



Touchstones Project

Small Group Discussion Guide

Resilience

Preparation: (Read the *Touchstones Journal* on the theme and the questions below.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “More and more I have come to admire resilience. / Not the simple resistance of a pillow, whose foam / Returns over and over to the same shape, but the sinuous / Tenacity of a tree: finding the light newly blocked on one side, / It turns in another. A blind intelligence, true. / But out of such persistence arose turtles, rivers, / Mitochondria, figs—all this resinous, unretractable earth.”
Jane Hirshfield

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake), adapted (In unison) Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes and to honor the limit of the time you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading the following wisdom story.
Circus School

Imagine leaving your home forever because there is a war in your country.

We lived in Aleppo. It was the largest city in Syria. I loved it. I played soccer with my friends. Spring was my favorite season. The city garden smelled of lemon and orange blossoms. I especially liked going to the covered souks (/sooks/). That’s what we called the covered marketplace. There were so many stalls, and one souk was connected to the next. You could walk for miles among the stalls. I loved the colors and smells, as well as the noise of the crowds. There were fruits and vegetables, spices, candy, clothes, Aleppo’s famous soap, and more. I loved the smell of freshly baked bread.

But then the war came to us. It started with the *Arab Spring*, where people in some countries in the Middle East began demonstrating against their governments. Demonstrations started in Syria in March 2011. I remember because my birthday is March 9th. In July, rebels began fighting in our city. By the end of the year, they captured a lot of the city. That’s when the government started dropping bombs on Aleppo. We were so afraid. My father decided that we must leave. He found a man who agreed to drive us to Damascus in his *servis*, a small white van. We went with another family, and it was so crowded. It took all night, and I couldn’t sleep. He dropped us off in the desert south of Damascus. Then we had to walk. It took a week, and it was hard, especially for my little brother and sister. We finally reached the city of Mafraq in Jordan. From there, we were taken to the Za’atari refugee camp. That’s where we live. My father said that 80,000 people live here. It’s crowded.

When we first arrived, we lived in a tent, but then we moved to a small metal house where we still live. They call it a caravan, but it doesn’t move. We go to school, and they have activities at a nearby community center, but I was bored

most of the time until they started the Circus School. I joined right away, and I loved it. It is after school, which means I have something to look forward to.

We begin Circus School with warmup exercises. Then we learn about circus “laws,” like respecting others, practicing safety, and obeying the rules. We then practice skills like acrobatics, juggling, and lots more. We only have one unicycle, so we have to share. Sometimes, we get special visitors like *Clowns Without Borders* who teach us about clowning, and people from *Circus Magenta*, who come all the way from Finland.

Once a woman came to write an article about our Circus School. We put on a show, and I did my tumbling routine. I showed off a little and ended with five backflips in a row. After the show, the woman asked if she could talk with me. She asked me a lot of questions, about my life in Syria, our escape, and my life as a refugee. Then she asked about the Circus School. When she closed her notebook, she said, “You are very resilient.” I didn’t know what she meant. Maybe she really liked my backflips. Anyway, I asked, “What does resilient mean?” She said, “It means that you are strong. It means that you are able to recover quickly from difficult experiences. And here, at the Circus School, it means that you don’t let failure stop you when learning new skills.” What she said made me smile.

Source: [Touchstones](#)

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl as follows. Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

“There’s no such thing as ruining your life. Life’s a pretty resilient thing, it turns out.”
Sophie Kinsella

“...All I see is resilience. You are allowed to feel messed up.... It doesn’t mean you’re defective—it just means you’re human.” David Mitchell

“A good half of the art of living is resilience.”
Alain de Botton

“It demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck, and an even greater miracle of perception and charity not to teach your child to hate.” James Baldwin

“To be rendered powerless does not destroy your humanity. Your resilience is your humanity. ...To yield and not break, that is incredible strength.” Hannah Gadsby

“I’ve come to hold the human spirit in the highest regard. Like the body, it struggles to repair itself. As cells fight off infection and conquer illness, the spirit, too, has remarkable resilience.” Karen Marie Moning

“Resilience is not a commodity you are born with, waiting silently on tap. It is self-manufactured painstakingly over time by working through your problems and never giving up, even in the face of difficulty or failure.” Lorii Myers

“I need a love that is troubled by injustice. ...A love that has no tolerance for hate, no excuses for racist decisions, no contentment in the status quo. I need a love that is fierce in its resilience and sacrifice. I need a love that chooses justice.” Austin Channing Brown

“So, what is it in a human life that creates bravery, kindness, wisdom, and resilience? ...What if it’s the struggle?... The bravest people I know are those who’ve walked through the fire and come out on the other side.” Glennon Doyle Melton

