

Resilience



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Job 19:25; James 5:10, 11; Ruth 1; Esther 2; 2 Cor. 11:23–28; Phil. 4:11–13.*

Memory Text: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging” (*Psalm 46:1–3, NIV*).

Resilience is the process of facing adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or extreme stress and “bouncing back” successfully without becoming too negatively affected by the experience. The concept has received growing attention because of the usefulness of possessing a reasonable amount of resilience in the face of life’s difficulties. After all, who among us doesn’t face major stressors, in one form or another? The question is, How can we have the resilience to deal with what happens and not be destroyed emotionally in the process?

In the 1960s, Victor and Mildred Goertzel wrote *Cradles of Eminence*, which presented biographical analyses of more than seven hundred subjects who went through great childhood adversity (broken homes, financial struggles, physical and/or psychological handicaps, etc.) and yet achieved great success. The book was updated in 2004.

The Bible also tells us of individuals who had to face adversity but who, through God’s grace, bounced back and overcame their problems. Despite difficult circumstances and even flaws in their characters, they were able to be used by God because they had the resilience to press on, even amid adverse circumstances.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 19.*

The Patience of Job

Read James 5:10, 11. What is it about Job that makes him an example to be emulated? See also Job 1–3.

A woman who underwent counseling to recover from a serious crisis told her friends that one idea transmitted by the counselor was key to her successful recovery. “What helped me most,” she said, “was the counselor insisting that my painful circumstances would come to an end. ‘It looks dark and unending now,’ the counselor used to say, ‘but it will not last too much longer.’ This thought helped me gain resilience.” In other words, the counselor kept the woman’s hope alive.

How can we grow in patience? George Goodman of England once received a young man who needed to be prayed for. He expressed his need directly: “Mr. Goodman, I wish you would pray for me that I might have patience.”

The elderly man responded, “Yes, I will pray for you that you may have tribulation.”

“Oh no, sir,” the young man replied, “it is patience that I want.”

“I understand,” said Goodman, “and I will pray for you that you may have tribulation.” The Bible teacher opened his Bible and read Romans 5:3 to the amazed young man: “ ‘And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.’ ”

The story of Job offers a supreme example of resilience. Earlier in his life, Job had understood that God is merciful and righteous. He did not understand the reasons for his suffering; he did not find support from his wife; his property and children were destroyed, and then he contracted a horrible disease. And yet, somehow amid it all, he never lost his faith in God and endured until the tragedy ended.

Read Job 19:25. What hope did Job cling to here? How can we better learn to cling to this hope in our own adversity, as well?

Think about times you were going through something terrible. What hope sustained you? What words spoken to you were helpful? Which ones were not so helpful, or even harmful? What did you learn that would enable you to better help someone who is going through great adversity now?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Philippians 4:11–13*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe the positive outcomes that come from suffering that is endured with patience and trust in God.

Feel: Nurture the development of rest and hope in God, regardless of how terrible circumstances may seem.

Do: Persevere in clinging to God and trusting in His care, whatever happens.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Perfect Work of Suffering

- Ⓐ What kinds of benefits can come from suffering patiently endured?
- Ⓑ How does Joseph’s story illustrate resilience and perseverance under trial?
- Ⓒ How did Ruth support Naomi in her suffering? What can we learn from Ruth’s example about supporting those who are suffering?
- Ⓓ Job’s questions to God about his trials were never really answered. What can we learn from God’s responses to Job?

II. Feel: Learning to Be Content

- Ⓐ How can we learn to be content in whatever circumstances God gives us?
- Ⓑ Peace comes from having complete confidence in God’s ability to care for us. What Bible verses help us review the history of God’s care of those who are suffering?

III. Do: Unfaltering Trust

- Ⓐ How can trials teach us to submit more completely to God’s far-reaching oversight?
- Ⓑ When the going is good, it’s much easier to trust in God. What is it about trusting in God when times are difficult that strengthens faith?

► **Summary:** Resilience under trial comes from learning to be patient and have faith in God’s foresight, strength, and unfailing goodness to us, regardless of what happens.

Joseph in Captivity

Read Genesis 37:19–28 and Genesis 39:12–20 and try to put yourself in Joseph’s sandals. Think how discouraged he must have been. Think of the potential for anger and bitterness that could have, even justifiably, been his. Though the Bible doesn’t tell us in detail what his emotions were, it’s not hard to imagine the pain he suffered from such betrayal and treachery.

Nevertheless, Joseph turned to the Lord at these junctures, and in the end, good things came out of the events. After having been sold by his brothers, Joseph actually experienced his conversion and a much closer relationship with God. “He had been told of the Lord’s promises to Jacob, and how they had been fulfilled—how, in the hour of need, the angels of God had come to instruct, comfort, and protect him. And he had learned of the love of God in providing for men a Redeemer. Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 213, 214.

