



MENTAL
HEALTH
SUNDAY

7- DAY DEVOTIONAL

WRITTEN BY LAURA HOWE

7 DAY DEVOTIONAL

BUILDING RESILIENCE & STRENGTHENING HOPE

GOAL:

The purpose of this devotional is to offer congregants hope-filled, practical support that can be applied to real life.

Mental Health Sunday is talking about mindsets, struggles and beliefs that may have been held for a long time. One Sunday message may cause the person to reflect, but this devotional is meant to take what was heard on Sunday and go deeper by offering practical strategies and hope that can be implemented in everyday life.

The message of Mental Health Sunday is not just inspirational, but transformational.

PROCESS:

Leaning on best-practice methods, the devotional is intentional in its delivery. Each day the reader is given the opportunity to reflect using shame-free language, identify with Biblical teachings offering Hope and apply practical resources and strategies to their real-life circumstances.

CONTENT:

The devotional aligns with the sermon notes offered in the Mental Health Sunday Resource Pack identifying the 7-Keys to Resilience and the congregational giveaways. Each day focuses on one resilience key grounded in biblical teaching coupled with a practical strategy.

Resilience isn't a one-and-done achievement. Rather it's a discipline that needs to be practiced and strengthened; much like a muscle. Without exercise and discipline, your muscles weaken and you are not able to support yourself. The same goes for resilience.

When you are strongly resilient you have the ability to bounce back more quickly and avoid getting stuck. Having strong resilience prevents mental health struggles.

Note: Mental Illness differs as it is a biological illness with impacts that can range from moderate to severe and usually requires medical intervention and treatment with medications.

Everyone has mental health struggles and by building resilience we can prevent getting stuck in the depths of these struggles.

While these 7-Keys may seem simple, they are certainly not easy. These simple strategies are powerful and create transformation in individuals' lives. When individuals are intentional in strengthening the 7-Keys their mental health improves resulting in healthier individuals, families, churches and communities.



DAY 1

STAY CONNECTED

When people are going through difficult times they often isolate themselves. They don't want to be a downer or they just don't have the energy to put on a brave face and pretend everything is okay.

But we were created to be in relationship - with God and with others. By staying connected we become more resilient, allowing us to bounce back faster from struggle or hardship.

We often underestimate the power of relationships, yet that was one of the first things to be attacked in Eden.

In the garden, when the Devil tempted Eve, and Adam followed suit, the first thing to occur was shame and separation between Adam and Eve. Further guilt and isolation occurred when they hid from the Lord. And finally, judgment and alienation resulted when Adam and Eve were removed from the garden.

Having a relationship with us was so important to God that he sent Jesus to restore what was lost.

A frequent tactic of the devil is to try to create separation, isolation, and alienation between each other and between us and God. This is done by convincing us that we don't belong, that we are not worthy enough, or that others reject us.

Unfortunately, in low or challenging moments, we tend to believe these lies and isolate ourselves leaving us vulnerable.

That is why staying connected is key to resilience.

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back or not get stuck when facing hardship. Rather than an achievement earned or designation learned, each of the 7 keys are disciplines that, when intentionally implemented, strengthen resilience.

When we implement the first key - staying connected and having relationships with other people - we are able to receive support even when we don't feel like engaging. We are able to avoid the destruction that comes with isolation.

Having supportive and trusting relationships can be challenging. And it's worth the investment of time and energy to seek out mentors and friendships and to nurture relationships where you feel you can be authentic.

It is a discipline to invest in relationships. It's so much easier to stay home and watch Netflix than it is to pick up the phone and spend what little time you have building a relationship. Having the discipline to build relationships creates a cushion that supports and fulfills that basic human need to belong and have a connection.

If you have isolated yourself and don't know how or where to start in building relationships, here is a list of ideas. Just pick 1 or 2 to do today. Start strengthening your resilience by staying connected.

- Go for a walk with a friend
- Call someone during your lunch or commute
- Sign up to volunteer in your church or community
- Ask someone for advice on a project
- Join a team or activity
- Join a small group at church
- Go out for dinner or live game
- Text someone that you haven't spoken to in a while

BIBLE READINGS

Genesis 2:1-15,25

1 John 4:7-19

Proverbs 27:17

Proverbs 16:23



DAY 2

KNOW YOURSELF

Always questioning whether you measure up, struggling with imposter syndrome, or doubting your purpose, can be crippling. It can prevent you from making decisions and moving forward. If you are under stress, in conflict with those you care about, or struggling with mental health, you can become completely paralyzed. Your reality appears to match what your internal voice has been shouting at you.

However, when you know who you are in Christ and you know your strengths and weaknesses, you are better equipped to bounce back more quickly when you face challenges.

And that is what resilience is all about; being able to withstand adversity without getting stuck, and bouncing back more quickly. Resilience isn't the absence of struggle or pain. It is the ability to come out of a challenging time, more easily, and perhaps with growth.

