for us. Just as we move from our earthly fathers to our homecoming with our true Father, so we need to come home to the mother-love of God, regardless of what we learned from our earthly mothers.

Embracing Recovery and Resilience

Recovery

Healing from trauma involves naming what the trauma was, and what its effects upon us have been.

As we were turning the corner from December 2020 into January 2021, many were making plans and setting goals for the new year. There was a lot of anticipation at that time about a new year. The commonly heard phrase was, “I just want 2020 to be over.” But 2021 turned out to look a whole lot like 2020 in most parts of the world. Still, we clung to whatever optimism we could.

There were so many losses and sources of heartbreak in 2020 you simply couldn’t move on without attending to them. You can’t heal trauma without grieving it. This is why the mad rush to grab some joy and the global denial insisting that “things are getting back to normal” are cruel to the soul. It’s a shared attempt to sweep it all under the rug, but the problem is a good part of your soul goes right along with it. Under the rug.

Resilience

Reading and memorizing scripture builds mental resilience because it is a living, breathing text in which you encounter God, and through which you get perspective on the world.

How good would it be for your mental health to be reminded each day that Jesus is Lord of all, “running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule” (Ephesians 1:20–21 THE MESSAGE). Try reading Isaiah 40 for five days in a row and watch what it does for your soul.

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, right and pure, lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8). Think about something beautiful, something that reminds you of the goodness of God. A place you love. A sweet memory. Something in nature. Something that makes you smile.

III.Application

As the world turns further and further from God, you will be sorely tempted to surrender some of your core convictions, if not all of them. The temptation will come over your emotions, your feelings—it doesn’t feel like God is listening; it doesn’t feel like he’s coming through. You must not let those emotions undermine your faith.

Start with God, center your life on him, and work outward from there. Our spirituality moves from something that is part of our life to the epicenter of our life—from which all other things flow, and to which all other plans yield.

Plan to become the most converted person your friends and family know. So why don’t we go ahead and call this the new monasticism—rearranging our days to be centered around our life in God, drawing upon his strength for our resilience. It’s the only way we’re going to make it.

His resilience will not fail us. Soon we will be laughing and singing with healed hearts, as we walk with Jesus in a completely healed world.

RESILIENT

TWO-PART SERIES

I. Introduction

One of the first warnings Jesus gave us about living through such times was simply “don’t freak out.” “You will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic” (Matthew 24:6 NLT) or “see that you are not frightened” (NASB 1995).

Unflappable Jesus, the most level-headed guy ever, simply refused to get baited into any of the drama of his own day. And he urges us to be unflappable too. Jesus knew that everything was going to be shouting for our attention, trying to get us all “spun up.” This injustice, that exposé. The message shouted at us from every side is, “Get upset! You really ought to be upset about this!”

It wears a soul down. There is a way out.

II. Teaching

Everyone prays at some point in their life, even if they’re not sure someone is listening. And one of the most common prayers goes something like, Lord help me; give me strength.

The Strength That Prevails

Toward the end of his days on earth, Jesus began to give his disciples clear instructions for living through extremely hard times, knowing they would record those instructions for future generations—including you, dear ones. He assured us in no uncertain terms that this story would sweep toward a climax, and that those days would be especially hard on the human soul. He urged us to ask for the strength that prevails:

Notice the fig tree, or any other tree. When the leaves come out, you know without being told that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that the Kingdom of God is near. I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear. Watch out! Don't let your hearts be dulled by carousing and drunkenness, and by the worries of this life. Don't let that day catch you unaware, like a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. Keep alert at all times. And pray that you might be strong enough to escape these coming horrors and stand before the Son of Man. (Luke 21:29-36 NLT)

Strong enough to escape—that's who and what we want to be. Strong enough to be the survivors, the triumphant ones. To make it through the storm.

Jesus wants us to understand that it is the powers of hell that are trying to overpower us, to crush the human heart—especially the hearts of his followers. The strength God urges us to ask for is a combative strength, a strength to win the fight, to overcome. Wouldn't that be wonderful right now?

We need strength of heart, strength of mind, strength of spirit. A strength that prevails. Because there are forces urging us to quit.

Jesus says there is a means of escape. Wouldn't you love an escape from all the madness? Okay then—let's make the choice right now to receive it.