“The energy expended in pushing down despair is diverted from more creative uses, depleting the resilience and imagination needed for fresh visions and strategies.” Joanna Macy

“Chances are no matter how bad your troubles seem to be, someone somewhere, with less resilience, has successfully conquered a more

severe version of your problems.” Gary Hopkins

“Resiliency is not gender-, age-, or intellectually-specific....” Asa Don Brown

“But hope has an astonishing resilience and strength. Its very persistence in our hearts indicates that it is not a tonic for wishful thinkers, but the ground on which realists stand.” Kathleen Norris

“When we learn how to become resilient, we learn how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience.” Jaeda DeWalt

“Resilient people do not bounce back from hard experiences; they find healthy ways to integrate them into their lives.” Eric Greitens

“You cannot learn resilience by reading a book or listening to a lecture.” Yuval Noah Harari

“Resilient trees can weather a violent storm because their roots are deep and firm.” Thích Nhất Hạnh

“Failure is a part of life. Success teaches you nothing, but failure teaches you resilience. It teaches you to pick yourself up and try again.” Sarah Morgan

“There are two kinds of strength. Power and the ability to wield it is obvious, but resilience, the ability to resist power, is the other.” Raymond E. Feist

“Wildflowers are the loveliest of all because they grow in uncultivated soil, in those hard, rugged places where no one expects them to flourish. They are resilient in ways a garden bloom could never be.” Micheline Ryckman

“Prize the natural spaces and shorelines most of all... We need the natural curves of hills, the scent of chapparal, the whisper of pines, the possibility of wildness. We require these

patches of nature for our mental health and our spiritual resilience.” Richard Louv

“You can’t just wish strength for yourself. Or wisdom. Or resilience. Those things have to be earned.” Katherine Center

“Life wears us down around the edges. The stress of life and its necessities cracks things. We learn to protect ourselves. We learn not to let so much of the world in, because sometimes it’s all too much, and we don’t have the resilience we need to survive it. Michelle Sagara

“One of life’s contradictions: how human beings were at once entirely resilient and impossibly fragile. One decision could stay with you forever, and yet you could live through almost anything.” J. Courtney Sullivan

“Live close to nature, and your spirit will not be easily broken, for you learn something of patience and resilience.” Ruskin Bond

“As I faced each tragedy in my life, I learned to reach into the depth of my soul for strength and determination. Through this healing process, I discovered perseverance and resilience. I could not go into the past and use White-Out to erase any events; instead, I had to find a way to use my pain to help me heal and grow. I had to stare darkness in the face and accept that I could not change the past, but I could build a better future.” Erin Merryn

“When kids feel that they are deeply loved even when they’re struggling, it builds resilience.” William Stixrud

“How fast is your alive? How smooth is your alive? How hard, how resilient? We’re alive because we can be hurt; we’re alive because we can heal. I think it’s beautiful.” Akwaeke Emezi

“It’s not their bullying that ‘made me the person I am today,’ but my own resilience that enabled me to adapt.” Florence Given

Most of our strength, capacity and resilience gets nullified when we harbor ...doubts over our own adequacies. The more the sense of insecurity, the closer we move towards defeat.”
Nihar Satpathy

“That’s Ma for you. Granny say she came in the world ready for whatever. When things fall apart, she quick to grab the pieces and make something new outta them.” Angie Thomas

Sitting in Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “...the capacity to be resilient, to respond to difficulty ..., is rooted in many diverse factors, but it consistently depends on one thing: the meaning you, the individual, make of where you are. When suffering leads to meanings that unlock the mysteries of life, it strengthens compassion, gratitude, joy, and wisdom. When suffering leads to barriers and retaliations and hatred, it empties you of hope and love, and then misery will lead to misery....” *Polly Young-Eisendrath*

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. How do you deal with setbacks and/or cope with adversity?
2. What does it mean to be resilient (physically, emotionally, mentally, and/or spiritually)? Which of these do you value most? Why?
3. Share an experience that required resilience. What did you find challenging? What surprised you? What did you learn?
4. What enhances resilience? What impairs resilience?
5. Who in your extended family, including ancestors, or among people you have known exhibited notable resilience? What was your

reaction to their resilience?

6. How can our congregations help participants cultivate a resilient spirit?
7. According to Hemingway, the world breaks everyone, and some are stronger for it, while others are just broken. Do you agree? What breaks people? What heals people? What leaves people broken?
8. How can a theology of resilience adequately challenge racism?

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones)
We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words: (Rev. Philip R. Giles)
(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*