



Soul Matters

Embodying Resilience



Small Group
February 2026

Welcome to Embodying Resilience

When did we decide that resilience was a solo project?

It's not that we consciously chose to define it that way. It's just what we were taught, from the time we were little right up to today: "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps"; "You're stronger than you think."; "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."; "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." The cultural consensus is clear: resilience depends on your personal toughness and inner strength. It's a solo act!

But other voices are on the rise. Take author and activist, [Soraya Chemaly](#), who writes,

"In spectacular arrogance, our mainstream vision of resilience encourages us to ignore, minimize, and even punish the desire for our greatest resilience assets: interdependence, collective versatility, and shared care. Instead of revealing our relationships to one another, our environments, and the systems we live in, this vision highlights and glorifies self-sufficiency, limitless positivity, and individual strength against all odds. It makes us less resilient, not more."

In a world facing numerous threats [of collapse and conflict](#), Chemaly's words help us see that correctly defining resilience is not just an intellectual exercise, but a matter of life and death. We all sense it: the road ahead for us human beings is going to get rough. So we simply can't afford to overlook a single source of resilience.

Which is another way of saying the world needs **us** to start speaking up too! If those rough roads ahead are to be successfully navigated, we need people who challenge those old-school chants of "You can do it!" with a new mantra of "We can't do it on our own!"

That doesn't mean we have to abandon old messages about personal resilience entirely, but it does mean that we need to get better at noticing when they get in our way. It's fine to celebrate the classic resilient image of a tree flexibly leaning and bending with the wind, but we can't let that distract us from the fact that, today, the kind of leaning that matters most is leaning on each other.

It's all one big reminder that while resilience has a lot to do with what is *inside us*, it is even more dependent on what is *between us*. We survive our wounds and weaknesses by having the strength to tell others about it. We find the courage to make our way through the dark only when we sense we are not alone. Internal and individual grit only gets us so far; empathy, assurance and love from others gets us the rest of the way. Boil it all down and you get this: There really is no such thing as a resilient person; there are only resilient relationships from which resilient people arise.

So friends, this month, let's look around as much as look within. Let's let up on all the "grin and bear it" talk and instead grab the hand that is reaching our way.

Spiritual Exercises

It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, our spiritual exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say *to us*!

With that in mind, pick and complete the one exercise that speaks to you the most. **Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did, how it surprised you and what gift it gave you.**

Option A *Write Your Failure Résumé*

Write [a failure resume](#)? Who would want to do that? Well, resilient people, that's who!

Contrary to our culture which celebrates perfection and shames those who make mistakes, truly resilient people don't run away from failure; they embrace and learn from it. And [a failure resume](#) is one of the best ways to support that learning.

In its simplest form, a failure resume is a list of *both* your failures *and* what you learned from them. While writing down and looking at your failures may sound awful, it's ultimately empowering, because it reminds you that you didn't just fail, you failed *and survived*! Every documented failure becomes proof that you persisted. Every mistake serves as a testament that, if this happens again, you will be okay.

It's all about [rewiring how we see failure](#). Instead of treating failures and mistakes as setbacks that leave us empty-handed, failure resumes frame them as [sources of growth](#) that offer us [many gifts](#).

So, this month, tap into those gifts by writing your own failure resume. Here's some guidance:

- There are many ways to organize your failure resume. You can organize your failures chronologically according to the various stages of your life. You could also bucket your failures like a traditional resume, dividing them up into academic, professional, and personal failures and mistakes. Or you can keep it simple and just make a list of your "greatest hits" - the five biggest failures/mistakes of your life!
- Whichever format you choose, be sure to write not only your failures, but also what you learned from them or what gift they gave you.
- When writing the gift or learning, keep it short. Often the greatest insight comes as you try to wordsmith your learning into a concise statement.
- Look for patterns. Uncovering a bunch of similar failures clarifies where your work lies. Noticing how life has tried to teach you a lesson over and over again is a good sign that it's time to pay attention.
- End by offering reassurance and compassion to yourself. After you are all done, write two things at the bottom of your failure resume: "If any of this happens again, I will be okay" and "I am allowed to be [a work in progress](#)!"

Option B

Your Way to Keep Going?

At one time or another, we've all asked, "How do I keep going?" It's a question that comes up not only when life is especially challenging, scary or disorienting, but also when life is wearily routine and repetitive. In those moments, we hunger for renewal and new energy - some source of resilience will help us put one foot in front of the other and enable us to fall in love again with the path we're on.