There is so much freedom in knowing and being confident in who God made you to be.

No one is good at everything. However, we often have the expectation that if God called us to do something we should be good at all of it.

If I'm called to be a mom, work in business, health care, tech, or even in ministry I SHOULD be good at or skilled in all aspects of the role. So, when you find yourself struggling or not seeing success, it can cause you to doubt your calling, or to feel inadequate.

It's impossible to be good at everything, but knowing who you are and the gifts that you have can prevent you from getting stuck as you focus on what you CAN do.

When you're struggling, consider what you are expecting of yourself and ask, "Am I expecting myself to be good at everything?" "Am I getting stuck listening to negative internal messages?"

Perhaps someone in your past told you that you weren't good enough, smart enough or loveable, and these messages are getting loud

God is telling you something different.

God's Word, the Bible, is telling you that you are cherished, loved, equipped, called.

I encourage you to take 2-3 scriptures from today's readings and post them in a visible place.

Make them your home screen, put them on the bathroom mirror, fridge, anywhere you will be regularly reminded of who you are in Christ.

When we are struggling with our purpose, we often don't see ourselves as valuable or skilled. It can become easy for us to get stuck.

By regularly reminding ourselves of who we are in Christ, that we are each created uniquely on purpose and that we have gifts and strengths, we build resilience to bounce back more quickly.

BIBLE READINGS

Galatians 2:19-21

Ephesians 2:10

Psalms 139:1-15

Jeremiah 29:11



DAY 3

BOUNDARIES

Developing and maintaining boundaries is hard work. It can feel as though it goes against our human nature. Naturally, we want to control others, or maybe you, yourself, have a hard time saying no. And the Bible instructs us to control ourselves (Titus 2:12).

Personal boundaries help limit our tendency to over-extend, control others, and even protect us from those who have no self-control or who wish to control us.

In one day, your boundaries can be tested by the temptation to take on another's offence, to accept responsibility for other people's circumstances, and to sacrifice your own well-being to accommodate others.

Maintaining boundaries is a discipline that impacts every area of our lives, in our relationships, work, and even how we care for ourselves. When we are able to maintain healthy boundaries we are strengthening our resilience. We are practicing disciplines that grow our skills and help us avoid hardships. When we become more resilient, we are able to bounce back quickly when facing life's challenges.

Maintaining boundaries can be challenging for some because having self-control and saying no can be very difficult. Saying no is a skill that can be developed. Jesus modelled this for us. In Luke 5:13-16 Jesus had a similar experience where he was surrounded by people with needs.

Jesus healed a man who had leprosy and asked him to tell no one. Instead, he was to show himself to the priest. The man (who was likely overwhelmed with joy) went and share the miracle with a lot of people.

This triggered a crowd of people to surround Jesus, asking to be healed of their infirmities. Scripture says that when Jesus was surrounded by the crowd of people, he left them, withdrawing by himself and praying (Luke 5:16). Jesus didn't stay and meet their needs. He left them standing sick, broken, and tired.

Can you imagine that? Just walking away from people in need?

Jesus set a boundary on what he was able to do at that time, and he did no more.

Jesus chose to say yes to spending time with God and no to the crowds of people seeking healing.

For most people, it is very difficult to say no to a person in need.

However, Jesus did it.

At specific times Jesus said "No" to people and "Yes" to spending time alone, resting and refuelling with time in prayer.

So let's use Jesus' example for saying no.

Rather than feeling guilty about saying no to someone, instead, choose what you are able to say yes to.

Because, when you agree to helping to meet someone's needs, you will invariably need to say no to something else.

When you stay late at work to talk to someone needing help, you are saying no to time at home with your family.

When you say yes to going on a field trip with your kids, you are saying no to the work that you would be doing at that time.

Saying yes to one thing is saying no to another.

Be intentional. Choose what you are agreeing to spend your time on. There will always be people needing your time and energy. Choose wisely. Discerning appropriate boundaries is Godly.

So the next time someone asks you for help and you feel that you need to say no, also tell them what you are choosing instead. Be authentic; be real; be honest and make wise choices.

BIBLE READINGS

Titus 2:12

Luke 5:13-16

Matthew 5:37



DAY 4

MEDITATION

Research has caught up to what we know as truth from the Bible and confirmed that regular practice of mindfulness increases resilience.

Resilience isn't simply an achievement that can be attained. Neither is it a goal reached that no longer needs development. In fact, it's the opposite. Resilience is the result of disciplines and habits that need to be maintained in order to remain strong. Meditation is one of these habits that develop strong resilience.

