



## Resilient Leadership: Enduring Qualities from Scripture on Optimism, Courage, Endurance, and Transcendence

Luke McCoy

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There are four enduring qualities that will allow the resilient leader to lead through adversity. First, the resilient leader chooses optimism. Scripture affirms, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (New International Version, 2011, Rom. 8:28). Second, the resilient leader is courageous. Paul exhorted, “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you” (NIV, 1 Cor. 15:58). Next, leaders guide with endurance. James encourages, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance” (NIV, James 1:2-3). The final enduring quality of resilient leadership is transcendence. Jesus reassured, “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer . . . be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown” (NIV, Rev 2:10). Considering adversity will occur, the resilient leader proactively chooses to develop the four enduring qualities of resilient leadership to lead through the pain.

*Keywords:* Resilient leadership, leading through the pain, optimistic leadership, transcendent leadership

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### Introduction

Throughout a leader’s life, they are eventually and inevitably going to go through a painful season that has the potential of breaking the leader. Resilient leaders need to navigate complex, painful, and adverse situations they will encounter. As the leader progresses and challenges come, four enduring qualities aid in the leader’s ability to navigate adversity and thrive through struggle. This literature review aims to discover

the research available on resiliency in leadership thoroughly and to discover if there are any timeless principles or enduring qualities that the resilient leader possesses. Resilient leaders can continue leading their teams and influencing people to accomplish their goals while navigating pain, adversity, and organizational change; therefore, the primary goal of this project is to see if there are principles that can propel a leader forward through pain to lead on a higher level when organizations require it for survival. Based on the current literature, there are four enduring qualities that a resilient leader must possess. Leaders must be able to lead through pain (optimism), despite the pain (courage), as a result of the pain (endurance), and knowing there will be more pain (transcendence). To become a resilient leader who thrives despite personal and organizational adversity, they must develop a mindset of optimism, courage, endurance, and transcendence. This is also supported in Scripture in James 1:2-4, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (New International Version, 2011).

### **Resilient Leadership**

There are a variety of traits that are advantageous to navigating the complexities of leadership pain and adversity. Resilient leaders "demonstrate the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic or crisis adversity" (Patterson et al., 2009, p. 8). Wilson (2013) described a resilient leader as one who can "overcome setbacks and positively meet challenges." Moreover, Hilton (2019) gives three common traits found in resilient leadership: a clear sense of purpose, optimism, and trust. Leaders who can stand the test of time and lead a team through adversity possess a clear sense of purpose, and an optimistic mindset, and people trust them. Everly et al. (2010) described resilience as "the ability to positively adapt to, or rebound from significant adversity and the stress it creates" (Everly et al. 2010, p. 13). They also proposed that "adversity is the true test of leadership" and "we believe the mystery of resilient leadership is revealed, not in the best of times, but in the worst of times—in times of crisis, even during times of initial defeat" (Everly et al., 2010, p. xiv). Crises will come, calamity will strike, adversity will occur, and pain will happen; therefore, leaders must possess enduring qualities of resilience to lead through the struggle.

Resiliency is "the ability to bounce back from adversity while maintaining personal and corporate integrity" (Wilson, 2013, p. 449). The resilient leader can incorporate the qualities of resiliency into their leadership to navigate change and transcend adversity and obstacles. The resilient leader is keenly aware of their weaknesses and endures despite those shortcomings. Resiliency beckons the leader to lead despite weaknesses and devise solutions to work on those weaknesses. The resilient leader adapts to the painful situation, recognizes limitations based on weakness, and perseveres while working on their weakness (Wilson, 2013).

Through extensive research, authors collectively researched the question, "are outstanding leaders born or made?" Divided in their analysis, they concluded that both scenarios have merit, truth, and precedent. Resilient leaders are born, and resilient leaders are made. These are two parallel truths that serve to encourage leaders that

there are inherent and learned traits that allow the leader to be resilient. Among the dissenting conclusions, authors who argue that leaders are born assert, “Unless an individual is born with certain traits (e.g., humility), life experiences will not develop him/her into an outstanding leader” (Boerma et al. 2017, p. 4). However, those arguing that leaders can become resilient write, “While it may be true that we’re born with a certain propensity to lead, outstanding leaders are the product of hard work and development over time” (Boerma et al. 2017, p. 4).

