

Chapter 10

RESILIENCE:

Hard Won Wisdom For Living A Better Life

By Eric Greitens

Reviewed by David Bradshaw

INTRODUCTION

If you've ever faced pain, suffering or depression created by debilitating circumstances out of your control, then Resilience deserves a place in your library. It was recommended to me by a life coach I met with to discuss how best to respond in wisdom to a difficult personal crisis. I was attracted to the book's title, so I took his sage advice.

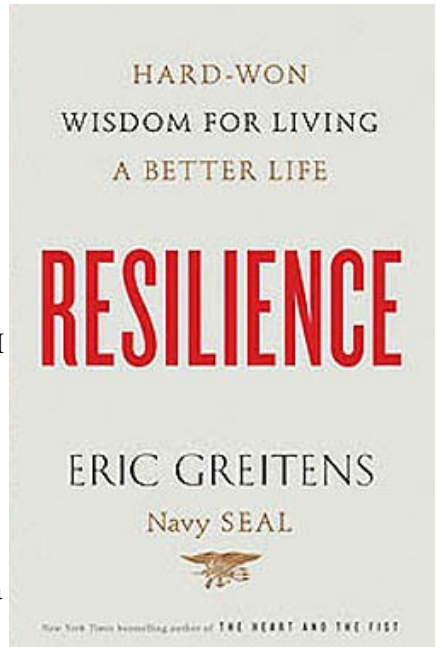
What can we learn about wisdom and life from a 40-year old former Navy Seal with a Ph.D. from Oxford, a Rhodes scholar, the Founder of *The Mission Continues*, named by Fortune magazine as one of the 50 greatest leaders in the world?

A lot!

I was intrigued by the author's unusual background as a distinguished military serviceman with a world-class education. I was struck immediately with his frankness, as he began to share his "hard won wisdom" with Zach, a downtrodden and addicted former Navy Seal in the form of twenty short letters of encouragement - later to become the book's 20 concise chapters.

Resilience is a real page-turner. I found myself instantly swept away with Greitens' vast historical perspective drawn from the wisdom of the ages such as; Aristotle, Socrates, Cicero, Augustine, Seneca, C. S. Lewis - as well as his deep compassion for a friend and fellow elite serviceman whose life was shipwrecked after returning home from combat.

Similar in some ways to Richard Rohr's *Falling Upward*, Greitens communicates the truth by using scores of stories which help Zach (and readers) gain a wider 104



and wiser perspective about how to overcome life's greatest paradoxes. Resilience is the type of book you wish you had read and unpacked as a young adult, however it contains so much practical wisdom it's equally valuable to those of us in the second half of life.

TOP 20 TAKEAWAYS

1. RESILIENCE: not bouncing back, but healthy integration of pain and suffering

Greitens begins his letters to Zach with his definition of resilience as a necessary virtue to help build reservoirs of strength founded upon common sense ideas that lead to action. "Pain can either make us or break us, the difference is resilience." Overcoming struggles requires a positive mantra, that is, repeating words of life in our mind. "Those who reflect on their suffering uncover truth."

2. HAPPINESS: 3 types; 1) grace 2) excellence 3) pleasure - be all you can be!

Unhappiness is rampant in today's pleasure-driven pop culture. Greitens believes resilience is a virtue required to flourish and become all we are capable of becoming. Happiness and flourishing are rooted in action, not circumstance, and are the result of the choices we make. Drawing from ancients, Eric turns our focus toward the happiness of pursuing excellence and acknowledging God's grace - which are both far above a stunted view of happiness focused on self-centered pleasure.

3. MODELS: we all need a hero, someone to help us assemble life's puzzle pieces

Finding a model, either living or dead, is vital. Models bring us hope and show us practical wisdom in action. He gives a great example of how we begin life with a jigsaw puzzle without any picture to show us how all the pieces fit together. A model shows us how we can do as they do, learning skills and ways of being. As first we imitate a model until we learn to build our own model. "Flawed heroes are still heroic," Eric reminds Zach.

4. IDENTITY: "Be less concerned with what you have than what you are"

said Socrates. Knowing your identity is the first step to making positive choices and taking the actions needed to change. "If you want to feel differently, act differently." Our identity should lead us to action, which is then followed by our feelings - which flies in the face of today's feeling-centered culture. Greitens reminds us we are each charioteers driving Plato's two horses of emotion - the horse of nobler emotions like honor, and our baser passions and appetites - both must be harnessed to move us forward.

