

The Spiritual Resilience Handbook

A faith-based, research-informed,
practical approach

Connie Fourné

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	2
Chapter 2: Gratitude.....	10
Chapter 3: No Pain No Gain...Really??.....	17
Chapter 4: Asking Blessing.....	24
Chapter 5: Spiritual Emotions.....	32
Chapter 6: The Power of Music.....	41
Chapter 7: Brain 101.....	47
Chapter 8: Taking Stock.....	53
Chapter 9: Letting Go.....	59
Chapter 10: Serenity and Awe.....	66
Chapter 11: Compassion and Inspiration.....	74
Chapter 12: One-Liners.....	79
Chapter 13: Loving Service.....	85
Chapter 14: Looking Ahead.....	90

Chapter 1: Introduction

We live in turbulent times. Economic and political turmoil, a deadly virus, and the "normal" wear and tear of life can be overwhelming. There's ample cause for fear and sadness, but the anxiety and resentment we sometimes feel only make things worse.

Jesus knew that. In times as painful and uncertain as our own he told us not to worry, to be people of gratitude, hope and compassion. He encouraged us to be *spiritually resilient*: to keep a positive spirit and a sense of purpose and meaning even when the sky turns dark.

Some people come by these qualities naturally. Most of us wander off into the weeds if we're not paying attention. Fast-paced lives, heartbreaking news headlines, and our own personal difficulties challenge our ability to stay resilient and on track.

The Spiritual Resilience Handbook

So how do we get there? How can we close the gap between where we are and where God calls us to be? How do we protect ourselves from the eroding power of anxiety and resentment? How can we open ourselves to grace with as much skill as we can muster? All too often our white-knuckled attempts to "be better" fall short.

*This is a faith-based, research-informed approach
to developing practical habits
that are shown to improve wellbeing.*

This book blends current scientific research on the human brain with ancient spiritual wisdom about the world and our place in it. This is a faith-based, research-informed approach to developing practical habits that have been shown to improve wellbeing, reduce anxiety and depression and—with God's grace—help us become the persons we were created to be. While this method is adaptable to a wide range of perspectives on faith, these pages will feel most comfortable to people who believe in or are searching for God or a Higher Power.

Throughout history humans have divided ourselves along religious lines. We tend to quickly pigeonhole one another based on our theology or lack thereof. Though our differences are real and important, spiritual resilience work is more like a wellness program than a religion class. I write from my own Christian background, but this approach is adaptable to other faith traditions as well as to a secular perspective. I invite you to translate these pages into your own spiritual framework, taking what's useful and leaving the rest.

Introduction

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE?

Spiritual resilience is *the ability to maintain a sturdy positive spirit and a clear sense of purpose and meaning even in the face of suffering.*

We intuitively recognize this quality when we see it. Spiritually resilient people are generally calm, hopeful and kind. We're drawn to them and somehow feel better when we're in their presence. They have a strength that radiates from within and a dedication to others' welfare. They are willing to engage with their own and others' suffering.

More often than most, spiritually resilient people experience these positive emotions:

- Gratitude
- Hope
- Compassion
- Awe
- Serenity
- Joy
- Inspiration
- Love

You'll notice these emotions feel good while at the same time moving us beyond our own egos to connect with other people and a reality greater than ourselves. Research shows these emotions have the power to heal us physically and emotionally and increase our capacity to reach out and change the world for the better.

The Spiritual Resilience Handbook

This book will examine how we can develop concrete, practical habits that deepen the presence of these emotions in our lives. This work is likely to strengthen the other two aspects of spiritual resilience: our sense of purpose and meaning and our ability to deal constructively with our own and others' pain. However, our primary focus here is on enhancing our spiritual/emotional wellbeing.

HOW THIS WORKS

Spiritual practices are *things we do on a regular basis to help bring us back to center*. They involve our whole selves—body, mind and spirit—rather than just our intellects. This book will introduce you to, or remind you of, six traditional spiritual practices:

- Gratitude
- Blessing
- Surrender/letting go
- Music
- One-liners
- Service

Research shows these spiritual habits substantially increase wellbeing while reducing anxiety, resentment and depression. While it's not possible to guarantee specific results for any one individual, these strategies have been around for centuries because they help. Incorporating what science now teaches us about the mind/body/spirit connection makes them even more transformative. Done alone or with others, they help us thrive and make the world a better place.

Introduction

THE POWER IS IN THE DOING

More than once when browsing in a boutique shop I've seen a post, "Sure, you could make it yourself. But *will* you?" Knowing how to do something isn't enough. Simply understanding spiritual emotions and practices doesn't change anything, any more than buying an exercise bike makes us fit. Actually *engaging* in spiritual practices has a positive impact on our nervous systems and opens us up to the grace of God we so often pass by. Lasting change comes hard. My prayer is that these pages will support you in bringing these habits to life.

NUTS AND BOLTS

Unless you live in a monastery, you are not likely to use all of these practices every day. I would encourage you to read the chapters one at a time and give yourself at least a week with each one to try out what you learn. This will give you a chance to see for yourself if the recommendations help. The goal is to become familiar enough with the practices so you can effectively integrate them into your life.

You'll find action recommendations at the end of each chapter. Research shows we are more likely to follow through on a new plan for action when we:

- 1) Make a specific commitment and
- 2) Anticipate obstacles and plan around them

The Spiritual Resilience Handbook

There is space at the end of each chapter for you to write down your intentions and your plan to counter obstacles. I invite you to do both.

WE'RE STRONGER TOGETHER

If possible, I encourage you to find a buddy or a small group to begin this adventure together. Partners not only help us stay accountable; they also share stories and encouragement along the way. I have been part of a spiritual accountability group for more than thirty years, and it has helped me stay anchored through storms and calm. There is a kind of connection that happens in spiritual sharing that is precious and all too rare. Our most powerful conversations are not about theory. They happen when we share how we are being shaped by what we believe and practice. I hope you can find at least one person to walk this path with you.

Introduction

ACTION PLAN

Let's say for the sake of argument that incorporating these spiritual practices into your life would accomplish most, if not all, of the following:

- Increase your experience of at least some of the spiritual emotions listed
- Decrease your experience of anxiety and/or depression, if you have them
- Offer you more meaningful and enjoyable connections with others
- Give you a language you can use with people who see religion and spirituality differently than you do
- Increase your ability to act compassionately

If that were true, how much time would you be willing to commit to the experiment over the next two months? (I'd recommend around 30 minutes per week with the chapter, and 10-15 minutes per day, five or so days a week for the practices.)

I commit myself to:

What obstacles do you expect will get in the way? What can you do to manage them?

About the Author



Connie Fourré is an award-winning author and educator currently working in spiritual resilience education and interfaith relations. She has presented at conferences and workshops nationally and in Canada on spirituality, social justice and service learning. Her books have been translated into Spanish and Indonesian. Retired from full-time work as a high school faith formation director and wellness coordinator, she lives with her husband in the greater Minneapolis area.

For more information, see
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