When he was thrown in prison unjustly, the experience opened the path to the court of Pharaoh to accomplish the mission to save many souls and his own people.

What do the following texts tell us about how bad situations can be turned to good?

Rom. 5:3–5 _____

2 Cor. 1:3, 4 _____

2 Cor. 1:8, 9 _____

2 Tim. 1:11, 12 _____

God does not want us to suffer needlessly. In fact, the environment Jesus has prepared for us in heaven is tearless and painless (*Rev. 21:4*). But as we wait for that promise to be fulfilled, it seems certain that pain is the path to learning certain lessons. Character development, empathy, humility, discipleship, understanding of good and evil—these are some of the lessons we can learn. Although it is difficult to think of the benefits of suffering, especially in the midst of trial, we can ask God for the necessary strength to pass through difficulties.

Have you ever had a terrible experience that in the end brought some good, some benefit? How can this help you learn to trust the Lord in any adversity, even when nothing good seems likely to result?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Even the most difficult moments of despair—those that bring us through the “valley of the shadow of death” and that threaten to break us—are opportunities to grow in God’s grace by cultivating emotional, mental, and spiritual resilience.

The sky fills with raptors, their bodies dark spots on cloudless blue. They circle far above the water, seemingly lazy and without intention. Finally one breaks off, tucking its wings to enter a freefall, a tearing and headlong dive. For a moment, one of the largest, most majestic lords of the sky becomes a creature of water, completely consumed. An eternal second later, the water’s surface breaks again, this time as powerful wings pump through waves and then finally air, lifting the heavy, wet bird to the sky, a fish gripped in its claws.

This act unfolds on every continent (except Antarctica) near the bodies of water where osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) make their home. Ospreys overwinter on continents throughout the southern hemisphere and make annual grueling and treacherous journeys back to their ancestral homes north of the equator. Traveling between one hundred and two hundred miles a day, they chart a course back to the places of their birth in order to mate, incubate, hatch, and fledge their offspring. One visceral account of a single female osprey en route to the Pacific Northwest was captured on film in March 2009 by a birder from Phoenix, Arizona, who traveled to the desert to photograph the blooms and birds of spring. He focused his camera on a large raptor flying in his direction and snapped a picture of what later turned out, to his amazement, to be an osprey flying over the desert.

Consider This: A bird that depends upon fish to live is spotted flying over the desert! If that’s not remarkable enough, this same bird, already many hundreds, if not thousands of miles into her journey, has still farther to go and more difficult territory to traverse. Throughout our lives, many of us will pass through similar, figurative deserts, harrowing experiences that seem impossible to endure, hard journeys that test our faith in God’s love. But just as God ordained the osprey’s difficult annual migration, so He has allowed each of us to face our share of trials and tribulations. How does the osprey’s journey mirror the faith and resilience we are called upon to exercise in our own faith journeys?

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Naomi

What are some of the misfortunes experienced by Naomi? *Ruth 1.*

Leaving one's country to settle somewhere else is always scary, especially when the departure is motivated by the need to survive. The famine in Judah forced Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons to emigrate to the country of Moab, an agricultural area where they could obtain food. The Moabites were an idolatrous people (*Judg. 10:6*) whose practices clashed with Jewish beliefs. This, in itself, must have produced significant turmoil to the newcomers. Sometime after having settled, Naomi's husband died. Mother and sons found themselves in a foreign land, degraded to the condition of widow and orphans, without protection and subject to additional disgrace. Then Naomi's sons, Mahlon and Kilion, married local women. This fact may have brought conflict to the family, at least in the beginning, because of significant religious differences. Although the law did not specifically prohibit marriages between Jews and Moabites, it was stipulated that Moabites, or their descendants, could not enter the assembly of the Lord until after ten generations (*Deut. 23:3*).

Later on, Mahlon and Kilion, whose names meant "sickness" and "wasting," respectively, also died. It is hard to imagine a more tragic situation in the life of Naomi—no one alive from her close family and the remaining kin far away in Bethlehem.

What was the turning point in Naomi's life? How did God repair the severe adversities suffered by Naomi? *Ruth 1:16–18, 4:13–17.*

At the deepest moment of trouble, Naomi's daughter-in-law Ruth served as God-sent emotional support. Naomi must have been a remarkable woman to have inspired the devotion of her two daughters-in-law, especially Ruth, who accepted the God of Israel and made the firm decision to care for her mother-in-law for life in a land whose inhabitants were, historically, her enemies.

Chapters 2 through 4 convey a beautiful succession of events that ended up in a happy family arrangement. Naomi left behind untold suffering and lived to witness the marriage of Ruth to Boaz and the birth of her grandson Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David.

