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# LIKE A RUBBER BALL

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## CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

### Text

“We often suffer, but we are never crushed. Even when we don’t know what to do, we never give up. <sup>9</sup> In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, CEV)

### Introduction

You may remember many years ago when toymakers brought out a *SuperBall*. This ball, which looked much like any other rubber ball, was invented by Norma Stingley in 1964 and was made of extremely elastic materials, which caused it to bounce much higher than any other ball up to that time. I remember throwing it against the ground as hard as my young arm could and watching it bounce way over the roof of my house and continuing to bounce on the ground many more times after. In fact, according to Wikipedia, “it can fly over a three-story building.”

The Superball possesses the property of being incredibly resilient. It has the ability to bounce back, to withstand and recover quickly from very difficult conditions – like being thrown hard against the pavement. This ball is resilient because it is able to recoil or spring back into shape after bending, stretching, or being compressed. This amazing ball is awesome to play with, as long as your arm can keep throwing it against the ground. But the *SuperBall* is not the only rubber ball that bounces. Other rubber balls are resilient too, each one according to the materials with which it is made.

People are also resilient. Resilience is the ability to manage your reactions to stressful situations, bounce back from painful events, and function well even when bad things happen. The good news is that resilience isn’t something you

either have or don't have. Everyone is born with a measure of resiliency which then can be fostered so that it grows and is strengthened. At the same time, resiliency is not something we use up and lose. Rather, we build resilience throughout our lives—especially when we find ways to get through a challenge. It is sort of like a muscle – the more we use it, the stronger it gets.

While the Bible does not use the words resilience or resilient, it does describe what it is. In our text for today, the Apostle Paul wrote: “We often suffer, but we are never crushed. Even when we don't know what to do, we never give up. <sup>9</sup>In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 CEV) Paul was very resilient. He reminded the church members of the church in Corinth of all the things he experienced as a believer and missionary for Christ:

*“I have worked harder and have been put in jail more times. I have been beaten with whips more and have been in danger of death more often. <sup>24</sup>Five times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes with a whip. <sup>25</sup>Three times the Romans beat me with a big stick, and once my enemies stoned me. I have been shipwrecked three times, and I even had to spend a night and a day in the sea. <sup>26</sup>During my many travels, I have been in danger from rivers, robbers, my own people, and foreigners. My life has been in danger in cities, in deserts, at sea, and with people who only pretended to be the Lord's followers. <sup>27</sup>I have worked and struggled and spent many sleepless nights. I have gone hungry and thirsty and often had nothing to eat. I have been cold from not having enough clothes to keep me warm. <sup>28</sup>Besides everything else, each day I am burdened down, worrying about all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:23-28 CEV)*

But despite all the hardships, Paul bounced back and continued to move forward. As he told the members of the church in Philippi:

*“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the goal for*

*the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.” (Philippians 3:12-15 NKJV)*

The Bible encourages us to press on (Philippians 3:13–15), to overcome hardships and temptations (Romans 12:21), and to persevere in the face of trials (James 1:12). But God’s word also provides many examples of people who suffered greatly but continued to follow His plan for their lives.

Perhaps we could even choose Proverbs 24:16 as a sort of theme song for a life beset with hardship. “For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.” (Proverbs 24:16 ESV)

God knows we need special encouragement at times, so He stands by us and whispers in our ears the words of Paul: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37 ESV)

If anyone needs resilience more than ever before it is today’s families. Just think for a moment about all that families have had to endure just in the last twelve months. But even if we take COVID-19, the pandemic, and the quarantine out of the equation, families are constantly bounced hard against the pavement of life.

## Resilient Spouses

[NOTE: PLEASE INSERT YOUR OWN ILLUSTRATION HERE] Just today, as we were preparing this message, we received an urgent appeal from a woman we do not know. In that e-mail, she pleaded for help because her marriage is falling apart. Her husband told her he wants to move on because he has no love for her. He had an adulterous relationship some time ago. He told her that it was because she had not shown any sexual interest toward him, that she didn’t seem interested in having sexual relationships with him, so he looked elsewhere to someone else to meet his need.



She said she had forgiven him and wanted to have a good, healthy, happy, lasting marriage, but he does not want to. One of the many tragedies from this story is that there's a child caught in this web, a child who will witness the breakup of his parent's marriage, the destruction of his family.

But it doesn't have to happen. We have also known and worked with couples who have had serious marital problems, including multiple affairs. Yet they were able to rebuild their relationship with God and with each other. One couple has been together, strong in their faith and faithful to their marriage vows, for over twenty years since they gave themselves and their marriage to God. They, like Paul, claimed the promise, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13 NKJV)

Resilient couples have discovered that if they are going to bounce back from whatever the world and the devil throw their way, they don't play the blame game. Unlike our forefathers, Adam and Eve, resilient couples face their troubles together instead of pointing the finger at each other. Accept responsibility for your issues and things you have done instead of hiding behind accusations of blame toward the other. Finger-pointing deflates you, and eventually, you may not be able to bounce back again.

