



Soul Matters

**What does it mean to be
a people of RESILIENCE?**



Small Group

February 2020

What Does It Mean To Be A People of Resilience?

When did we decide that resilience was a solo project?

It's not that we consciously defined it that way. It's just what we were taught, from the time we were little until, well, today. The same thing was - and is - said in so many ways: "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps"; "You're stronger than you think."; "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."; "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." The cultural message is clear: resilience depends on you - your individual toughness and inner strength. It's a solo act.

And it's not just our culture, but our UU faith too. We also prop up this heroic and individualistic form of resilience. We UUs famously rejected the idea that human beings are depraved, sinful and weak and replaced it with the view that people are inherently worthy and strong. As [one leading UU voice](#) put it, "Our moral fiber is equal to all demands!" It's the ultimate "You can do it!" theology.

Yet at our best, we don't stop there. We say two things at the same time: "You can do it." **and** "You don't have to do it on your own!"

Remember those folk sayings that hold up the image of a tree being able to bend with the wind? Remember how they end with a message about resilience resting in our ability to flexibly lean and bend? Well, for us UUs, another kind of leaning is just as important: the practice of leaning on those next to us! Yes, bend with the wind we say, but also remember that no one makes it through the windstorms alone.

It's all a reminder that while resilience has a lot to do with what is *inside us*, it equally depends on what is *between us*. This is where our Soul Matters framing is so important: we are indeed a *people of resilience*. Forget solo act; think community choir! We survive our pain by having the strength to tell others about it. We find the courage to make our way through the dark only when we sense we are not alone. Internal and individual grit only gets us so far; empathy, assurance and love from others gets us the rest of the way. Resilience has everything to do with the water within which we swim and the web of connections that surround us. Resilient people arise from resilient relationships!

So friends, this month, let's look around as much as look within. Let's let up on all the "grin and bear it" talk and instead grab the hand that is reaching our way. Let's help each other remember that resilience arises not so much when we dig deep but when we remember we don't have to do it all on our own!

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A

Root Your Resilience in Beauty

“In my own worst seasons, I’ve come back from the colorless world of despair by forcing myself to look hard, for a long time, at a single glorious thing: a flame of red geranium outside my bedroom window. And then another: my daughter in a yellow dress. And another: the perfect outline of a full, dark sphere behind the crescent moon... until I learned to be in love with my life again. Like a stroke victim retraining new parts of the brain to grasp lost skills, I have taught myself joy, over and over again.”

- *Barbara Kingsolver*

In our introduction, we talked about how resilience is about more than “digging deep.” Sources of resilience lie around as much as within. Or as Barbara Kingsolver suggests, the sources of resilience that are around us stimulate the strengths of resilience within us. Nothing does this better than beauty. It’s one of the most sacred forms of magic: Stare at something beautiful and slowly inner strength arises.

So this month, make some room in your life for this magic. Your instructions are simple:

Stare at a single glorious thing each day for at least a week!

It can be the same glorious thing or you can seek out a different one each day. It’s the “staring” that is the really important part. Give it your attention long enough to sink in. You will know when you are done; your body will tell you. Just stare until you, like Kingsolver, it teaches you joy once again.

And don’t get caught up in what “glorious” means. As Kingsolver affirms, a geranium is as glorious as the crescent moon.

Come to your group ready to share what you learned about the spiritual practice of “resilient staring.”

Option B

List ‘Em and Share ‘em

We are more resilient than we realize. Or maybe it's more accurate to say we have more resiliency tricks up our sleeves than we give ourselves credit for. Over time we all accumulate go to strategies that help us maintain our resilience. The challenge is remembering them. So this month, bring your resiliency tools into greater awareness. Here's how:

1. Carve out some time to make a list of your *TOP FIVE* resiliency practices and habits. For instance, here some from the lists of our Soul Matters facilitators:

- Getting eight hours of sleep
- Getting *some* exercise every day
- Creating external order – organizing the junk draw, cleaning the fridge, redesigning the workbench in the garage.
- Make sure there is a veggie on every plate I eat (And make sure my hands stay out of potato chip bags!)
- Meditating 3 mornings a week
- Make my bed
- Once-a-week email Sabbath
- Family dinners with a family gratitude prayer
- Spending time with animals
- Knitting
- Watching The Daily Show

2. After you list your top 5, think about them more deeply using these questions:

- Which resiliency practice/habit is “saving” you right now?
- Which one have you let slide and need to start doing more of again?
- Which one was given to you by someone else?
- Which one did you discover on your own?
- Which do you need to pass on to someone in your life?