An additional question regarding resiliency was thoroughly researched to discover if there was any precise manner of predicting a leader’s resilience. Nguyen et al. (2016) researched the correlation between personal drive, optimism, leadership style, and proactivity to see if they could predict or impact a leader’s resiliency. Their assertions were inconclusive, and there is very little evidence to prove that one can predict one’s propensity or potential to become a resilient leader (Nguyen et al. 2016). While it is academically irresponsible to declare a leader resilient by birth or circumstance and incomplete to predict a leader’s resiliency, certain aspects of life inevitably have the power and possibility to create or bring to light the resilience in a leader. Considering this, adversity and pain can bring to light a leader’s resilience.

Given enough time, leaders will eventually face a season of adversity where they will face some pain. This pain could result from organizational change, an unfortunate reorganizational strategy, a demotion, or an understaffed team. It could be something catastrophic like a death in the family or the loss of a close friend. At some point, adversity will affect the team in such a way as to potentially negatively affect the leader’s influence, performance, and ability to keep leading at a high capacity. A leader’s pain comes in a myriad of situations and has a variety of manners of disguising itself. Leadership pain could include depression, grief, anxiety, stress, or betrayal. Leadership pain could happen in a moment but have ripple effects for years. Leadership pain could come from those closest to the leader or someone they have never met. Duggan et al. (2017) declared that adversity is going to happen and that “in every case, when the leader leads with a well-defined, thoughtful, and less anxious presence, the organization’s odds of defending against the invasiveness of toxic forces are increased rather than lowered” (Duggan et al., 2017, pp. 143-144.) Therefore, the resilient leader leads through adversity and takes their team with them.

When leaders face adversity and pain, they must make a decision. So often, the leader continues to attempt to lead at the same level they have up until the pain. Leaders are masters at compartmentalizing and can do their best to hide, forget, or mask the pain to continue leading. Leaders can develop various coping mechanisms to feel they have alleviated the pain (Bath, 2014); however, resilient leaders possess four qualities that allow them to lead despite, through, from, and knowing there will be more pain. Resilient leaders possess four qualities that allow them to lead through pain: optimism, courage, endurance, and transcendence.

### **Optimism: Viewing Obstacles as Opportunities and Leading Despite the Pain**

The challenges and obstacles a leader will inevitably face are multiple and varied; however, there is an enduring quality that will help the leader navigate the pain and move forward through adversity. The enduring quality is the mindset of optimism.

Optimism is a hopeful feeling or expectation that any situation will turn positive (Hilton, 2019).

The Scriptures are full of examples of men and women who faced adversity yet remained optimistic in their hope that the Lord would provide. Likely, in the most traumatic event of Abraham's life, he still believed that good would somehow come out of tragedy. God had called him to do the unthinkable, and in the act of obedience, Abraham tied Isaac to the altar to sacrifice his son. The author of Hebrews describes Abraham's hope, "Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death" (New International Version, 2011, Heb. 11:19). Abraham displayed his resiliency and optimism through obedience. God provided a ram to be sacrificed in place of Isaac while giving humanity an image of the coming substitutionary atonement in Christ Jesus. Abraham's enduring optimism allowed him to obey the Lord despite the extreme situation and painful test.

Before literally being thrown in the fire, Daniel writes, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (New International Version, 2011, Dan. 3:16-18).

These three young Israelites who had their names changed and were forced to worship an idol instead of the living God were defiantly optimistic. They knew that God had the power and choice to save them; therefore, they went into the fire believing that, ultimately the situation would work out for their good. The three young Israelites kept their optimistic faith in God even in the most challenging of circumstances. The resilient leader remains optimistic through adversity.