However much we ultimately need to trust the Lord and surrender everything to Him, at times we also need human help. When was the last time you really needed someone's help? What did you gain from that experience?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED▶ **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary**

I. Job: The Source of Suffering (*Review Job 1:8–10 and Job 2:5 with your class.*)

The story of Job is one of the few in the Bible that gives a glimpse into the divine rationale that allows for suffering to take place. Job 1:6–12 and Job 2:1–6 reveal that the calamities Job faced were linked to the larger conflict between God and Satan. Satan sought to prove that Job, the most blameless and upright man on earth (*Job 1:8*), was faithful to God only because of his soft, cushy life—specifically because he had material riches (*Job 1:10*) and was blessed with physical health and well-being (*Job 2:5*). Further, we learn that Satan called Job’s faithfulness into question before the heavenly host of God.

Consider This: What lesson is there in knowing that the origins of Job’s suffering are linked directly to the universal conflict between good and evil? The story of Job lingers as a reminder that although we, like Job, may not understand the reason for our suffering, we can be assured the root cause is the same. How can this knowledge enable our faith and spirits to endure our darkest trials with resilience?

II. Trials of Faith (*Review Job 12–14 with your class.*)

In chapters 3, 7, 9, 10, 12–14, 16, 17, 19, 21, 23, 24, 26–31, we confront the personal account of Job’s perseverance to hold on to his faith amid a struggle to reconcile his circumstances with his concept of God as just and loving. Here we see Job stretched to the limits of his capacity—physically, mentally, and spiritually. He laments his own birth, asserting the futility of life. He wishes he were dead. He says that God shattered him and vacillates between despairing of God’s dealings with him altogether and asserting God’s power as a Redeemer in his life, a Savior he longs for.

Consider This: Job’s crisis of faith is familiar to anyone who has experienced senseless tragedy and profound personal loss. We know that

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Esther's Days of Stress

What were some of the adversities, struggles, and pressures faced by Esther?

Esther 2:6, 7 _____

Esther 2:10 _____

Esther 2:21, 22 _____

Esther 4:4–17 _____

Esther 7:3, 4; 8:3 _____

Since early life Esther had been an orphan. Although she was adopted by her older cousin Mordecai, the stigma of parentless childhood was most surely difficult. In spite of this, Esther grew up as a balanced, determined, and capable young woman.

After she became queen, Esther did not reveal her nationality or family background. This was a particularly heavy challenge. Surrounded by food, luxuries, and practices of life in the court, Esther had to somehow try to maintain her Jewish faith and identity. In addition, the risk of being identified as a member of the Jewish people was real, and the consequences of hiding her identity were uncertain.

Esther also had to take to the king the bad news that officers were conspiring to kill him. This was not an easy task because, if the plot could not be substantiated, Esther and her cousin could be blamed for starting rumors, and who knew the results?

But the greatest responsibility placed on Esther was being left as the sole channel to save her nation. Mordecai asked her to mediate on behalf of the Jews, which she could not do without risking her life. When she hesitated, her cousin put still more pressure on her: "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish" (*Esther 4:14, NIV*). Talk about stress!

Finally she appeared before the king, knowing that such an act carried with it a high chance of death. In the end, though, things worked out, however dangerous the situation was at times for this young woman.

All of us, like Esther, are born into situations not of our own making. What is your background? What things were handed you, good and bad, that you didn't ask for? How can you learn to appreciate more deeply the good that you have been given and to overcome the bad?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Job was a man whose faith was so great that he was singled out by God as “a blameless and upright man” without a peer on the earth (*Job 1:8, NKJV*). Yet, even a man like Job can be brought to the brink of despairing in God in his pain and grief. Consider that resilience doesn’t mean that there aren’t moments of profound doubt. How does Job’s story show that being resilient is not measured by the individual moments of strength or weakness along the way but rather the place we end up?

▶ **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: We often want to know why we are asked to endure suffering; yet, this question is rarely answered. At the same time, God reveals Himself to strengthen the weak (for instance, Job) or works through others to provide support (for instance, Naomi and Ruth), giving resources to help individuals endure their circumstances. Focus on biblical examples provided in this week’s lesson which show that individuals caught up in trying circumstances may be part of a larger plan (for instance, Job, Joseph, Esther) and discuss the possible applications for our lives today.

Thought Questions:

- 1 Rather than asking the reasons for our suffering, what are other questions we can ask ourselves that can help us grow in grace and strength to carry us through the dark moments?
- 2 In circumstances we cannot change, all we can do is decide what our response to them will be. How can we cultivate a resilient attitude and a thankful spirit? (*Read Romans 8:28 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18.*)

Application Questions:

- 1 Think about the most challenging circumstance in your life. As you look back on that experience, what unexpected blessings grew out of it that you perhaps couldn’t see during the trial?
- 2 Discuss how God can make something beautiful out of tragedy, how He can transform our biggest failings into sources of personal growth and strength.