3. Share your list with a family member or close friend. Ask them if they recognize the list as true. Have them offer what they think is missing.

4. Come to your group ready to share your insights from this exercise.

Option C

Which of the 13 is in Your Way?

Sometimes resiliency isn't about what we do right but what we do wrong. Sometimes we undercut our own resilience. The below article lists some of things that trip us up. So make some time this month reading through the article and identifying which of the 13 is in your way. And then take one step - large or small - to remove it from your life. Here's the article:

13 Things Resilient People Don't Do

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/what-mentally-strong-people-dont-do/201501/13-things-mentally-strong-people-dont-do>

You might also think about interviewing a family member or close friend about which of the 13 they think is in your way. The insight from others almost always expands our own!

Option D

Play That Resilient Tune

We all know it works: That perfect song played at the perfect time gives us the strength to hold on, keep going and struggle back toward joy. This month spend some time revisiting those songs that have got you through hard times. Then pick one, bring it into your group, play it for them and then tell the tale of how it propped up your resilience.

For some inspiration, check out our Soul Matters playlists on resilience, found on Spotify and You Tube.

Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6xOFPSI9vtV3w2oPfzGDLO?si=qrCPxBQFREihjvZ8gcZ9Bw>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvXOKgOQVYP7-GP08C-jEL-DqEBVydle5>

Option E

Find Resilience in Our Recommended Resources

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of and a person of resilience. Engaging these resources and finding the one that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, if none of the above exercises call to you, engage the recommended resources section of this packet as your spiritual exercise for the month.

Set aside some regular time throughout a week to go through them and meditate on them until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of resilience. After you've found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

Your Question

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? What is that question trying to get you to notice or acknowledge?

Often it helps to read the list to a friend or loved one and ask them which question they think is the question you need to wrestle with!

1. One definition of resilience is the ability to return to one's original shape after it has been unexpectedly jolted, stretched, flattened, bent, etc. Where are you in the journey of resilience? Starting to feel pulled? Already significantly bent? Stretched and worried about snapping? Slowly returning to form? Still trying to figure out what's causing the kink? Gratefully back? Realizing there's no going back to that original shape?
2. When do you remember first watching one of your parents act resiliently?
3. What makes your resiliency unique?
4. Has someone else's resilience helped you survive? When did you not give up because they didn't give up?
5. How has your life partner made you more resilient?
6. What did your hardest moment teach you about yourself?
7. Is it possible that "Grin and bear it" is actually the worst advice you could be following right now?
8. Have you been trying to act strong for too long? Could it be that resilience is asking you to rest, just rest?
9. It is said that resilient people don't just struggle through their pain; they share their stories and hear the stories of others. So is it time for you to be a storyteller, not just a survivor?
10. Could it be that resilience is asking you to stop wishing things would go back to the way they were? Is it possible there's no going forward until you let go of the future you planned?
11. Why is it that you haven't wept yet for all you have lost?
12. Have you ever made it through hard times by believing what others may call "nonsense"?
13. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it. Or maybe the question or call you need to hear is waiting in one of the quotes listed below. Consider looking there!

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of resilience.

Word Roots & Definitions

We get resilience from the Latin *re* “back” and *saliens* “the beginning, the starting point, the heart of the embryo”. *Saliens* also holds the suggestion of movement; to leap, to flow, to run, to hurry. These images instill a sense of an active effort to return, retain and hold to that core heart of ourselves. Resilience is not a passive idea, it asks us to take action to sustain that beginning point, that core essential self.

Wise Words

Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.

Helen Keller

You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.

Maya Angelou

A river cuts through a rock not because of its power but its persistence.