Optimism can be deployed in various ways, notably by love and gratitude. In a letter to the Corinthian church, Paul described love as having the enduring quality of optimism when he wrote, "It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (New International Version, 2011, 1 Cor. 13:7). Love is *always* hopeful and endures through *every* circumstance. The second practical way that optimism can be displayed is through giving thanks. Leaders can choose optimism by maintaining a posture of gratitude. Resilient leaders are thankful for their blessings and believe they can persevere through adversity (D'Intino et al., 2007). Altogether, love and gratitude have the propensity to build optimism into the leader.

Nevertheless, the optimistic leader must stay grounded in reality. A leader given to a naïve optimism is likely to neglect the fact-based reality in which they live which can cause significant difficulty, doubts, and burnout within their organization. The resilient leader must have optimism that is confident that the team can conquer the challenge, reach the goal, and overcome adversity but never lose sight of reality (Torres, 2013). As one follows the resilient leader, there can be a perceived danger associated with this shadow side of optimism. If the team feels that the leader is tone-deaf or unaware of the adversity surrounding a particular situation, there is a very real danger of faltering trust. Holiday (2021) asserted, "Overcoming that [broken trust] requires skilled communication which demonstrates an accurate understanding of difficulties, but also a dogged determination to see the good, even if the blessing is something merely dreamed up at

that moment” (p. 8). While naïve positivity can be a shadow side, reality-based optimism is required to navigate adversity and lead through pain. The resilient leader is hyper-aware of the reality, stakes, and obstacles and yet optimistically presses forward with perseverance (Holiday, 2021).

Both the optimistic leader and the pessimistic leader will likely face equal adversity; however, the optimistic leader has the agility, creativity, and willingness to overcome and thrive through adversity. The resilient leader retains an optimistic mentality regarding the situations they are facing. The pessimistic leader will eventually give in to their fears, self-sabotage their success, or stall with pervasive mediocrity. On the other hand, optimism views life through a lens of hope, encouragement, and determination (Hilton, 2019). Seligman (1998) sees pessimistic leaders as those who see unfortunate adversity through a “personal, permanent and pervasive” lens while, conversely, optimistic leaders experience adversity through an “impersonal, temporary and specific” lens (D’Intono et al. 2007, p. 108). Optimism recognizes that the adversity being faced is nothing new to humanity and that there is a solution or mindset that will allow the leader to navigate the pain. Resilient leaders have learned the value of optimism and explain unfavorable circumstances as singular pain through which they can work.

Kim et al. discovered three critical components of resilient leadership by studying educators, business leaders, and the armed forces as they concluded,

Resilience is a crucial component of effective leadership. Resilience is made up of mindset and behaviors. It is predicated on the belief that setbacks are temporary and create opportunities to learn. It begins with optimism, mindfulness, clarity about the work to be done, and trust in the intentions and abilities of your team. But it must be practiced, modeled, and refined over time. (Kim et al. 2019, p. 18-19)

The resilient leader will choose to see obstacles as opportunities and believe that, ultimately, every situation can and will work out for good. Paul reminds the believer, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (New International Version, 2011, Rom. 8:28).

### **Courage: Determining to Navigate the Adversity and Leading Through the Pain**

While *optimism* believes that there will be a way out of the pain and that ultimately the situation will work out, *courage* is needed to lead the team through the pain. Optimism is positively leading *despite* the pain, while courage leads *through* the pain. Optimism considers the presence of adversity but acknowledges that the team will eventually emerge. Courage is required actually to get through the pain.

Paul encouraged the leaders in the Corinthian church, “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 labor in the Lord is not in vain” (New International Version, 2011, 1 Cor. 15:58). Furthermore, he wrote, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong” (New International Version, 2011, 1 Cor. 16:13). Additionally, he challenged,

“And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good” (New International Version, 2011, 2 Thess. 3:13). The resilient leader will enthusiastically (optimism) work hard (courage) to accomplish the goal.