Wanting to remember her own sources of resilience, the writer, Lisa Olivera, created a personal "[How To Keep Going Manifesto](#)." Basically, she made a list of the things that enabled her to keep going in the past so that she could more easily grab ahold of them in her present. Engaging her manifesto makes for a great spiritual exercise. So, here are your instructions:

1. Read through the *keep going strategies* in her manifesto: <https://lisaolivera.substack.com/p/how-do-i-keep-going>
2. As you go through Olivera's list, identify one that is similar to a resilience strategy you've used *in the past*. Spend some time with the memory of this moment when you "kept going." Ask yourself how this memory might be trying to speak to you and offer a message of comfort or challenge for your life today?
3. Finally, go through the list again and identify another strategy of hers that you want to try *today*!

Extra Mile Idea: If you want to go deeper with this exercise, you could create your own How To Keep Going Manifesto, using Olivera's as inspiration.

Option C

Is Your Thinking a Help or Hindrance to Your Resilience?

Resilience and self-talk are tightly tangled together. While popular resilience strategies often focus on *positive* thinking, [psychologists](#) tell us that dealing with *negative* thinking is even [more critical](#) to resilience. And the key to addressing negative self-talk is [noticing it](#). So, that's what this exercise is all about.

To help us on our way, we turn to the beloved writer, Anne Lamott, who is known for looking at herself with brutal honesty as well as self-compassion. She once [stumbled on a sentence](#) that changed her life: "Stinking thinking is the universal addiction." This led to her confronting how addicted she was to toxic and obsessive thinking by reworking the widely-used Alcoholic Anonymous's "[20 Questions List](#)." In short, she substituted the word *Thinking* for the word *Drinking*.

So, notice your own relationship to negative thinking by answering Lamott's revised 20 questions list: https://docs.google.com/document/d/10G_j4upylMc2fe4i1vEptdUoqQIATWfhBBJQjpA0rml/edit?usp=sharing

As you go through the questions, remember that this is not a pass/fail test. It's about helping you notice where you might need to do [some work](#) regarding [your relationship](#) to self-talk. So use Lamott's 20 questions in any way that feels useful. You can use the check boxes and reflect on what the *quantity* of your checks might be telling you. Or you could jot notes under each question to get at the unique *quality* of your relationship with negative thinking. You might also want to use our Soul Matters discernment technique and read through the list over and over until one question shimmers for you. In all cases, be sure to wrestle with how your negative thinking might be undermining your ability to resiliently navigate stress and challenges.

And here's the most important part of the exercise: Be gentle and compassionate with yourself as you answer the questions!

Option D

Visio Divina & Resilience

Visio Divina (spiritual seeing) is [an ancient religious practice](#) where one lets images become doorways through which the divine, our inner wisdom or life itself speaks to us. In its more straight-forward form, it involves spending time with an image until it offers you a message of comfort or challenge, or reconnects you to an important memory. This is akin to how our Soul Matters groups engage the “Your Question” section of each packet.

For this exercise, you’re invited to spend some time with a selection of “[resilience photos](#)” to see what message one or more of those photos might have for you. Here are the steps for you to follow:

- Pull up the document with the selection of photos that speak to our theme of resilience: https://docs.google.com/document/d/15-Z4txUL-wsh-hL4wZtBi_V2PLcMUMivAgyGrGfxck8/edit?usp=sharing
- Slowly view each photo with this question in mind: “Which two images capture two important moments of resilience in my life?”
- Take some time to reflect on how your two selected images offer some new insight about that time in your life. Briefly jot down the thoughts and feelings that arise.
- Return to the pictures again with this new question: “Which image is trying to speak to my life *today* by offering me a message of comfort or challenge?”
- Take your time being present with each image. Explore the photo’s details and stick with it long enough to discern if that photo has an emotional gravitational pull for you.
- Once you’ve found the picture that seems to be speaking to you, open yourself to how that image is offering you a message of comfort or challenge.

Option E

Ask Them About Resilience

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to have conversations about them with people who are close to you. It’s also a great way to deepen your relationships! Below is a list of questions to guide your conversation. Be sure to let your conversation partner know in advance that this won’t be a typical conversation. Telling them a bit about Soul Matters will help set the stage. *Remember to also answer the questions yourself as they are meant to support a conversation, not just a time of quizzing your discussion partner.*

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation and what gift or insight it gave you.

Resilience Questions:

- What [image](#) best captures your unique style of resilience?
- Wider perspectives infuse us with deeper resilience, enabling us to extricate ourselves from the daily stresses and defeats that seem all-important. Tell me a story about when you survived by finding a way [to see the bigger picture](#)?
- What do you know about having to hide parts of yourself to survive or get by? How were you able to invite those parts back into the world later in life?
- What is your most beautiful scar? (What wound ended up giving you a surprising gift?)