5. HABITS: thoughts-> choices-> actions-> habits-> character-> lifestyle-> destiny

"Never cease chiseling your own statue," said Plontinus. Your life is built not on 105 dramatic big events, but by accumulation of small daily actions and habits.

“Resilience is the ability to endure hardship and is rooted in our security...children have a greater capacity for resilience due to their sharp learning curve, adults have often forgotten how to fail and are busy protecting what they have accumulated. To learn resilience children must be exposed to hardship, or life will teach them later by harsher means. Protecting children from all suffering insures they’ll later be hurt badly.”

6. RESPONSIBILITY: habit of accepting consequences for actions, mastering self

Eric views taking personal responsibility as the single most important habit of resilient people. While our culture is full of professionals paid to help us deflect responsibility, reduce anxiety and eliminate fear, Greitens says “fear is a core emotion and a life without fear is an unhealthy life.” The goal is to redirect anxiety toward worthy ends, such as building courage. “Excellence is difficult, excuses are seductive...excellence requires pain, excuses promise a pain-free life...the solution to worry is to look at things in the moment.” Worry about the future is a form of unproductive self-prayer.

7. VOCATION: “where your great joy meets the world's great need.” -Rev. Gomes

“We create passionate purpose by doing consistently excellent work,” says Greitens. Vocation means answering the “call” to work at developing your gifts. *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a great example of the struggle we all face in finding our true calling. He views a true warrior’s purpose as “serving something greater than yourself.” He points to Greek myths such as *The Odyssey* which illustrates a hero’s journey as consisting of a series of trials to be overcome and which concludes by returning home to serve the people using the wisdom gained.

8. PHILOSOPHY: discipline about living well, not just thinking well, doing vs. study.

Greitens views our modern life of ease as having lost touch with much of the ancient wisdom about resilience built during harder times. This has created a false expectation of perpetual happiness. The ancients viewed philosophy as meant to be lived out, not just studied. Again resonating with Richard Rohr, Greitens quotes F. Scott Fitzgerald’s statement, “The test of first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.”

9. PRACTICE: begins with the will to work, learn how to practice to learn anything

The old saying practice makes perfect is a truism. Greitens encourages the practice of gratitude, self examination and prayer. He finds five variables in practice; “frequency, intensity, duration, recovery and reflection.” Practice and training changes who we are, versus education alone, which only changes what we know. Resilient people have to practice. “Purposeful repetition are what separate an idea of interest in the moment from an idea that becomes part of our character.”

10. PAIN: must be worked through, not ended, learning to change how we relate
Physical pain can be endured, but emotional pain must be transformed. Grietens says “there is pain that we seek and pain that seeks us.” He defines “fortune” as the pain of chance, which are events beyond our control. He says there is a time to be unhappy, hurt, angry, sad and even depressed but we must not stay there long. To work through pain does not mean to end it, but to change how we relate to it and turn it into wisdom. “Pain is God’s megaphone to a deaf world,” -C. S. Lewis.

11. MASTERING PAIN: separating pain (no choice) from suffering (our choice)
The mark of resilience is discerning which pain deserves our attention. Paying attention to all pain leads to whining. Perhaps most striking is Grietens separation of pain, which is often out of our control, with suffering, which is often within our control. Negative self-talk is destructive and divorced from practice can lead to self-deception. “You will either face your fears or they will own into you...we all have pain we’ve mastered and pain we’ve run from,” says Eric. Keys to mastering pain include; taking control of our breath (spirit), keeping perspective on fortune and practicing gratitude. “To forgive is to give up all hope for a better past.” Prayer brings resilience, gratitude.

12. REFLECTION: act, reflect, plan, making sense of memories in a larger context. Reflection begins with the possibility that we are wrong. There is no shame in starting wrong unless we stay wrong over time. “Without action thought never ripens into truth,” said Ralph Waldo Emerson. Grietens suggests we act, then reflect, then plan and feels in reflection modern culture is very weak compared to ancients. Quality reflection gives us the ability to respond to hardship, error and pain in a way that strengthens us. Reflection should become a daily habit. Closed mindsets prevent insight, growth and are often the product of our fears and ego protection.

13. FRIENDS: “a single soul dwelling in two bodies”, to lean on & struggle for
“A true friend is a second self,” said Cicero. Friendships often fall into three categories; 1) utility, 2) pleasure, and 3) virtue/excellence. Our deepest friendships are formed when we are moving in the same direction and begin with roots in fellowship, such as studies, serving and suffering together. Friends are people we can lean on in times of trouble and people we can be strong for. The knowledge of God’s love makes people resilient in the face of hardship.