Ernest Shackleton is a lasting example of resilient leadership as he optimistically said, “Difficulties are just things to overcome” (Bragg, 2018, p. 7). He and the crew aboard the ship *Endurance* made an exploration to locate Antarctica in 1915. The more challenging the trip became, the more Shackleton thrived. Before leaving, Shackleton placed a recruitment ad in the newspaper which read, “Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success” (Bragg, 2018, p. 8). He knew their chances of venturing to Antarctica and returning were only possible if he had a resilient crew. His resiliency and courage propelled him to keep watch over his crew through the most adverse situations. Bragg asserts three conclusions through the leadership of Ernest Shackleton. First, “leaders set goals, but when circumstances beyond their control change, they adapt and refocus the mission.” Second, “Be strong and decisive as a leader and, when inevitable conflicts occur, promote reconciliation to achieve the overall mission.” Finally, “Never give up on the mission, no matter how difficult or impossible it may seem” (Bragg, 2018, p. 9). Courage is a requirement for the resilient leader to lead through the pain.

The resilient leader stays strong and courageous in the face of adversity to begin leading through the pain. Painful experiences of change that are led courageously can accomplish growth. Moreover, Harle (2005) argued that the resilient leader dares to step out of their comfort zone and lead when the stakes are high and the obstacles are significant. Courageous, risk-taking efforts, like those of Shackleton, can propel the leader forward in their leadership (Harle, 2005).

Bartone (2006) set out to discover the specific qualities of a resilient leader in the military to see if those traits could be taught to build resilience or “hardiness” in people. Soldiers specifically face an immense amount of adversity in isolation, ambiguity, powerlessness, boredom, danger, and workload; however, Bartone (2006) noted that a select few can lead through the pain. The resilient or “hardy” leader has a born and learned set of qualities that allow them to persevere through genuine pain. So much of the leader’s ability to lead through pain rests in their mind as they reframe the adverse and stressful circumstances into obstacles that can be overcome. The resilient leader innately believes that there is control over the stress and that victory is possible. Consequently, studies have shown that the resilient leader can have a positive effect on building resiliency within their team. As the leader courageously leads by example, the team’s trust increases, and so does their resiliency. Through an upbeat, motivating leadership style, the resilient leader can build optimism and raise commitment and confidence levels in the team (Bartone, 2006). As the team observes the optimistic and courageous leader, they will likely respond with mirrored courage and resiliency.

On the other hand, it is easy for the leader to sit back and wait for the world to adjust to their style. The way of mediocrity is to wait for the culture to adapt to the leader’s style of leadership and management (Patterson et al., 2009). Alternatively, the resilient leader courageously adapts and refuses to wait for the world to change passively. Courage means “going beyond what’s expected, taking a risk for the right reason, doing something that seems unpleasant or impossible—because it’s the right

thing to do” (Fifer, 2006, p. 32). Resilient leaders are bold, courageous, and willing to work hard to keep their organizations moving forward (Fifer, 2006). Leaders and teams will face adversity; the courageous leader will work hard to build a resilient team that can lead through the pain.

### **Endurance: Persevering Through Adversity and Leading from the Pain**

The resilient leader recognizes the pain and optimistically addresses the situation with reality and positivity. Second, the resilient leader courageously begins leading through the pain. Next, the resilient leader perseveres through adversity and continues to lead from the pain. Pain and adversity will shape the leader, but the resilient leader endures and perseveres through trials to become stronger and lead the team toward the goal. James encourages the leader,

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything . . . blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him (*New International Version*, 2011, James 1:2-4, 12).

Paul continued the challenge, “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (*New International Version*, 2011, Rom. 5:3-5). The apostle John wrote these words from Jesus in a letter to the church at Thyatira, “I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first” (*New International Version*, 2011, Rev 2:19). Correspondingly, John wrote, “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus” (*New International Version*, 2011, Rev 14:12). The Lord himself exhorted Joshua, “Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous” (*New International Version*, 2011, Josh. 1:6-7a). The theme of endurance runs through the scriptures and encourages the resilient leader to remain strong and courageous in the face of adversity.

