

A tall, grey stone lighthouse stands on a rocky island. The base of the lighthouse is surrounded by turbulent, white-capped waves crashing against the rocks. The sky is a mix of grey and blue, suggesting a storm or late evening. The lighthouse has a red metal railing around its top. The overall scene is dramatic and emphasizes the theme of standing firm.

Stand Firm Take Action!

Verse for the Year:

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

I Corinthians 15:58

DAY ONE - Quitting?

Stand Firm - Let Nothing Move You!

There is a story told of a boy trying to learn how to ice-skate. He had fallen so many times that his face was cut, and the blood and tears ran together. Out of sympathy, a man skated over to the boy, picked him up and said, "Son, why don't you quit before you really injure yourself?" He wiped the tears from his face and told the man, "I didn't buy these skates to learn how to quit; I bought them to learn how to skate."

The Christian worships a God who can (and does) take the life of individuals, turn it inside out, and use it to build a piece of His kingdom. Quitting is not an option! We become a Christian to learn how to live, how to really live, not to quit!

The story of Eli, the Old Testament priest, is a story with a sense of failure attached to it. He failed both as a Father of his own family and as a spiritual Father to his nation: Israel. Yet, the Bible points us in the direction of a man who was used by God. In modern speak, he coached or mentored a young boy; Samuel grew up to be one of the greatest prophets in all of Israel's history - a significant achievement in the second half of Eli's life. Here we see *resilience!*

The New Testament documents many moments where resilience is required to see that God's purposes are carried out. Paul and Silas demonstrate considerable resilience in the face of a barrage of both physical and verbal abuse when their prayerful actions affected the wealth of a group of local fortune tellers.² Attacked by a crowd, beaten by the authorities and imprisoned they start to do what most of us wouldn't do:

¹ 1 Samuel

² Acts 16:16-38

they sang hymns! Midnight came and things really did start to happen; nuts, bolts, wood, stone and chains broke open: God changed the atmosphere through their resilience. Paul and Silas' praise and worship changed the atmosphere!

It would seem that resilience has a number of qualities to it; the first of these is "don't quit". We are wonderfully and fearfully made for a purpose and leading a resilient life says, "I'm going to find out what that purpose is all about!"

REFLECTION & STUDY

1. **READ Acts 16:16-38** - note the number of issues faced by Paul & Silas and their unswerving focus.
2. Consider a time where you or someone you know has demonstrated resilience. What characteristics were present in the situations? What part does faith, prayer and support from others play in developing resilience?
3. **PRAY** for:
 1. Resilience - in yourself, in those around you, in your church leaders;
 2. The purpose and mission of the worldwide church:
 1. Pray for the persecuted church, for a spirit of resilience to grow.

DAY TWO - Walk or run?

Stand Firm - Let Nothing Move You!

... 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, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Personally I'm not much of a long distance athlete but as a youngster I remember the 'buzz' before the annual sports day 'sprint' races, the silence before the starting gun and the euphoria of not coming last! On occasions in longer distance races there were times where I just had to walk because I didn't have the stamina to run all of it!

Clearly, the writer of the text above *knew* the games; runners would have removed clothing to ensure nothing would hinder the performance in the race. He makes a clear link between the athletes race and with the walk or 'race' of a Christian. In this way, his focus was on a resilient ("run with perseverance") race; a conditioning of the Christian to perform at one's best. As with all scripture, it is a 'mirror' where our character is reflected in its light, the text encourages us to consider several believers' questions:

Am I 'fixed' on the finish (Jesus)?

Am I persevering through the events and obstacles of life?

Am I hindered or 'tripped up' by the issues and sin of my humanness?

In the Christian race many of us will be running along nicely and others will be struggling at different times and walking; sometimes we run sometimes we walk and that is absolutely fine. The key of course is to run

or walk with perseverance or resilience; to let *nothing* move you away from your focus on Jesus.

