

1st slide: Emotional, Physical and Spiritual Resilience: What is it and how do I know I have it?

In 2008, the year I refer to as the year from hell, I got divorced, lost my job, lost my dog of 12 years and then my father died. All in a span of 10 months. I thought this was the worst year of my life and then, in 2015, I got breast cancer.

After 32 years in the behavioral health field and having survived my year from hell and breast cancer, I no longer believe that God doesn't give you what you can't handle, I don't believe God "gives" or "doesn't give" us anything when it comes to the trials we are confronted with in life. I had to grapple with this in a new way when I was diagnosed with cancer. It revealed itself when I would share with folks about how I was doing. My prognosis was good. And they'd say; "Praise God." It's only in one breast and I don't need a mastectomy. And they'd say; "Praise God." My tumor shrunk to one third of its original size after only the second chemo. And they'd say, "Praise God." One day, I thought to myself; "Supposing my news was of a different sort?" I had to somehow come to terms with that if I attributed only my good news to God's grace in my life, then what would that say about God in my life, if my news was not so good? Delle came to see me during every chemo session and this was a significant part of our talks. Through those dialogues, I settled the matter for myself in this way. God doesn't bring loss and illness and hardships to me. Life does that. And God is my companion in whatever life brings. Which means I can love God and trust God and praise God no matter the outcome. And, more importantly, this conclusion I came to ignited in me the desire to be a testimony to God's love no matter what the outcome. It became important to me that how I lived through these difficult times were demonstrations of God's grace, not in healing or having good news or recovering or surviving, but in the day to day pain and struggle. And frankly, that's precisely what got me through it.

2nd slide: Surviving and Thriving

Now the word resilience comes from physics and describes the quality of materials that regain their shape after they have been bent, compressed or stretched.

Positive psychology talks about the difference between surviving and thriving. I believe that when we return to our original shape, we have survived and that is resilience. It is a very important aspect of resilience because surviving enables us to move forward. But for some folks, when life gives them pain, they do not return to their original shape, they become something else . . . we call this becoming something else, transformation.

When we talk about transformation in this context, we are talking about a profound shift in how we make meaning of our world and experiences. We see life and ourselves in it differently. We are not looking at the world through the same lens as before and because of that, we are changed.

Ha- life is short but it is also wide! This is what James is referring to when he says; "because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let endurance have its full effect". Let endurance have its full effect. The breadth of life provides us with all the room we need to let endurance have its full effect. Life is so wide, we can move beyond surviving to thriving. Life is so wide, we can allow endurance to have its full effect and in so doing, be transformed.

3nd slide: Christ is born

So, we begin with the most important fact in all this. Christ is born.

I'd like you to take a moment to think about where all of your life's hurts live in your body. Where do your painful memories and your present hurts live in your body? When life gives you hardship and suffering, where do you feel that in your body? For most of us, it doesn't take but a spilt second to identify where these things live in our bodies.

Now, think about where the birth of Christ lives in your body. Where does the hope of Christ is born dwell within you? Paul asked the Corinthians; "Do you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" Do you know that? Can you feel that truth in your body? Close your eyes for a minute and go to that place. Find that place. That place is also where your resilience lives.

Since ancient times, religious teachings, writings and practices have existed to help us with life's struggles. And all of them share one thing: they are all optimistic. All of them believe there is a way through trials and tribulations and that people are capable of finding it. You are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells within you. Christ is born lives in us always. The hope of Christ's birth is among us always.

4th slide:

For many of us, the personification of resilience is in Jesus who suffered greatly but never lost the capacity to extend himself to others in love. In other words, Jesus had an abundance of compassion.

5th slide: So, Who is the resilient person?