It is not enough for resilient leaders to be optimistic and courageous; they must do the hard work of persevering from the pain. Endurance is displayed through adaptability, modeled through tenacity, and exhibited through proactivity.

### **Adaptability**

Resilience is reflected in one’s ability to adapt and change leadership styles as the need arises. As evidenced in the medical world, physicians and healthcare workers who are inflexible and cannot adapt their leadership perpetuates a culture thwarted by dissension and resistance (Arond-Thomas, 2004). Alternatively, leaders who acknowledge their challenges and press forward to grow, change, and adapt can help

build a resilient culture that addresses the needs of the people around them. As necessary, the resilient leader can effortlessly adapt to the situation and draw from various leadership styles (Arond-Thomas, 2004).

Holiday (2021) stated, "Excellence in decision-making includes three skills: emotional/social intelligence, communication, and agility" (Holiday, 2021, p. 8). The adversity that will press in on a leader will cause the mediocre, inflexible leader to stall, cave or quit; however, the pain, grief, change, and problems that the resilient leader will inevitably face must be met with a pervasive adaptability (Holiday, 2021, p. 8). Warren Bennis said, "I believe adaptive capacity or resilience is the single most important quality in a leader, or anyone else for that matter, who hopes to lead a healthy meaningful life" (Patterson et al., 2009, p. 8).

Resilient leaders are adaptive and learn to see patterns within organizations to prepare for changes proactively. Patterson et al. (2009) remind the resilient leader that "adaptive leaders see patterns before they become obvious to others. They extract meaning from observations, interactions, data, and other sources. They sort information quickly but make inferences based on partial information" (p. 122). The resilient leader can anticipate the next appropriate step, adapt quickly, and then help the team through the changes.

## Tenacity

While resilient leaders are adept in agility, they are also tenacious. The resilient leader is fluent in flexibility; therefore, they can tolerate change and keep tenaciously tackling challenges. Resilience is not simply showing back up to work after a challenge; it is courageously coming back stronger after enduring the pain. Kim et al. (2019) proclaimed, "we have to adapt and evolve each time we bounce back. Every time we struggle and recover should be a learning experience. The role of a modern resilient leader isn't just to withstand difficult conditions. It is to learn and improve because of them and anticipate the future" (p. 22).

Paul admonished Timothy, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (New International Version, 2011, 1 Tim. 6:12). In other words, resilient leadership must be tenacious in its ability to finish the work. Peter vehemently denied that he knew Jesus, and as evidenced by bitter weeping and retreat, likely was filled with regret and disappointment. After spending three years with Jesus and partaking in his ministry, Peter denied Christ and consequently went back to what was familiar; Peter went back to fishing. This was a pivotal moment in the life of Peter as he had to discover his own level of tenacity. After Christ's resurrection, Jesus called Peter back to the mission, and he resiliently and tenaciously began preaching the gospel once again. As a result of Peter's first recorded sermon post-resurrection, three-thousand people were added to the faith (New International Version, 2011, Acts 2:41). Peter not only bounced back from his setback, he tenaciously emerged more courageous than he was before and spent the rest of his life proclaiming the good news of Christ.

Similarly, Paul, who once persecuted the church and openly supported the stoning of Steven for his faith, came to Christ and refocused his tenacity towards telling



people about Jesus when he said, “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace” (New International Version, 2011, Acts 20:24). The life and ministry of Paul encourage the resilient leader that even though there was a season of setback, they can persevere through pain and lead with tenacity for good.

Klocko (2019), in referring to an especially adept group of school superintendents, wrote, “These resilient leaders believed that it was their responsibility to persist in the face of adversity and were more likely to expend unlimited effort and attempt new strategies when faced with economic turmoil” (p. 9). The resilient leader does not allow personal weakness to hold them back from pressing forward, and they work on their weakness as they continue to lead. The tenacious leader acknowledges weakness, works on resolving and fixing their shortcomings, and leads despite adversity (Klocko, 2019).