Another thing we have learned about resilient couples is that they are able to find humor even in difficult situations. It doesn't mean that you don't take your concerns or problems seriously. One couple noticed that if their fights were beginning to spiral out of control, it often helped if one was willing to break the tension by smiling, opening their arms, and exclaiming: "Let's hug it out!" Please make sure that finding humor during tough moments does not mean you make fun of the other person. Not only is that disrespectful, but it does nothing to help the already problematic issue you are facing.

Resilient couples don't want to simply survive, they want to thrive. So, when they see themselves beginning to sink, they ask for help. They don't wait until they're already drowning; they ask for help early rather than too late. It takes courage to ask for help, but resilient couples know that all couples face difficulties at one

time or another; it is part of life. The key is knowing when you can take care of the situation on your own or when you need help from outside. And by help from outside, we don't mean a relative or a friend, but a skilled professional.

You might think that resilient couples are strong all the time. The truth is that these couples have learned to be vulnerable with each other and are not afraid to confide with their spouse about their fears and hopes. At the same time, they respond compassionately to what their spouse discloses.

Good, healthy communication is a key ingredient in the life of successful couples. Resilient couples don't expect their spouse to read their minds but express openly, clearly, and assertively what it is they think and feel, what they like or dislike, and what they want or wish. At the same time, resilient couples don't gloss over or ignore problems but rather are committed to solving them. They have a genuine desire to move forward and continue their journey of marriage together until death do them part.

Resilient spouses enjoy being together. During the pandemic, many couples got to stay home for days, weeks, and even months and truly enjoyed spending time with each other, even while working in front of their computer screens. I think of an older couple that had some marital, emotional, and perhaps even spiritual issues. Twice he lied about her to save his own skin. She forced him to father a child with another woman and then nagged him into getting rid of the woman and her son. They grew old without the joy of having their own child. But despite their conflicts, challenges, and complications, they enjoyed each other's company. In their old age, Abraham and Sarah still enjoyed being together, and even being intimate with each other.

Resilient couples are grateful and thankful to each other, for one another, and to God. Resilient couples set goals together instead of making individual decisions apart from the other. Above all, resilient couples have learned that they can't do without God's help. They have learned to believe and love the words from the book of Proverbs: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on



your own understanding. <sup>6</sup>In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV)

## Resilient Parents

If there’s something that every parent dreads, it is the death of their child. They pray they will never have to taste that bitter pill. Many couples don’t survive such tragedy and the loss of their child often results in the demise of the marriage.

Resilient couples make it past the valley of the shadow of death and maintain a balance between normal grief and a return to a new normal without their child in their lives. I think of couples like Adam and Eve and how they must have mourned the death of their second child, Abel, at the hands of his older brother. But they found solace and peace in the birth of their third son, Seth. Mary, the mother of Jesus, didn’t sit to weep alone in her home. The book of Acts tells us that she gathered with Jesus’ disciples in the upper room, and there Jesus met with them after His resurrection. (Acts 1:2-14)

Job, that saint of the Old Testament, demonstrated incredible resilience, and God honored him for it. Please remember that he had lost literally everything he had. All he had left was his health, but then calamity struck again, and he became ill. Job was in great agony physically and emotionally, and yet he refused to curse the Lord or give up. The bible tells us: “In spite of everything, Job did not sin or accuse God of doing wrong.” (Job 1:22 CEV)

His life companion even challenged him: “Why do you still trust God? Why don’t you curse him and die?” (Job 2:9 CEV) But for Job that was out of the question. When he most needed a friend, he received the visit of three of his closest companions, and one extra visitor, a younger man than they were. As long as they kept quiet, and they did that for seven days, they gave Job just what he needed. They sat quietly with him for seven days and seven nights (Job 2:13). But then they tried to convince him that his suffering and his losses were his own fault. He had no children, no workers, no income, no support from his wife or his closest friends, but despite his suffering, Job knew that God was in

control, and that knowledge helped him maintain resilience instead of giving in to defeat. His faith resulted in resiliency.

Often as parents, we wonder if we have done our best in raising our children. Have I been patient enough? Have I prayed enough? Have I been a good example? As a parent, resilience is about finding a way to be the parent you want to be, no matter what else is going on around you. And when our children disobey, rebel, or walk away from everything we have taught them, it is easy to blame ourselves for their choices and decisions.

During these difficult moments, see what helps you calm down, tap into your inner strength, but also into the strength that comes from above. Resilient parents have learned to find something they can do to take care of themselves each day, so they can, in turn, take better care of their children. Make sure you carve out some time for yourself to do something you find relaxing or refreshing. It may be some exercise, drink your favorite hot drink in the morning, read a book, or pick up the phone and talk with a trusted friend.

When we're in the midst of a challenging situation, we feel as if it's never going to end, but you need to remind yourself that this too will pass. Maintain hope for a better future and hold on to the promise of a better tomorrow. When you feel like you're sinking in quicksand, it's easy to think only of yourself, but you must check in with each of your family members to find out how they are feeling, what they are missing, or what made them laugh today.