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The Secret of Being Content

Paul was born and grew up in Tarsus, into a Hebrew family from the tribe of Benjamin. He obtained his Roman nationality through his father, a citizen of the Roman Empire. He became a Pharisee, a devout group who adhered to the law (Torah) plus the oral tradition (Mishnah). With this background, he must have enjoyed the privileges of his social and religious status.

However, when Paul responded to the call of Jesus, everything changed. Instead of persecutor, he became the target of radical persecution from some of his own nation and eventually from Romans. He suffered tribulations for three decades and was executed after having been imprisoned at Rome.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23–28, which lists some of the adversities Paul had to face. Then read Philippians 4:11–13. After so much suffering, what is the assessment Paul makes of his own life? What lessons are here for us amid whatever struggles we’re going through?

Contentment is a crucial component of happiness and psychological well-being. Being content comes to those who see the positive outlook of things, those who look at the past with acceptance and at the future with hope. Interestingly enough, having “everything” doesn’t guarantee contentment and happiness. For some folk, no matter what they have, it’s never enough. Others, having so little, are nevertheless satisfied. What do you think makes the difference?

One of the many current definitions of “intelligence” is the ability to adapt to new situations. This may have to do with living in new places, relating to new people, or experiencing new socioeconomic conditions. Paul’s ability is not a hereditary trait, because he specifically says, “I have learned to be content” (*Phil. 4:12, NIV*). This is not a capacity that some possess and others do not. Adaptation and contentment amid a wide range of circumstances are learned processes that come as a result of time and practice.

Verse 13 gives the ultimate key to Paul’s resilience. Not only could he feel contentment with little or much material resources. He could do anything and everything in Jesus Christ.

How content are you? How much are you tossed around and victimized by your circumstances? What are ways in which you can learn better to be “content in any and every situation” (*vs. 12, NIV*)?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

3 To the young and untested, giving thanks in suffering seems impossible. What is the way in which the testimony of those with experience can strengthen the resolve and resilience of individuals undergoing trials of faith for the first time? (Read *Hebrews. 12:1–3, Romans. 5:3–5, and Ephesians. 6:18.*)

► **STEP 4—Create**

Inspiration: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (*Heb. 12:1–3, NIV*).

1 During most of our lives we face everyday challenges. Pipes break, work circumstances are challenging, our friends or family disappoint. Think of the top three problems you face in your life. How often do we miss out on using these challenges as opportunities to grow in grace and faith? Moving forward, how can you take a new look at your life, specifically the problems you face, and cultivate a new attitude and spirit of thankfulness? How can you use the circumstances in which you find yourself to build resilience (and all the fruit of the Spirit) for yourself, your spouse, your family, and your wider community? (Read *Galatians 5:19–23.*)

2 How does faithfulness in facing small challenges lead to a capacity to face the big challenges in life?

3 What example of Christian community do we find to help us understand what creates resilience? How do we foster resilience in our families, churches, and wider community? How do we raise children to cope with adversity and to build internal resources to endure suffering? How do we create spiritual support networks to lend support and minister to one another?

Further Study: “The powers of darkness gather about the soul and shut Jesus from our sight, and at times we can only wait in sorrow and amazement until the cloud passes over. These seasons are sometimes terrible. Hope seems to fail, and despair seizes upon us. In these dreadful hours we must learn to trust, to depend solely upon the merits of the atonement, and in all our helpless unworthiness cast ourselves upon the merits of the crucified and risen Saviour. We shall never perish while we do this—never! When light shines on our pathway, it is no great thing to be strong in the strength of grace. But to wait patiently in hope when clouds envelop us and all is dark requires faith and submission which causes our will to be swallowed up in the will of God. We are too quickly discouraged, and earnestly cry for the trial to be removed from us, when we should plead for patience to endure and grace to overcome.”—Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 114.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Some people overcome hardships under which others are crushed. What do you think makes the difference?
- ❷ Dwell more on the question of trials and tragedy that don’t seem to have any kind of happy ending. What are we to make of them? How do we reconcile them with our faith and the promises of God?
- ❸ In the third sentence of the quote in Friday’s study (“In these dreadful hours we must . . .”), what is Ellen G. White telling us? Where is she pointing our hope? Why, in the end, is the gospel, as presented in these words, our only hope, regardless of the tragedy that happens to us now?
- ❹ How can you practically apply Peter’s counsel in 1 Peter 4:12, 13? It’s one thing to remain resilient and faithful amid trial, but to do what Peter says? How is that possible?
- ❺ Suppose you were dealing with someone in a very dire situation, one from which there seemed no way out, humanly speaking. Suppose, too, that you had only five minutes with that person. In those few minutes, what would you say to give the person hope?