Jim Marshall made the conscious choice to choose tenacity over failure. Marshall, a National Football League defensive end for the Minnesota Vikings, made a huge mistake during a televised game while playing against the San Francisco 49ers. Marshall picked up a fumble and accidentally ran in the wrong direction, scoring for their opponent. The shame, frustration, and embarrassment could have overcome Marshall, and failure of the moment; however, he made the conscious decision at half-time to be tenacious. He came back in the second half, played as strong as he could, and helped his team win. During half-time, Marshall commented regarding his mindset, “If you make a mistake, you got to make it right. I realized I had a choice. I could sit in my misery, or I could do something about it” (Dweck, 2016, p. 33-34).

Wilson (2013) reminded the leader, “It does not matter how strong your vision is, how positive your attitude, or how deep your passion is. Without the tenacity or single-mindedness to see things through when the going gets tough, you will inevitably struggle” (p. 450). Through tenacity and perseverance, resilient leaders can overcome obstacles by keeping sight of their goals. The resilient leader has an incredible amount of energy to expend toward the goal and possesses a remarkable ability to accomplish tasks. Whether the leader initiates the change or the change is thrust upon the organization, it is the leader’s task to see it through with tenacity, endurance, teamwork, and drive (Kirkpatrick, 1991).

## **Proactivity**

Historically, the army has taken a reactive approach toward resiliency; however, authors Cornum et al. (2011) present a proactive posture toward building a resilient leader. If teams can build resilience into them before they need it; they are more likely to navigate the pain and come out stronger on the other side. As opposed to waiting until a soldier has experienced the trauma of war and potentially developed post-traumatic stress disorder to develop a solution toward resiliency, there is an anticipatory “four-pillared” approach to building a resilient leader (p. 6). Initially, each soldier goes through an assessment to establish a baseline that can be updated through the years. Next, they undergo a specific training regimen designed to develop and improve resiliency. Third, there is a customized individual training methodology given. Finally, the most

advanced leader is chosen to become a “master resilience trainer” who will help with the continued effort towards building a resilient contingency of soldiers who are proactively fit and prepared to navigate the adverse situations they will inevitably encounter. Conclusively, they proclaim, “We believe that the CSF [Comprehensive Soldier Fitness] program may ultimately be a model for psychological fitness in other large organizations” (Cornum et al. 2011, p. 8). As modeled in the resilient leader, endurance is displayed in adaptability, tenacity, and proactivity. The resilient leader will endure the pain by staying agile, tenacious, and anticipating problems before they arise.

### **Transcendence: Sustaining a Mission-Driven Focus Knowing There Will be Pain**

While optimism, courage, and endurance are required for the leader to be resilient, there is one more quality that the resilient leader must possess. The resilient leader *optimistically* leads despite the pain, *courageously* leads in the pain, *endures* from the pain, and finally, *transcendently* leads, knowing there will be more pain. The leader must keep their eyes on the mission that transcends circumstances to lead the team to greater heights.

Leaders must maintain their initial hope in the vision that has fueled them in their leadership. Viktor Frankl, a Nazi concentration camp survivor, Austrian psychiatrist, and author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*, maintained his hope, vision, and optimism through all the atrocities and difficulties of Nazi Germany. Frankl held on to optimism by regulating his mentality towards challenging circumstances (D’Intino, 2007). Moreover, the resilient leader remains steadfast in their focus on the transcendent mission.

Endurance should not be mistaken for merely being headstrong. Endurance, perseverance, and tenacity are only strengths when combined with a mission-driven, curious, humble leadership style that includes others’ opinions and still seeks the best scenario. The resilient leader is compelled by the mission while continually receiving feedback from the team. A strong team of advisors who can help the leader fuel their tenacity toward the mission is necessary for the team’s ability to thrive through adversity (Wilson, 2013). Resilient leaders are wired with drive, passion, determination, and excellence; therefore, the mission must be worthwhile (Kirkpatrick, 1991). The resilient leader will stay on mission, and a wise team of advisors ensures the mission is worth pursuing. A strong leader will direct significant energy and resources toward the goal, so the goal must be excellent (Kirkpatrick, 1991).