REFLECTION & STUDY

1. READ **Hebrews 12:1-13** - picture the focus of the argument (v.1-3): the athletic contest, the cloud of witnesses (see chapter 11), the endurance of Christ (v. 3). Summarise this focus or element of the chapter.
2. **Verses 4-13** have a focus on perseverance, hardship, suffering and persecution.
 1. How are we to see ourselves? (7)
 2. Consider 'discipline' - how well do you react to it? (10)
 3. "*Make level paths for your feet*" (13) - Is perseverance a one sided affair? In other words is it just about the person themselves or is there a bigger picture to it?
 4. In the light of this thinking consider the questions posed above:
Am I 'fixed' on the finish (Jesus)?
Am I persevering through the events and obstacles of life?
Am I hindered or 'tripped up' by the issues and sin of my humanness?
3. PRAYER
 1. Using the key phrase from the verse for the year, "let nothing move you" pray and ask God what he sees in you. Are you easily 'moved' or distracted away from him.
 2. Pray for those you know who face hardship and difficulty.

DAY THREE - Resilience: A daily focus!

Stand Firm - Always Give Yourselves Fully!

“I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in (people’s) welfare... Timothy has proved himself.” (Phil. 2:20,22)

In his letters to Timothy, Paul reflects a concern for the younger man; Timothy had gone to Ephesus, where he seems to have assumed pastoral responsibilities for the Christians in that area. He seems to be a person of deep care and compassion. Yet, Paul did question Timothy’s resilience, the way he was intimidated by older people and an issue with his own self-discipline.³ It seems as if Paul is encouraging Timothy to view his life under a microscope and consider every aspect of it according to the highest of Christian standards; *stand firm - give yourself fully* for people, says Paul.

Self-examination of the ways that we behave, act and react is not an easy thing to do or it might be that we have been, generationally speaking, encouraged or discouraged to this way of ‘growing’. Yet, Paul sees it as an important discipleship matter to ‘*watch your life and doctrine closely*’ and for the majority of the commentators this is not a morbid introspection into the ‘self’ but a prayer that is more in line with the prayer of the psalmist, who called out:

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)

The search for resilience is impossible if a person is unwilling or unable to engage in a reflection on oneself in the way in which Paul encourages Timothy to take part in. The challenge was to *give yourself fully* in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity; we have that same challenge!

³ 1 Timothy 4:12-16

REFLECTION & STUDY

1. Consider Paul's letter to Timothy (**1 Tim. 4:12-16**). How do you read his message to him? Is he speaking about self-discipline?
2. Gordan McDonald writes about resilience and says "*resilience is a pursuit - a relentless one*". How far do you agree or disagree with this statement? Does resilience mean different things to different generations?
3. Discuss and reflect on '*giving yourself fully*' in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Are there areas of your life where you need to grow and learn how to give *yourself fully*?
4. Using **Psalm 139: 23-24** as a basis for a prayer, **PRAY** for:
 1. A better understanding of who you are - speak to him about your anxious thoughts and the ways you interact with other people and stop and **LISTEN**;
 2. Consider, and pray about, your answer and thoughts to question 3 above.

Day Four - Sunday Services

There are no readings for this day.

DAY FIVE - Resilience: Living with the BIG picture!

Stand Firm - The Work of the Lord!

"If you want to identify me," he says to the British officers who are questioning him, "ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I think I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for. Between these two answers you can determine the identity of any person."⁴

Thomas Merton makes a succinct statement about big picture living. He is dealing with two big questions: *What am I living for? What stops me from living for these things?* He makes the case that those who understand the big picture live resilient lives: they deal with the biggest picture of the things they hear God speaking to them about. Paul made this clear when he emphasised that looking forward in hope is the key to big picture living⁵ and those that live without the big picture are people who are *tossed back and forth by the waves*.⁶

Gordan McDonald⁷ makes six observations about people who understand this big picture view of life. He says:

- (1) They have a sense of life direction;
- (2) They foresee the great questions of one's life journey;
- (3) They cultivate Christian character;
- (4) They listen to the call from God;
- (5) They are confident in who they are;
- (6) They live generous lives.