Unknown

The most delicate flower is still a badass, it sucks food from roots, stares at the sun and basks in it. It wrestles the wind, and drinks rain.

Rob Grad

This thing we call 'failure' is not the falling down, but the staying down.

Mary Pickford

Resilience is accepting your new reality, even if it's less good than the one you had before.

Elizabeth Edwards

Ultimately, resilience is learning from your past rather than resenting it.

Rev. Scott Tayler

Anyone can slay a dragon, he told me, but try waking up every morning and loving the world all over again.

[Brian Andreas](#)

Life's reality is that we cannot bounce back. We cannot bounce back because we cannot go back in time to the people we used to be. The parent who loses a child never bounces back. The nineteen-year-old who sails for war is gone forever, even if he returns. You know that there is no bouncing back. There is only moving through... What happens to us becomes a part of us. Resilient people do not bounce back from hard experiences; they find healthy ways to integrate them into their lives.

[Eric Greitens](#)

You know that Glennon Doyle quotation about wanting her kids not to avoid fires but to know that they are fireproof and can survive hard things? That they are brave and resilient?

I want that for my fellow UUs too.

Doyle says in trying to protect our kids from all pain, we remove from them an essential tool they'll need if they're going to become the people we hope they'll be.

I want THAT for my fellow UUs too.

Rev. Janet Newton

If your heart is broken, make art with the pieces.

[Shane Koyczan](#)

You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, and when to run.

Kenny Rogers

If you need to fall apart, then do —
for Life will hold you in that,
will teach you how to desiccate and blow away
and then will call you back from the four corners of
the earth
and will renew you with the water
of the tears of others

who

like you

weep for all that is lost.

She will breathe back into you
the breath that washes from the mouths of children
laughing
from the lion's roar.

[Rev. Audette Fulbright Fulson](#)

[Resilience] is to watch a gathering darkness until all light is swallowed up completely without the power to interfere or bring a halt. Then in that darkness, to continue one's journey with one's footsteps guided by the illumination of remembered radiance.

[Howard Thurman](#)

Resilience is the strength and speed of our response to adversity, and we can build it. It isn't about having a backbone. It's about strengthening the muscles around our backbone.

[Sheryl Sandberg](#)

I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refuse to be reduced by it.

Maya Angelou

It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it.

Lena Horne

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?...
Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?...

[Maya Angelou](#)

School said I'm a slave
But kindred call me a queen
I exist between

Cherizar Crippen

We Are Not Responsible

Harryette Mullen

Full poem at

<https://www.slowdownshow.org/episode/2019/10/31/244-we-are-not-responsible-mullen>

On what resilience faces in a society that has not yet lived up to the true promise of democracy and equality...

Joy Unspeakable

Barbara A. Holmes

Full poem at <https://cac.org/joy-unspeakable-2018-05-23/>

Joy Unspeakable
is not silent,
it moans, hums, and bends...

joy unspeakable is
practicing freedom
while chains still chafe...
while Jim Crow stalks...

Sweet Darkness

[David Whyte](#)

When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.
When your vision has gone
no part of the world can find you...

A Rainy Morning

Ted Kooser

Full poem at

<https://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php%3Fdate=2014%252F04%252F25.html>

A young woman in a wheelchair,
wearing a black nylon poncho spattered with rain,
is pushing herself through the morning.
You have seen how pianists
sometimes bend forward to strike the keys...
Such is the way this woman...

The author Joan Didion wrote a memoir, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, about the death of her husband. Didion had been with her husband John for forty years... She describes the alternate reality she lived in while coping with her grief, a nonsense world where her physical strength and sense of meaning were shaky: "I stopped at the door to his closet. I could not give away his shoes. I stood there

a moment, and then realized why: he would need shoes if he was to return. The recognition of this thought by no means eradicated the thought." In times of unfathomable grief, plain old truth is not enough... part of resilience is when we reach deep despite the facts, not knowing, in the end, if we are reaching for something true, but reaching anyway. There are times when making meaning seems impossible and when the truth is cruel. And when we search for those things, we do not know what we will find... There are people who have endured so much, who surprise us with an ability not only to function but to keep really living... And those among us whom we would call resilient are not always the strongest, or the smartest, or the most successful. They are often the ones who are acquainted with a little bit of nonsense.