Even in the saddest moments, look for moments of joy and encouragement, no matter how small. Don't isolate yourself. Even if your church is temporarily closed, stay connected to your faith community online, by phone, or by handwritten letters. Our faith can be a powerful reminder to be grateful for the good things in your life and to have hope for the future.

## Resilient Children

We have heard it say many times: "children are very resilient." And that's true, up to a certain point. When they are little and just learning to walk, they often fall and cry. As new parents, we hurt for them, and our heart breaks to see them in

pain. But those little humans get back up and keep trying until they are moving and running around the house faster than we can keep up with them. A scraped knee, a cut of a finger, or even a broken bone heals, and often they show their scars as a sort of badge of honor.

At the same time, children are deeply affected by trauma, abuse, and the divorce of their parents. Even adult children of divorce are hurt by the actions and decisions of their parents.

Why is it that some children seem to fare better than others? The fact is that everyone is born with a measure of resiliency that can be nurtured or hindered by life situations. Some kids naturally seem more resilient, while others seem to develop this trait over time and through managing their own trials. In some ways, resilience just means “work through the tough stuff, and the next time it won’t seem so tough after all.”

One of the vital components of resilience is the ability to look at a problem and find a solution. The wonder is that we as parents can help develop this trait in our kids by encouraging them to participate in solving the small dilemmas that happen throughout the day. It would probably be easier for us to simply do things for them, but then they would never learn. That’s why trying to “fix” their problems, instead of encouraging them to find a solution on their own, can be more harmful than helpful. What are you doing for your kids that they could do themselves? Ask them to consider what it would take to solve the problem. If they are thirsty, what can they do about it? If their toy broke, what do they need to fix it? Or what did they learn so they will be more careful next time? What if they can’t find their tennis shoes? Pose the question, “what do you think we should do about that?” or “How would you find it?”

Don’t expect all your children to do the same things at the same time and in the same way. Your older kids can be responsible for getting out of bed on time and studying for the math exam, while younger ones might need more direct help and encouragement. Perhaps the older kids can help the younger ones with their struggles.





All of us find it easier to learn when we receive encouragement, so praise your children with purpose. Even God, our Father, expressed encouragement and praise for His Son. Twice the Father spoke these words: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17, 17:5). Your children need to receive such positive reinforcement for their good actions. “Good boy!”, “Wow, you’re so smart!”, “This picture should be hanging in a museum!”, “I am so proud of you!” Say those words as soon as you see them do good things. And make sure your praise focuses on the strategies your children use (“That’s awesome how you solved that problem”), specific jobs they did well (“Your room looks so nice and clean!”), and especially their effort throughout the challenges they faced (“I can see your hard work is showing in this project”).

Paul reminded young pastor Timothy, “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2 Timothy 1:7 ESV) As parents, we set the bar for our children. They learn by watching us. They learn from us how to interact with people and the world around us, what is acceptable, and inappropriate behavior. When we face our own challenges, do we fall apart, yell and scream, throw things against the walls, or hurt others? We model the behavior for our children to emulate. Or we can show them by our example how to make good decisions, what choices are best, and what to do even when people treat us unkindly and unfairly. “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.” (Micah 7:8 ESV)

## Resilient Families

Why are we talking about resilience in today’s message? Unless you have been living in a cave during the last year or two, you know we have been going through some of the most difficult, challenging days of our lives. Millions have been infected by a deadly virus and many have died. We all probably know at least one person who died as a result of this deadly virus.

But there have also been other side effects of the pandemic, and many of them will be felt for a long time to come. Spouses and parents have lost their job, their

income and have not been able to keep their home. Their children have lost their friends.

And yet, despite of the bleak environment, many families have not only survived but thrived. With the Apostle Paul, we can say: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18 ESV)

As we consider the promises of a better world, we can accept the words of Paul as a down payment on the treasure that awaits us. But what about the here and now? What about these days when we may still not be able to see our loved ones? We encourage you to remain connected even when you can’t be together.

As parents, it’s easier to handle parenting challenges when we stay connected to our family, friends, and neighbors that we have positive relationships. Having caring people in our life helps us feel secure, confident, and empowered.

Stay in close contact, even if from a distance, at least once a day with people you care about and who care about you. A text message, an e-mail, or preferably a short phone call or video chat can be meaningful to both. At least once a week, try to have longer conversations.

## Conclusion

One of the many blessings of being Christians is that God gives us that resilient spirit to keep bouncing back. The key to resiliency is faith in the Lord:

*King David, who was persecuted by family and by the king, still wrote,  
“If you do what the LORD wants, he will make certain each step you  
take is sure. The LORD will hold your hand, and if you stumble, you still  
won’t fall.” (Psalm 37:23-24 CEV)*

And James, the Lord’s brother, assures us, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12 ESV)



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