Glory or Desolation

Glory

Christians are designed to live in and enjoy the benefits of two ecosystems, two realities—the physical and the spiritual, the earth and the heavens.

Each world offers graces for human flourishing. The natural world is saturated with beauty, and beauty nourishes the human soul. That's why we vacation in lovely places—when we're looking to be renewed, we choose walks in the woods, swimming in the ocean, biking through vineyards, music, and dinner on the patio under the stars. There are many natural graces that nourish and strengthen the heart and soul—beauty is one, stillness is another, and so are nature and disentangling from technology.

We are also created to live comfortably in the spiritual world, to draw upon the supernatural graces available to us through the rest of God's wonderful kingdom.

If you've ever experienced the comfort of God, or the love of God, that was heaven coming to you here on earth. You tapped into the rest of God's kingdom for the help, strength, and sustenance you needed.

Prayer is reaching into the heavens for what we need. If you have had the joy of hearing Jesus speak to you, if he brings to you scriptures, songs, things that stir your heart, that's the heavens coming into your natural world. You are tapping into the resources of God's kingdom. And there is so much more to discover!

Desolation

The prophet Daniel foretold a day when “the one who makes desolate” would step onto the world stage (Daniel 9:27 NASB). This was prophesied as part of the final trials of the age. Jesus then referred to this same reality in his own warning and counsels that we have been drawing from. Paul went on to link this force—whatever it may be—to the Falling Away he spoke of in 2 Thessalonians.

“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [the day Christ returns] will not come unless the falling away comes first” (2 Thessalonians 2:3 NKJV).

Something or someone is going to cause Desolation, and that Desolation is part of what causes people to give up on God. This is something we most definitely want to strengthen our hearts against.

The symptoms include a sort of dullness of heart, a poverty of spirit, a barrenness of soul. Disappointment collapses into disillusionment. Neither hope nor joy comes easily.

Worst of all there comes a kind of blankness in our life with God. Faith feels flat, or dumb, or simply . . . gone. We are disappointed with God, and we feel we don't believe in him anymore. Hopelessness infects our faith. Like the limping caribou, we're beat up and lagging behind, vulnerable to the predators that want to drag our souls into Desolation. Trust me—you do not want to fall prey to this. It's terrible.

We must find the supernatural graces to guard our hearts against both Desolation, whatever the source, and the riptide pull to draw away from God—or even to give up on God entirely.

Because the battle is over the heart, my friends. Always. The battle is over your heart.

III.Application

If you spend thirty minutes a day consuming what is called news (this includes all social media), then you need to spend more than thirty minutes—maybe twice as much—in the Scriptures or listening to biblical podcasts. Instead of using your downtime to scroll through Facebook or Instagram, use it to read something that reminds you of the story of God—a psalm, a good sermon, even a simple quote.

Remember—the battle right now is for the narrative; who gets to frame the story for you? Either it will be God, or someone else. If you are “alarmed,” something has drawn your attention away from the story of God. Let your fears, anxieties, anger, or rage alert you that you've been taken hostage; stop and get your bearings.

Jesus says there is a means of escape. Wouldn't you love an escape from all the madness? Jesus tells us, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Seek Jesus.

RESILIENT

TWO-PART SERIES

I. Introduction

Who we are, what we love, and how far we are willing to trust God are revealed when we are truly hard pressed.

There is poor Peter, of course, and the call of the rooster. But another revealing story—especially in terms of the fear of not having enough—comes to us from the life of the young church. Things are still turbulent. Revival is happening, but so is persecution. The infamous Ananias and Sapphira sell some real estate, and the problem isn't that they kept part of the cash for themselves; the issue is they pretend they are sharing it all with the poor. They want to look sacrificial while living selfishly. The duplicity is the issue. I think the fear of not having enough causes them to hoard, but they lie to the apostles and say they aren't. Things don't go so well after that.

Pressure brings it all to the surface. We face pressure every day. How do we respond? Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again. (1 Thess. 5:23 NLT)

II. Teaching

Holiness is a word with a lot of baggage for many people, but we can get past all that if we look at the gorgeous life and character of Jesus—he was simply good through and through. His character is so alluring, so winsome, and whenever you see him relating to people you are watching true holiness in action. Women who everyone had used and abused came to Jesus, threw themselves at his feet, and he was only loving toward them. Sometimes the crowds loved him, other times they shouted for his head, but he didn't let it faze him. Jesus' goodness in the Gospels is captivating.