In this way resilient people understand there will be change and they prepare for it by developing themselves in line with scripture. They recognise when they hear God speak and they can act on it because they are confident about their life 'in Christ' and from this generosity pours out.

⁴ M. Pennington, *Thomas Merton: Brother Monk* (Harper & Row, 1987)

⁵ Phil. 3:13-14

⁶ Eph. 4:14

⁷G. McDonald, *A Resilient Life*, (Thomas Nelson, 2004)

Are you living with the Big picture? Ask yourself the questions penned above: *What am I living for? What stops me from living for these things?*

REFLECTION & STUDY

1. In a succinct statement ask and answer: *What am I living for? What stops me from living for these things?*
2. Describe your own life journey in a few key words. What were/are the 'big picture' moments?
3. READ: Acts 26:1-23. Reflect on Paul's life journey and consider the moments where he was resilient to the call placed upon his life. What situations could have prevented Paul from *giving himself fully to the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58)?*
4. Discuss and reflect on '*the work of the Lord*' - How are things working out? Are there areas of your life where you need support, training or encouragement?
5. Using **Psalm 90: 1-2, 17** as a basis for a prayer about big picture living:
 1. **PRAY** prayers of thanksgiving (Ps. 90:1) for the sense of being at 'home' with God or the profound understanding and sense that God is a 'safe haven' - "*our dwelling place*".
 2. '*Before the mountains were born...*' (v.2) In a silent moment consider the 'big picture' - ask God to help you with your understanding of your place in him and in his kingdom.
 3. **PRAY** for the work of your hands (v.17) ask for God's favour to 'rest' on all that you do.

DAY SIX - Resilience: Glance back, look forward!

Stand Firm - know your labour for the Lord is not in vain!

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" (Genesis 45:1-3)

What an incredible moment this must have been for Joseph: his brothers had intended to harm him and Joseph 'gets it' and avoids a further 'trap'. He begins to realise the significant journey he has made from the arrogant 'know it all' young boy to the significant leader, who would save many from destruction, and the role he must play in the restoration with his family. After all Joseph could easily have fallen into the destructive mentality of wanting to avenge his past hurt. He chooses differently and looks to repair the past, to practise repentance and views 'what happened' with clarity by understanding it as a way to gain and grow in wisdom. Even after their Father has died the brothers still struggle with their past:

"What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" (50:15)

Joseph responds:

"Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. (50:19-21)

After all that had happened Joseph replied 'kindly to them'. This shows the level of repair Joseph had reached. Joseph is a resilient character and his story reminds us that resilient people: *look to repair the past, practise repentance, and look back to gain wisdom.*

REFLECTION & STUDY

1. Consider and reflect on Joseph's story: do you relate to any part of or emotion contained within it?
2. Reflect on Joseph's response - *he reassured them and spoke kindly to them (21)*. How easy would that have been to do in reality?
3. Joseph chose to repair the past rather than destroy the present. Discuss how difficult that might have been to do.
 1. What do you think would have been your natural inclination - to *punish or forgive?* Why?
4. Discuss and reflect on the phrase '*know your labour for the Lord is not in vain!*' - What does the phrase mean?
 1. Think about a time (or times!) where you used your gifts to serve.
 2. Consider what 'drives' your service?

5. PRAYER

1. **READ** Luke 15:17-18 where Jesus describes an act of repentance. Repentance is indispensable to the resilient life and is a spiritual habit to engage in and with.
2. Confess your need of God - **READ** Psalm 51:1-2.
3. Pray for those who you struggle to get along with. Ask God to help, strengthen and support your working together and friendship.

DAY SEVEN - Resilience: Prepare and focus!