- Have you ever had to fight to see yourself as [more than your wounds](#)?
- With so much of our world seeming fragile and on the brink of collapse, do you still have faith that humanity will be resilient? If saving the world seems no longer within reach, how might creating [islands of sanity](#) be your road back to hope?
- Our culture promotes and celebrates the path of grit and pushing through no matter the costs. Have you ever resisted that and saved yourself by [courageously quitting or letting go](#)?
- How has beauty been a source of survival and resilience for you?

Option F

Which Companion Piece Speaks to You?

Sometimes we come across a quote, song, article or movie and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now or allows us to view our current circumstances in a new light.

With this in mind, spend some time this month going through the Companion Pieces section below to find the one piece **that speaks most powerfully to you.** (Or "[shimmers](#)" most strongly for you.)

Come to your group ready to share the piece you picked, why it called to you and what insight, memory, or message of comfort or challenge it offered you.

Finding Your Question

This list of questions is an aid for [deep reflection](#). How you answer them is often less important than the journey they take you on.

So, read through the list of questions 2-3 times until **one question** sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions “[shimmers](#).” Or as we like to say, “Read over them until one of the questions **picks you**.”

Then reflect on that question using one or all of these questions:

- What is going on in my life right now that makes this question so pronounced for me?
- What might my inner wisdom be trying to [say to me](#) through this question?
- How might this question be trying to wake me up or get me to realize something through this question?
- How might Life or my inner wisdom be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?



1. When do you remember first witnessing one or both of your parents act resiliently? How might that memory have a message for you today?
2. Has someone else’s resilience ever helped you survive? When did you not give up because they didn’t give up?
3. How has your life partner made you more resilient?
4. What is your most [beautiful scar](#)? What wound ended up giving you a surprising gift?
5. Have you been trying to act strong for far too long?
6. What if resilience is not about holding tight against the wind, but letting go and trusting the wind to take you where you need to go next?
7. Who are you [without your wound](#)?
8. Might your resilience be found by releasing yourself from the role [your family system has stuck you in](#)?
9. If saving the world seems no longer within reach, how might creating [islands of sanity](#) be your road back to hope?
10. What parts of you did you have to hide to survive? What would it look like to invite them back into the world?
11. Why do you keep pushing through when you could save yourself by [courageously quitting](#)?
12. What if you allowed yourself to be [a work in progress](#)?
13. What if the biggest secret to resilience is [loving it all](#)?
14. **What’s your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to find it.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. Nor are they intended to be analyzed in your group. Instead, they are here to companion you on your personal journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of embodying this month's theme in your living and loving.

Wise Words

Observing the water teaches me [that] Resilience isn't trying to hold on to all you have been and somehow get through. It is the flow of water that responds to its environment and even changes its form, yet never changes its fundamental nature.

[Sue Heartherington](#)

Resilience is really a secular word for what religion was trying to say with the word faith. Without a certain ability to let go, to trust, to allow, we won't get to any new place.

[Richard Rohr](#)

my heart, a cottonwood seed,
landed on rock instead of soil—
love says, time to trust the wind.

[Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer](#)

Falling into grief is a very difficult invitation into falling into love with the next level of generosity in our life; [It's an invitation to] let go of what we've held on to so tightly in another person in order to re-find the world, or let it come find us.

[David Whyte](#)

When people face adversity, it's incredibly common for them to walk away thinking... it's going to feel like this forever. If you look at the evidence on this, most of those predictions turn out to be false... And so part of moving past this imagined permanence is changing all those times where you use "always" and "never," into "sometimes" and "lately."

[Adam Grant](#)

One of the things that our bodies need to heal from trauma is to reclaim an identity [not defined](#) by the trauma event or conditions we survive.

[Tangled Roots](#)

If you see successes and failures as being placed in your path to teach you things, you are more likely to be psychologically hardy and therefore more resilient in the face of trauma.

[Andrew Zolli](#)

The truth is that things don't really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. It's just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.

[Pema Chödrön](#)

Anyone can slay a dragon, he told me, but try waking up every morning and loving the world all over again.

[Brian Andreas](#)

Forests may be gorgeous. But there's nothing more alive than a tree that learns how to grow in a cemetery.

[Andrea Gibson](#)

Only to the extent that we expose ourselves over and over to annihilation can that which is indestructible be found in us.

[Pema Chodron](#)

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of putting broken pottery pieces back together with gold, built on the idea that, in embracing flaws and imperfections, you can create an even stronger, more beautiful piece of art. It is also a metaphor for resilience: embracing your wounds as part of your path of evolution.