14. MENTORS: love what they do, sense what really matters & make pass it on.
Mentors exercise authority, they “author” ways to grow, enrich and increase our lives because they are willing to take responsibility. “The mark of a mature man is the ability to excel under hardship... through hardship a boy is taught to become a man who is community-oriented rather than self-oriented,” says Eric. Mentors
107 love to pass on what really matters. How do you find a mentor? “When the

student is ready, the teacher will appear,” as Jackie Chan once said, ‘how can you fill a cup when it’s already full?’ Keep yourself humble and a mentor will find you.

15. TEAMS: ability to manage many interests while serving a larger purpose /mission. Great teams are built when we place our mission above personal differences. Clarity of purpose creates perspective. Team leaders are magnanimous; generous, eager to serve, quick to forgive insults, independent-minded and brave in the face of danger. “Purity of heart is to will one thing,” said Soren Kierkegaard. Deep bonds and strong teams are created by those who serve together and form a shared connection.

16. LEADERSHIP: earned devotion by taking action, multiplying what is working Beware of leaders who have not suffered or been forged in the fire. A true leader earns followers devotion by showing devotion through their consistent actions. Leaders are able to listen, counsel and at times be friends and fans. Leaders are resilient by choice and have learned the trick is not to repair what’s broken as much as to multiply what is working. “It is better to be led by hardworking resilient failures early in life than by those of privilege or luck without putting their souls into a task.”

17. FREEDOM: won by devotion, self-mastery, vision of excellence at work/play Meaningful, fulfilling and purposeful work radiates to all areas of our life. Rather than viewing work and life as a see-saw balance, Greitens sees it as a symphony. “A master in the art of living sees no distinction between work and play, viewing labor as leisure, pursuing his vision of excellence, whether working or playing, he always appears to be doing both,” said James A. Michener. Like riding a bike, the balance comes when we are in motion, not standing still.

18. STORY: we're not alone, without a past - lost in present, fearful of future “All sorrows can be borne, if you put them in a story,” said Boris Cyrulnik. Stories are at the heart of all religions and philosophies. As long as we are part of a story we are not alone. Storytelling gives events meaning and help build resilience. “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutters in their actions as in their words,” says Alasdair MacIntyre, one of Greitens’ college professors. “A quest is a journey with meaning... on a quest we discover the true nature of what we’re after only by going on the journey.” The best stories start at the point where things get interesting. If you’ve lived well you hope to become part of a story others are proud to tell.

19. DEATH: time is limited, disciplined reflection adds meaning/urgency to life. Resilient people learn to live with the knowledge of death without being overcome by it. Disciplined reflection on death adds meaning to the days we live. Death provides us with the urgency behind our greatest efforts. ‘At the

moment we go to sleep, let us say in joy ‘I have lived well,’” said Seneca. “We strip death of its greatest advantage... come to know it, get used to it...Practicing death reminds us our time is limited. Premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom,” said Montaigne. What lives on is not what’s engraved in stone monuments, but what we have woven into the life of others. We honor the dead by living out their values.

20. SABBATH: the realm of time to be, give, share - rest + resilience = a whole life.

After 273 pages of explaining to readers the many virtues of resilience, Greitens reserves the last four pages to discussing the importance of resting from resilience, at least once a week on the Sabbath. “Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth, on Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul,” said Rabbi Abraham Heschel. “The Jews built a palace in time, a realm where the goal is not to have, but to be, not to own, but to give, not to control, but to share, not to subdue, but to be in accord. Sabbath is less about rituals we follow and more about changing our frame of mind to find holy space in time that God created and commanded humans to keep. Sabbath is the counterbalance to resilience...Sabbath comes without our help, celebrate it!” Sabbath makes our life whole. Notice that man and woman were created on the 6th day - illustrating that our life is meant to begin “at rest” on the Sabbath. The world says we should work first, then rest, but our Creator says the opposite: we are to REST first, then work.

CONCLUSION

This overview is just the tip of the iceberg of the keys to building a resilient life – which is a life-long process we can choose to engage in. I tip my hat to Eric Greitens for writing a book full of such encouraging letters to his friend Zach.

All may learn from his wise counsel. I also thank him for simplifying my Christmas gift shopping this year - as I will give copies of *Resilience* to my family and friends. Don’t miss this valuable tool to sharpen your ability to live above your circumstances.

Exit your comfort zone today. Realize your life mission and then press onward and upward. (For a free printable poster summary of this great book below, visit: <http://myideafactory.net/gallery3.html>)

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Until next time ... *blessings to you all!*