A Christian definition of mindfulness is "making mental space on purpose to turn our whole attention to God so that we can hear and abide in His voice in our lives instead of our own judgements." (Regina Tremmel 2020 Summit)

Having mindfulness is intentionally focusing on God so that His voice is louder than our judgements. And mindfulness is produced through the practice of meditation. To say it differently: Meditation is the habit and mindfulness is the skill developed.

As Christ-followers, our resilience is strengthened when we are able to develop the habit of meditation by slowing our thoughts, intentionally focusing on God. This builds our ability to hear from Christ and abide in Him throughout our day.

Christians are not immune to life's struggles. But, having the habit of meditation and building the skill of mindfulness allows us to more readily hear from God, rather than being distracted by our thoughts.

The skill of mindfulness develops your awareness so that you are not overcome by these thoughts.

Stress, anger, depression, and anxiety are often felt in the mind, body (indigestion, headaches, sleeplessness, chronic pain), and spirit, (feeling far from God).

Meditation and mindfulness tend to all three of these areas. Research shows that meditation slows the heart rate, decreases blood pressure, and can improve digestive issues and pain.

Based on the Christian definition, mindfulness is walking out what 2 Corinthians 10:5 says in “taking every thought captive.” Meditation develops the skill of gaining control over what you think about yourself and life and submitting it to God.

And finally, meditation nurtures the spirit through developing a more intimate connection with God.

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Joshua 1:8

Developing the habit, or discipline, of meditation and developing the skill of mindfulness strengthens your resilience. When you face challenges or difficult times, you have the ability to control your thoughts so that they don't hijack you. You have a quick connection with God and are able to check in with Him and abide in Him. This allows you to bounce back more quickly and avoid getting stuck.

When first practicing meditation, it can feel unattainable. Life is flying a mile-a-minute - sitting still and silent sounds unrealistic. Building these intentional routines into your day doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, I bet most of you already do this.

What do you often do when you sit down to eat? Pray. The act of praying before eating is an intentional pause, directing our thoughts to God to acknowledge our thanks to Him for His faithfulness and provision. I encourage you to think about practical and simple ways that you can take a moment and focus and redirect your thoughts on Christ throughout your day.

It could be on your commute, while your computer turns on, or sitting in your car before walking into work. These are simple, in-the-moment suggestions that help you center your thoughts and intentions on God and build resilience that will prevent you from getting stuck when facing life's challenges.

BIBLE READINGS

Joshua 1:8

Psalms 1:1-6

Psalms 143:5

2 Corinthians 10:5

Philippians 4:8

Romans 12:2



DAY 5

SELF CARE

Self-care has been found to be a core building block for surviving and thriving, and it builds resilience. The concept of tending to your mental, spiritual, emotional, social and physical needs is founded in scripture.

For some, this isn't new information. You have likely heard countless times that to be healthy and avoid burnout we need to exercise, eat well, get good sleep, and have some downtime.

But if all that comes to mind when you hear the words "self-care" is vacations, green smoothies and going to spin class, I'm not surprised that self-care gets moved to the bottom of your to-do list.

All of these things take time, money and a lot of effort. They become just one more thing on the already very long list of things I "should" be doing.

But the goal of self-care is not to indulge in or fulfill selfish desires. The goal is to live out the great commandment found in Matthew 22:36-40, which commands us to love one another as we love ourselves.

Taking time to care for yourself and refuel is not about whether or not you deserve it. It is about God wanting to love on His children. He wants you to know Him and He wants to refresh you.

The time you spend refreshing and refueling is time well spent.

When you regularly practice self-care, you are much better equipped to handle life's difficult moments because you're facing them with a full tank.

It is so much harder to overcome struggles when you are weary. Tending to your spiritual, emotional, physical, social, and mental needs helps you thrive despite challenges.

Self-care is all about accepting the love of God as His children and meeting the needs he designed us to have.

Self-care can be as simple as eating lunch with real food at lunchtime at a real table, not at your desk or in a meeting. Self-care is developing a bedtime routine to allow for better sleep, adjusting the notifications on your devices so you're not being distracted by every ping and beep. It can even be registering for the course you've been thinking about for years.

Self-care is anything that tends to your spiritual, emotional, physical, social and mental needs. One way of recognizing when we need to tend to self-care needs is to look out for the "must-be-nice" syndrome.

The must-be-nice-syndrome is when we find ourselves being cynical or having difficulty encouraging others when they tell us about their self-care practices. We envy their new class at the gym, the new book they are reading for a book club or their weekend plans. Outwardly we politely smile, but inwardly we roll our eyes and say "must be nice".

The must-be-nice-syndrome is really a red flag signal that we are lacking in the self-care department. We haven't created enough space and margin in our life so that we can feel restored and refilled.

To build resilience, prevent burnout and avoid the must-be-nice syndrome, think about how you can build some self-care practices into your day. This will look different for each person and your need for self-care will ebb and flow.