Stand Firm - let nothing move you!

Most of Daniel's early life was spent in the training academies of the Babylonian emperor. The storyteller says that Daniel was "without physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace." (Daniel 1:4) Daniel remained true to his early life and refused to eat and drink the royal food and wine (8). There was a discipline to his life that was actioned in everyday living.

Resilient people prepare themselves by committing to train and be ready for the future. There is a focus, of their intentions, to look ahead to see what needs to be accomplished; they have an unswerving focus. They understand the words of Peter, who wrote:

So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. (1 Peter 1:13-15 NLT)

Early Christians understood that crisis might be around any corner, that they might be called upon to answer for their convictions whatever the cost. It was an emotionally challenging time for these early Christian and it is an emotionally challenging time for people today! Keeping emotions in 'check' is a part of resilient living in these challenging times; I am not suggesting that we should ignore the way we feel but test and discipline our emotions to translate them into responsible action. Paul understood this more than many (Acts 27:22-25) as many around him had lost all-self control in a moment of absolute terror. In short, resilient people: *prepare themselves; focus on what needs to be accomplished; harness emotions to take action to stand firm.*

REFLECTION & STUDY

1. Consider a moment where you were under extreme pressure and emotion.
 1. *How did you deal with the situation?*
 2. *What sources of help did you draw upon?*
2. Think about the early Christians and persecution.
 1. *Do we/you face persecution?*
 2. If you are able and it is suitable to do so share your thoughts about this together.
3. Reflect on Paul's words, **"I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost..." (Acts 27:22)** These words have contextual meaning (22-25) but also contain a profound truth. Discuss this together!
4. **PRAYER** - consider the words in (3) above. What have you learnt or will take away or are still thinking about from this study and week of prayer? Take a moment to talk about or look back through the guide to help you.
 1. Pray for your needs and those needs of your study group.
 2. Pray for resilience to grow through the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

IDEAS FOR FAMILIES

The next section provides a few ideas for families to engage with the 'Week of Prayer' material. It acts as a guide for you to develop with your family as appropriate.

DAY ONE

Stand Firm - Let Nothing Move You!

TO TALK ABOUT: Today's thinking is about 'giving up'.

- Ask the children if they have ever given up (or felt like giving up) on something at school. If appropriate share an experience from your own life.
- Talk about the feelings of giving up on something; we can feel upset and disappointed when we do give up on something.
- Share the story of Paul & Silas from Acts 16. How do you think they felt in the story? Remind the children that Jesus is always with them just as he was with Paul & Silas.

ACTIVITY (Optional): Talk about the seasons: When do they change? What happens? Are some times of year difficult for animals? Remind your children that the seasons 'keep going'; God sets all things in motion for the good of his creation. Make a small display of items from the garden that remind us of God's creation eg a crumpled leaf, something 'evergreen', a twig etc.

TO THINK ABOUT: Remind the children that the seasons continue to take place they 'don't give up'. Let's encourage each other to stand firm!

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank you that you are always there; speaking up for us, encouraging us to not 'give up'. Help us to stand firm! **AMEN**

DAY TWO - Walk or run?

Stand Firm - Let Nothing Move You

TO TALK ABOUT: Being a Christian is a bit like being in a race!

- Ask the children if they like races. Talk about what it is like to win or lose in a race. Tell the children that you are thinking about a different type of race today. Christians say they 'run a race';
- Talk about the feelings of winning and losing a race and make the point that a Christian 'runs a different type of race' - the prize is Jesus and we are not running against each other only ourselves!
- Read Hebrews 12:1-3 and talk about the word perseverance or resilience. What does it mean?

ACTIVITY (Optional): Using the theme of races why not act out a few of them! On your marks.... Remind the children that the race we run as Christians is very different.