[Rev. Sadie Landsdale](#)

She who has not been tried,
what does she know?

MJ Abell

Music

We create two different playlists for each monthly theme each month: one using Spotify and another using YouTube playlists. Music connects us to the themes in a way like nothing else. Follow the links below to connect with our "resilience songs"!

Click [here](#) for links to the [Spotify playlists](#) for each month.

Click [here](#) to check out the [YouTube playlists](#).

Videos & Podcasts

won't you celebrate with me

Lucille Clifton

<https://vimeo.com/197834578>

I, I, I. Him - Invisibilia Podcast

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/invisibilia/id953290300?i=1000405617558>

What do you do when you lose big, and in the process lose yourself? How do you find yourself again? How do you get back?

How to Raise a Black Son in America - TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/clint_smith_how_to_raise_a_black_son_in_america?referrer=playlist-talks_to_help_you_understand_r

Nothing is impossible - Hari Budha Magar

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5KtMgWQO_o

A Former Gurkha soldier Hari Budha Magar who had both his legs amputated after being injured serving in Afghanistan. He is the first bilateral above-the-knee amputee to summit a peak upward of 19,000 feet

The Peace of Wild Things, Wendell Berry

On finding resilience in the wild things..

Video #1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hb-HgNzTylk>

Video #2: <https://vimeo.com/99893181>

Put to song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObYb8EtZm78>

When despair for the world grows in me...
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great
heron feeds..
I rest in the grace of the world and am free.

Living Beyond Limits - TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/amy_purdy_living_beyond_limits?referrer=playlist-talks_to_remind_you_that_life

On imagination and resilience. The story of Amy Purdy, who lost both her legs below the knee. And now is a she's a pro snowboarder.

“And it was then that I asked myself that life defining question: If my life were a book and I were the author, how would I want this story to go?... and that’s when my life began again...”

How Do You Mend A Broken Heart? - Soul Pancake

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YbS5zBFwp7c>

Can We Feel and Laugh Our Way into Resilience? Seems So!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=18&v=9WTC6CNhEHg&feature=emb_logo

Articles

things i did today to recover

adrienne maree brown

<http://adriennemareebrown.net/2016/11/09/a-range-of-reflections-on-resilience/>

Strategies of resilience after Donald Trump won the 2016 presidential election.

Black Women and The Sacred: With “Lemonade,” Beyoncé Takes Us To Church

<http://religiondispatches.org/black-women-and-the-sacred-beyonce-takes-us-to-church/>

“To make lemonade out of lemons is code for powerful spiritual practice in the hands of women. Since the beginning of chattel slavery in this country, black women have been magically making something from nothing, conjuring up lives for themselves and their families with nothing but crumbs, dust and ashes... “Lemonade” is a reminder of the revolutionary [and resilient] power of self-love...”

How Trauma Lodges in the Body - [On Being](#)

[Podcast](#)

Found [here](#)

Powerful new uses of bodywork, yoga and eye movement therapy to strengthen resilience in the face of the overwhelming events... and “everyday suffering” as well.

Books

Bailey’s Café

Gloria Naylor

When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times

Pema Chodron

[Review](#)

The Positive Power of Negative Thinking

On getting through the hard times by expecting the worst!

[Julie K. Norem](#)

Movies & T.V.

[I Am Not Your Negro](#)

[If Beale Street Could Talk](#)

[Precious](#)

[When They See Us](#)

[He Named Me Malala](#)

[First Match](#)

[Pariah](#)

[Roma](#)

[127 Hours](#)

[The Shawshank Redemption](#)

[Rectify](#) (TV)

[Losers](#) (TV) - a [review](#)

Get more inspiration on the monthly theme
by following our social media and music lists:

Soul Matters Facebook inspiration Page

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Spotify Lists

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/spotify-lists.html>

Instagram

Find us as “soul_matters_circle”

Find support for bringing the
monthly themes home and into your family life with

Soulful Home: A Guide for Families

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>

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