Unconverted Places

When his own time of severe testing came, that goodness was his shield. Just before the secret police came for him, before the grisly scenes that follow, Jesus told his disciples, “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30 NKJV).

The enemy tried every angle he could find on Jesus—seduction, rejection, threat, the fear of not having enough, even torture. Nothing worked because Satan had nothing “in” Jesus to use as his hook. Imagine the sheer relief of it.

It probably feels like obtaining even a fraction of that goodness is beyond you, but the promise of the Christian faith is that God will reproduce Jesus’ goodness in you: “I feel as if I’m going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives” (Galatians 4:19 NLT).

The goal of God’s work in us is Jesus taking up residence in every part of us. Nothing left out. No little pockets of resistance. (And did you notice? Paul, with the Holy Spirit through him, is “mothering” these dear followers of Christ toward the beautiful goal. He is “in labor” with them, for them!)

The battle taking place over the human heart can be described as Satan using every form of seduction and threat to take our hearts captive and our loving Jesus doing everything he can to form single-heartedness in us. This often plays out in thousands of small, daily choices. Which is kind, really; we want to develop single-heartedness before the severe testing comes.

As Jesus began to explain the trials of the final hours, he warned us several times about hatred, and how hanging on to love will prove very difficult: “And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. . . . Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:10, 12 NLT).

It is our inner weaknesses, brokenness, and frankly the “unconverted places” that are going to take our legs out from under us.

We will not be safe until we are completely God’s.

Salvation is a process, not an event. It is a homecoming to be sure. Our salvation begins when we first turn toward Jesus with an open heart. We come to him for mercy. We ask him to forgive us for living so much of our life utterly ignoring him. We invite him in as our rescuer. We also sur-render; we yield the throne of our lives to him. That’s the homecoming, and our Father is so absolutely giddy over it he wants to throw you a party.

Our homecoming is utterly life-changing.

The Deep Well Inside Us

“God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psalm 73:26). How wonderful, how life-changing it is to experience God as the strength of your heart!

Don’t allow your past experience to restrict your ability to open yourself to this. Life is disappointing. There are many things we don’t understand. But this is exactly why we must allow the Scriptures to open new horizons for us, or we will forever remain within the confines of our experience. Think about the beauty, strength, and glory of the oceans, forests, waterfalls, thunderstorms—all the wild power of creation. This is the power of God made available to us The God of shooting stars and swirling galaxies, the Lord who sustains “all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3) lives in you. What if you could draw upon that glorious energy and power?

It would change things for sure.

In order to tap into that wild strength, we tap into God.

Like a tree sends its roots down deep into the subterranean world, we must learn to tap into the presence of God where he resides within us, deep in our inmost being.

Cast all your cares upon him, as 1 Peter 5:7 urges us. We let go, surrender control, and withdraw from the world by putting it all in the hands of God.

As we commune with God's presence within us, we are able to receive the strength that prevails. His glorious resilience is always available to us. Simply lingering in the presence of Jesus-within-us strengthens us. The communion is the point. Remember, just because these are supernatural graces doesn't mean they are dramatic. Don't look for fireworks and explosions. God is gentle. Receiving his love and strength is often a gentle experience.

III.Application

If you want to become a wholehearted person, you must reach the point where happily, lovingly, you give absolutely everything over to God. You make Jesus your everything, your all-in- all. Not only is this the fulfillment of your heart's created destiny, it is the source of all recovery and resilience. Nothing can be taken from you because you've already surrendered everything.

I give everything for your everything.

This is now my prayer.

I give everything for your everything.

You can't go back, especially at a time when God is moving things forward. He wants us to come along with him.

If the heavens are thrilling as they stage for the return of Christ, if the battle on earth is raging, if Christ himself is standing at the door—wouldn't our hearts somehow recognize it? He who is our heart of hearts, our deepest desire, and most sincere longing, is drawing near — nearer than ever before.

This would be especially moving for those in whom Christ dwells. Maybe—just maybe—our hearts are responding to the imminent return of Jesus while our rational minds continue to dismiss the thought.

We remember Lot's wife, as our Lord commanded. Every time our hearts are tempted to look back, we redouble our love for Jesus, knowing that strong, dark currents are trying to pull us away. We take hold of the supernatural graces! We give everything for his everything, diving deep in our innermost being to find the God who gives us resilience.