TO THINK ABOUT: Remind the children that all sort of accidents can take place in a race. Somethings are our fault other things are not our fault. Let's encourage each other to: **stand firm and let nothing move you!**

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank you for your help each day in the race that we run. May nothing move me from doing things in your way! AMEN

DAY THREE - Resilience: A daily focus!

Stand Firm - Always Give Yourselves Fully!

“I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in (people’s) welfare... Timothy has proved himself.” (Phil. 2:20,22)

TO TALK ABOUT: Being strong (resilient) every day with Jesus!

- Ask the children who is their best friend. What do you like about your best friend? Talk about Paul and Timothy who were good buddies and about the way they helped each other. Explain that Timothy had a difficult task and he needed help - Paul helped him by giving good advice.
- Talk about the times when you (or ask your children when they) helped a friend. How did it feel to be helpful?
- Remind the children that Jesus is a source of our help and the children can ask Jesus all the time about what to do. We do this by praying!

ACTIVITY (Optional): Draw around the outline of your hand or your child’s hand. Write or draw a prayer for a friend.

TO THINK ABOUT: Sometimes friendships go wrong and people say things that they get upset about. Talk about the ways in which we can pray to help these difficult friendships.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank you for our friends. Help them and bless them in all they do! **AMEN**

Day Four - Sunday Services

There are no readings for this day.

DAY FIVE - Resilience: Living with the BIG picture!

Stand Firm - The Work of the Lord!

TO TALK ABOUT: Knowing which way to go by noticing the signs!

- On the way to school or when out for a walk start to notice road signs as you walk and talk. What do they mean? Explain that Jesus will provide us with clear guidance when we ask for it.
- Talk about a time when Jesus provided you with a clear sign or guidance about something. Ask the children what they think about Jesus who does this? How does he do this?
- Remind the children that Jesus is the source of our help and the children can ask Jesus all the time about what to do. We do this by praying!

ACTIVITY (Optional): Recall some of the signs that you can remember seeing. Could any of the signs help you walk with Jesus? e.g a stop sign to remind you to stop doing something wrong.

TO THINK ABOUT: The way Jesus chooses to speak to us - through people, situations etc.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank you for your help in keeping us going your way.
AMEN

DAY SIX - Resilience: Glance back, look forward!

Stand Firm - know your labour for the Lord is not in vain!

TO TALK ABOUT: Saying sorry is the hardest thing!

- Ask the children what they should do if they get something wrong. Why do we do that?
- Talk to the children about the story of Joseph. What do the children know or remember about the story? i.e his blood stained coat, left in a well, being sold as a slave, becoming Pharaoh's second in command, the goblet, Joseph forgives his brothers.
- Remind them about the end of the story where Joseph "reassured them and spoke kindly to them." Joseph could have punished his brothers but he decided not to do that. How do the children feel about that?

ACTIVITY (Optional): Think about the story of Joseph - perhaps you could act out the appropriate parts of the story with Lego or draw pictures for each part of the story.

TO THINK ABOUT: The way people serve or do jobs in the church - are there people we could say thank you to.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank you for the story of Joseph. Help us to forgive people like Joseph did. AMEN

DAY SEVEN - Resilience: Prepare and focus!

Stand Firm - let nothing move you!

TO TALK ABOUT: Preparing to be all grown up!

- Ask the children about growing up - what are they looking forward to being able to do? Talk about their hopes and dreams.
- Talk to the children about the story of Daniel. What do the children know or remember about the story? He left his home at an early age and lived in an unfamiliar land but remained firm about how he should live.
- Remind the children about the story where Daniel refused to eat the royal food and drink the wine.

ACTIVITY (Optional): Think about the story of Daniel - together while you bake a cake or help peel some potatoes talk about being 'grown up' - what do the children think it will be like?

TO THINK ABOUT: The bravery of Christians who live in difficult places around the world.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank you for the story of Daniel and the way it teaches about what it means to be 'all grown up'. Help us to grow up well like Daniel did in the story today. **AMEN**