Solomon exhorted, “Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways” (New International Version, 2011, Prov 4:25-26). Paul admonished, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (New International Version, 2011, Col. 3:2-3). Paul lived out this optimistic and transcendent resiliency as noted in his letter to the Philippian church, “Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (New International Version, 2011, Phil. 3:13-14). Paul purposefully chose to forget the negative past that had the propensity to hold him back and chose to set his mind on the mission ahead. He challenged leaders, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true,

whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (New International Version, 2011, Phil. 4:8). The resilient leader stays single-minded and focused on the mission and allows the mission to fuel his or her leadership.

Jesus’ words through John’s letter continued, “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown” (New International Version, 2011, Rev 2:10). Suffering, pain, disappointment, and adversity are inevitable. Still, the resilient leader keeps their focus on the mission. This is very likely why Jesus’ last words before ascending to his heavenly Father were commission, focus, and encouragement. Jesus said,

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (New International Version, 2011, Matt. 28:18-20).

The resilient leader who will stand the test of time, grow, and thrive keeps a mission-driven purpose as the primary focus of their leadership. They are motivated by an intrinsic and transcendent purpose (Hilton, 2019). The transcendent, mission-driven goal will guide the resilient leader in the right direction as they guide their organization (Kirkpatrick, 1991).

## Conclusion

The resilient leader operates under the pervasive mentality that they can lead through adversity and optimistically chooses to focus on the goal. The resilient leader courageously steps forward and leads the team through the pain. The resilient leader perseveres and leads from the pain with a spirit of endurance. Finally, the resilient leader chooses to remain focused on the mission and transcendentally leads knowing there will be more pain ahead.

The author of Hebrews provides one final picture of the resilient leader by encouraging leaders to keep their eyes on Jesus.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, 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. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (New International Version, 2011, Heb. 12:1-2).

Jesus is the greatest model of resilient leadership. He optimistically kept his mind on the transcendent goal and courageously endured the cross to bring about salvation. Paul affirmed that while Jesus was in the flesh, he retained his deity as he wholeheartedly submitted to his Father’s will. Paul maintained that Jesus,

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself

nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross (New International Version, 2011, Phil. 2:6-8).

Jesus was optimistic that the Father's plan would be accomplished. Jesus was strong and courageous throughout his ministry and fulfilled every prophecy on the way to Calvary. Jesus, who was both God and man, endured betrayal, denial, abandonment, suffering, torture, and horrific execution. Jesus kept the transcendent mission in front of him at all times, accomplishing the will of the Father.

Challenges, adversity, and pain will occur, and many leaders will fold under pressure. Still, the resilient leader will continue leading with ever-increasing strength because they have worked hard to build into their life and rhythms the four enduring qualities of resilient leadership: optimism, courage, endurance, and transcendence. As the leader faces adversity in their organization and pain within their team, they will have the opportunity to be optimistic and lead with courage. Furthermore, as the leader continues through the challenging seasons, they can endure and keep their focus on the transcendent mission. The resilient leader will stand the test of time and lead their team to victory. In summary, the resilient leader leads like Jesus. As Christ was filled with optimism, courage, endurance, and transcendence, the resilient leader leads.

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## About the Author

Luke McCoy is the Creative Arts Pastor at Antioch Christian Church in Marion, Iowa. McCoy received his Bachelor of Biblical Literature through Ozark Christian College, his MA in Worship Studies through Lincoln Christian University, and his MA in Organizational Leadership with a certificate in Executive Coaching through the Townsend Institute, Concordia University Irvine.

Email: [lmccoy@lifeisforliving.org](mailto:lmccoy@lifeisforliving.org)

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