6th slide: For starters, They Practice Compassion

Some 22 years ago a mentor of mine, Marge, said to me, "Inge, you will never have the kind of love you want in life until you make peace with your mother," to which I said, "A bloody cold day in hell before that happens," to which Marge said, "Well, I'm not asking you to invite her over for tea and crumpets for Christ sake!" So, just to describe my mother in a few words: sociopath, alcoholic, opioid addict, borderline personality disorder, perpetrator. Mom. For Christ's sake. Now I did end up making peace with my mother and that story is for another sermon. But I did not invite her over for tea and crumpets. Not even for Christ's sake.

Now fast forward to 8 years ago in a class with Lingpur, a local Buddhist monk. The topic: compassion. She was explaining the importance of understanding that hurt people, hurt people and that we are all wounded and so, if we can acknowledge our own woundedness, we can have compassion for even the most injurious of people. Now, this one very shy gal in the class, meekly raises her hand and asks, "But Lingpur, what if the person is still hurting you?" Lingpur answers tenderly; "Having compassion for another does not mean you do not have a decision to make." Now Marge's delivery was a little less tender but the message is the same. Having compassion for others does not mean that we have to invite the sociopath over for tea and crumpets. In some cases, we have a decision to make and resilient people understand this. They understand that we need to always practice compassion but sometimes we have to practice compassion from a safe distance. Doing this enables them to extend love to those who are safe and good and healthy. That's what Marge was trying to say. Practice compassion with your mom- from a safe distance- so that you can open your life to the kind of love you want with those who will love you back. For your sake.

Slide 7: Besides practicing compassion, Resilient folks also practice mindfulness

Mindfulness is the art of paying attention to your life on purpose. Mindful people monitor the thoughts that come through them. However, instead of reacting to their negative thoughts, they observe them like a storm that is passing through.

And, more importantly, they pay attention to what is right in their lives. They give it strength and value, thereby turning up the volume on the beauty that surrounds them. In today's world this could not be more needed- turning up the volume on what is beautiful about our world.

Resilient people realize that they are part of a divine cycle of life and death. And in this understanding, they remain like the eye at the center of a tornado.

The world will continue to change around them. But at the center of this tornado, is their mind, where there is tranquility and calm. The place perhaps where Christ is born lives.

Jesus is the quintessential example of how mindfulness strengthens resilience. From an eternal perspective, every moment in all time is part of "now." So while Jesus was mindful of the events occurring in the secular world around him and even responsive to them at specific moments in time, he maintained an eternal perspective. His deepest person was not actually motivated by the temporal present but rather by the eternal Presence. Now, more than ever, we need that perspective. Life is very wide.

Slide 8: now, one thing resilient people don't do is compare themselves to others

We live in a society that encourages keeping up with the Joneses. Resilient people don't spend their time feeling sorry for themselves. They realize that every soul has a different journey and therefore it is pointless to compare the path of your life with someone else.

The expression, never compare your insides to someone else's outsides rings true here.

They are continually trying to be the new and improved version of themselves. And as long as they are better than they were yesterday, they know they are on the right path. Isn't that a relief? We just need to try to be better than we were yesterday.

Slide 9: And resilient people understand that after every big setback is an even bigger transformation.

When I lost my job during that year from hell, one of my colleagues said to me, "Inge, no one goes through this amount of loss in such a short period of time without there being some kind of transformation on the other side of it."

Resilient people understand this. They see difficulties as stepping stones to a transformation.

And they do this by not asking why, as in, why is this happening to me. Instead, they ask what, who and how:

What do I want my life to look like on the other side of this? Who do I want to become? How can I learn from this? Because of those wise words from my colleague, I had a mantra I would say every morning: I will be kind and gracious and grateful today. Now, that does not mean there weren't days where I would call friends and say, "I'm having a really hard time being kind and gracious and grateful right now!" There is nothing easy about this. About any of this.

Slide 10: Which brings us to the next characteristic of resilient people. They find humor in everything

Laughter, in its very highest form, is a spiritual practice. It connects us to the part of our soul that heals. When we laugh with others, we gain a sense of interconnectedness and belonging.