It's helpful to have a list of self-care ideas from which to choose when you're needing it. Set a 7-minute timer and make a note file on your phone of 2-3 ideas for each of these 5 areas; spiritual, emotional, physical, social and mental.

Your self-care ideas don't need to require a lot of time, energy or money, but they are a great way to start practising self-care and building your resiliency.

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 22:36-40

Luke 5:16

1Kings 19:4-8



DAY 6

HAVE FUN

Having fun is often overlooked as a means to building resilience.

Having fun as an adult can feel hard. As a kid or teen, it was easier. There were organized groups, activities, lessons, and very few responsibilities.

There was always something to do. But as an adult or parent with significant responsibilities and pressures, it's WAY harder to find and/or make time for fun.

In our busy and driven culture, we can sometimes feel as though everything we do should get us closer to meeting a goal or achievement. Consequently, play or fun can feel counterintuitive because it doesn't outwardly appear to accomplish anything. It has no purpose other than the genuine joy that it brings.

However, play triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals, which relieve stress and can even temporarily relieve pain. Also, pursuing fun activities that challenge the brain can help prevent memory issues and enhance brain function. The social interaction of playing with family and friends can also help ward off stress and improve your relationships.

Psalms 118:24 says, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

We are encouraged to find joy in the day right in front of us, not because we accomplished something but because joy is a gift from God.

We can often put off having fun until we have time off or extra money, but fun doesn't have to be a big event. It doesn't have to include extravagant things like vacations or amusement parks.

The past few years have been challenging. We were stripped of all the large activities we would have normally classified as being fun. Vacations, parties, malls, sports, and movie theatres. We were forced to be creative in our fun: hiking, puzzles, movie nights, and even, for those of you who love it, Legos.

Having fun is a key to resilience. It allows you the mental and emotional break to be creative and relieve stress. This will prevent you from getting stuck when walking through life's difficult moments.

Having simple regular moments of fun will help prevent depression and improve your resistance to disease. Or as it says in Ecclesiastes 8:15, "And I commend joy for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun."

What is fun for you may look different from those things other people find fun, and that's okay. There is no need to compare or evaluate or shift your fun to match others. Only what is truly fun for you will give you the benefits of joy and resilience.

Having fun is powerful and strengthens your resilience. A great question to ask yourself is "what did you do for fun when you were 8 years old?" Was it biking? Sewing? Music? Making forts? And then do that. Fun doesn't require days off work or extra money. It's simple and builds your resilience.

BIBLE READINGS

Psalms 118:24

James 1:17

Colossians 3:17

Proverbs 17:22

Ecclesiastes 8:15



DAY 7

REST

A quote from Pete Scazzero sums up the purpose of rest so well. He says, "Sabbath is not about resting from our work but learning from our rest."

From the beginning of time, God modelled rest by establishing a Sabbath.

God, the creator of the world, could have said that the universe was created in 6 days. Instead, He included the 7th day, a day of rest, as part of His perfect creation even though He didn't need rest from His work.

God, who is perfect, chose to rest. Rest is part of our work, not a result of being lazy or only because we are physically tired.

When we don't include rest in our work, ministry, and schedule, we are not fulfilling all that is expected of us.

Anyone with kids is familiar with bedtime negotiations. The kids are exhausted, but they know the parents are going to stay up a bit later and chat or watch tv.

In their exhaustion, the kids cry, whine, and complain that it's not fair. This is not their normal behavior, but when they are tired, they are irrational, easily upset, offended, and fight with their siblings.

In a less dramatic way we, too, don't act our best when we are tired and worn out. Being tired and worn out can cause us to make poor decisions, act out of character, and become sensitive to offence.

Even Jesus recognized the importance of rest. We see this at different times throughout the gospels.

In Mark 6:31 Jesus tells his disciples to find a quiet place to rest, and Luke 5:16 reads that Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.

We don't need rest because we are weak. We need rest because that is God's perfect model of work and life, and it provides us protection.

Resilience is all about being able to bounce back when you face difficult times. Rest is an important piece to staying resilient.

Having regular rhythms of rest and understanding your unique signs that you need rest is a discipline that will allow you to avoid getting stuck when you face adversity. Rest is necessary to have endurance, a clear mind, and the emotional capacity needed to not be overcome by life's challenges.

Keeping a Sabbath is a great way to maintain rest. Some of us have trouble stopping and taking a break. Here are some signs that you are weary and maybe need additional rest.

1. You lose interest in the things you're usually passionate about and that bring you joy
2. Your temper is short and you are easily provoked
3. You become offended easily or take everything personally
4. You are constantly overthinking
5. You always feel exhausted despite getting rest and sleep

By recognizing when you need some extra mental, emotional, physical relational and spiritual rest, you are able to remain resilient.

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 11:28-30

Genesis 2:1-3

Luke 5:30-32

Hebrews 4:9-11





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