Your scars show the path travelled, and you are more beautiful and stronger for having been broken.

[Paige Bradley](#)

A lot of people think about grit and resilience as having the ability to push through tough times to get to where you want to go. But the truth is, it's more about having a strong sense of purpose to pull you towards your ultimate goal. When you view challenges or setbacks in light of that all-important goal, they start feeling much smaller — sometimes almost irrelevant — in light of your bigger commitments.

[Jonathan Fields](#)

While we can't stop the collapse of ecological and social systems and their scary implications on our lives, we can create *islands of sanity* - for ourselves, for the people around us and for everyone else who needs it. We can create spaces that acknowledge the insanity of the world and make each other feel sane again.

[Till Leinen](#)

Sure grit and resilience mean pushing through against all odds. But sometimes being able to say, "I quit," and to actually quit, takes grit. It takes resilience. Sometimes withstanding adversity looks like withdrawing from certain activities. Sometimes pushing through looks like pulling out.

[Emen Washington](#)

You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, know when to walk away, and when to run.

Kenny Rogers

Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt have crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Here's the real kicker. The people who break free from their past aren't the ones who never made mistakes; they're the ones who stopped identifying with those mistakes.

[Brene Brown](#)

You are allowed to be a work in progress!

[Mel Robbins](#)

*Any shields I would build up as barriers—
life keeps peeling them away.*

What thickens around me now are layers of dynamic compassion—vital, vulnerable, ever-growing. They do not protect against wounds. Instead, they seem to say, *Be with what aches, my dear. Trusting discomfort is the only way.*

[Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer](#)

They tried to bury us, they didn't know we were seeds.

[Dinos Christianopoulos](#)

Videos & Podcasts

On The Resilience Found In Facing Mortality With Open Arms, Andrea Gibson

https://www.freethink.com/ftm_episode/andrea-gibson

Still I Rise, Reflection & Poem by Maya Angelou

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrjNdYdbiwk>

Drowning Fish, Rudy Francisco

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTx57o-M20c>

A Letter to Remind Myself Who I Am, Shane Koyczan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DAftgCk18>

A Difficult Life, Andrea Gibson

<https://www.tiktok.com/@andreagibsonpoetry/video/7413105423479213342>

The Resilience of a Father's Grief

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/5MF3iVgtsuw>

The Resilience Practice of Letting Grief Companion You Rather Than Resisting It

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRWPA8oPyGs>

Resilience's Call to Say Goodbye to the Identity that Once Kept You Safe

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQ9uuZijm5m/>

Becoming Resilient to Stress by "Letting them" Rather than "Letting it Go"

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQ-VNtXkUcK/>
<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DOqgoIMDwAU/>

Don't Chase Happiness; Become Antifragile
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-or_D-qNqM

Finding Resilience In Facing The Frighteningly Fragile Complexity Of Civilization
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qu2rhAoP1Q0>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6FpHLI7jPg0>

Articles

Finish Each Day And Be Done With It
Patrick Byron

On the resilience of viewing your mistakes as a moment to learn from rather than a character flaw to feel shame about.
<https://medium.com/@patrickbyron/finish-each-day-and-be-done-with-it-a87a2529346d>

What If the Story About Your Brain After 40 is Simply Wrong?
Thom Hartmann
On the brilliant and beautiful resilience of the aging mind.
<https://wisdomschool.com/p/age-and-wisdom-and-brains>

Music

Our thematic playlists - on [Spotify](#) and [YouTube](#) - are organized as a journey, so consider listening from beginning to end and using them as a personal musical meditation.

Click [here](#) for the **Spotify playlist** on Embodying Resilience

Click [here](#) for the **YouTube playlist** on Embodying Resilience

Books

[The Resilience Myth](#): New Thinking on Grit, Strength, and Growth After Trauma
Soraya Chemaly

[Welcoming the Unwelcome](#): Wholehearted Living in a Brokenhearted World
Pema Chodron

[You Are Your Best Thing](#): Vulnerability, Shame Resilience, and the Black Experience
Tarana Burke and Brené Brown

[How to Survive a Bear Attack](#): A Memoir
Claire Cameron

[The Wild Edge of Sorrow](#): Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief
Francis Weller

[Little Bee](#)
Chris Cleave

Movies & TV

[Come See Me In The Good Light](#)
[Maudie](#)
[Beasts of the Southern Wild](#)
[Till](#)
[Sorry, Baby](#)
[Manchester by the Sea](#)
[Is This Thing On?](#)
[The Janes](#)
[Rectify](#) (TV)
[Losers](#) (TV) - a [review](#)

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