Resilient people look for reasons to laugh. They find humor in the mundane. They understand that paying attention to the ordinary is what makes life extraordinary.

When I was first going through chemo they told me that my toenails might fall off. I was completely horrified. Not sure why this, out of everything else, scared me the most. OMG- my toenails might fall off?? Seriously? Never mind the incapacitating nausea, the diarrhea, the mouth sores, the exhaustion and the terrible bone pain . . . my toenails are going to fall off? No, no, no. So I prayed. Please God, please, please, please do not let my toenails fall off. A week later, my fingernails started falling off. And I laughed like I'm laughing now and said thank you.

Slide 11: Another thing resilient people do not do is try to control their lives

Worry and anxiety are a good example of trying to control our lives because they represent believing you can change things by thinking about them obsessively. If I worry about this enough, it will change. If I think about this hard enough, it will be different.

It's not about throwing caution to the wind. It's about figuring out what you can and cannot control and doing your best not to put energy toward trying to control things you can't. The opposite of worry is doing something about the things you can do something about. When you do that, letting go of the rest becomes a lot easier!

Slide 12: Now here's an interesting commonality among resilient people, they treat their bodies as gifts from God

Ok everyone, it's New Year's resolution time! There's no getting around this. We need 30 minutes of moderate cardiovascular exercise 5 times a week. We need a diet of fruits and vegetables, low fat dairy, lean protein and legumes. We need to stay away from processed foods. Listen, if your meal comes in a bag or a box, it's probably not good for you. We need to quit smoking and maintain a healthy weight. And, we need to get enough sleep. Now you all get right on that.

Slide 13: We can't have a conversation about resilience without talking about vulnerability

Resilient people understand the relationship between resilience and being vulnerable.

Davin has this great story. He was in diversity training and was partnered with someone to share on the questions; "What is something in life you are afraid of? And how do you manage this?" Now sit with that for a second, what is something in lie you are afraid of and how do you manage it?

He went first. He told his partner about how he was scared of success at times. He shared that he often self-sabotaged out of fear of failure. He said, "You know, it really holds me back and here are three examples of how this has played itself out in my life . . . And he went on. He shared like a champ. He just put it right out there. There it was- the fear.

Then it was his partner's turn. And she said . . . "Spiders. I'm really afraid of spiders."

Well, some folks are more willing than others to be vulnerable☹

Being honest about how we feel, starts with letting ourselves feel. Too often we swallow our feelings, quite literally. How many of you have done that? Swallowed your feelings? Or we go to emotions that feel safer, like anger. We do this because to make ourselves vulnerable is scary. But, swallowing our feelings or only allowing anger will wreak havoc on our resilience because it makes us sick.

There's no getting around this one either. The more we swallow our feelings or don't get underneath the anger to the place where it hurts, the sicker we become.

So, I'd like you to take a moment to think about one hurt, recent or from the past, that you have been holding on to. Do you have it in your mind? Now, I am going to ask you to make a commitment to yourself, right now, to share that hurt with someone you trust. Do you all have your confident in mind? Please, give yourselves that gift.

Slide 14: Finally, why does this even matter? Why is resilience important?

Well, we have now come full circle. It is important for the reason James tells us it is important. So that we may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. When Michelle Obama was asked by Oprah Winfrey how she handles the negative commentary that is constantly being flung at her she says that she handles it by being a grown up. Isn't that priceless? By being a grown up. When they go low, we go high. She also said during the same interview that we need to be what we want. If you want hope, be hopeful. I think that's what James means when he tells us that when we face trials to consider it nothing but joy. Consider it joy so that you strengthen your endurance and when you let endurance have its full effect, you open your heart to joy. You make space in your life for hope.

So, we have talked about what resilience is and why it is important, but how do we know we have it?

This is what I can tell you, the degree to which you are resilient is measured by the degree to which you can experience hope and joy.

Have a very joyful, hope filled New Year.