

Lewis and Sarah Allen. *Resilient Faith: Learning to Rely on Jesus in the Struggles of Life*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2023. 216pp. + 10pp. (back matter).

In a society where reported mental health struggles are skyrocketing and the definition for “adult” continues to be pushed further and further down the age continuum, Lewis and Sarah Allen give us a refreshing and practical book that presses into the question, “How can a believer have resilient faith?” Resilience, “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change,” is a diminishing character quality in our world today.<sup>1</sup> The Allens (husband and wife) wrote this book specifically targeting young adults, though the material will be helpful for any believer. I think it will be particularly useful for new Christians or for those who have not had much personal discipleship. The book’s purpose is to help believers persevere and to give the believer Bible tools in order to do so. The Allens define resilient faith as “the grace-shaped habit of keeping on trusting Christ even when life is hard, of relying on God’s power to obey Jesus in difficult times” (4). Lewis and Sarah demonstrate this grace in giving us a fine resource to use with brothers and sisters who are young in years or young in the faith.

The book is divided into nine sections or “parts,” with the Allens tag-teaming in the writing of chapters within each section. They take Ephesians 6:10–18 as their “base” passage for the book but utilize many passages of Scripture throughout the book as they walk the reader through the beliefs, attitudes, and actions that shape a resilient faith.

Part 1 examines our initial response to trouble or difficulty. Do we retreat into ourselves? Do we turn to sinful distractions? Or do we retreat, like Jesus did, by running to the Father? Chapter 1 shows us how Jesus exhibited dependence and trust in his loving Father, and we are called to rest in and run to our loving Father. The authors observe, “To be righteous is to be connected and dependent, not disconnected and self-reliant” (14). Chapter 2 points us to the all-seeing, all-caring Lord. It discusses our propensity to turn to self-pity and a downward thought spiral of our losses, hurts, and grievances, rather than running to the Lord with honest words. Jesus sees. Jesus cares. And because he sees and cares, chapter 3 reminds us that we should respond to him in humble, active obedience. Even in the midst of trouble, *especially* in the midst of trouble, we must do the next right thing.

Part 2 points us to the importance of rest in our pursuit of perseverance. I found this section to be particularly refreshing in a book about resilience. Remembering God’s design for Sabbath rest (chapter 4) and daily rest (chapter 5) helps recenter our dependence upon God as weak, limited creatures. The Allens are not focused on the theological debates about the Sabbath but on seeing the Lord’s Day as a gift, a rest. “Sabbath rest is simple because at its heart it is a celebration of what God has already done and is doing, rather than an attempt to perfect something new ourselves” (40). In discussing the importance of having a spirit at rest rather than a spirit of restlessness, we are pointed to the centrality of our own pursuit of looking to Christ and looking away from distractions (49). Our rest is in a Person.

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster online dictionary, accessed 14 September 2023, [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience?utm\\_campaign=sd&utm\\_medium=serp&utm\\_source=jsonld](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld).

Hope is the theme of part 3, and chapter 6 asks us to look into our hearts and examine our hopes. Where are our dreams, our aspirations, our expectations centered? We are pointed to Christ, and specifically to his cross. Our true hope is in his gospel work, in what he did through his death, burial, and resurrection on our behalf! Our hope is also grounded in our future expectation, heaven. “Glory is waiting for us” (64), and chapter 7 opens the doors of heaven and lets some of its brightness shine out to us. Chapter 8 asks how our present hope is affected by the truths of the cross and of heaven. It makes the connection that Scripture makes between suffering and hope. Our suffering actually *produces* hope when we respond to it in the Spirit, because hope “is God’s powerful gift” (74).

Part 4, entitled “Body Life”, reminds us that “spiritual life isn’t separate from bodily life” (77). As a biblical counselor, I assent wholeheartedly. Sometimes well-meaning believers focus exclusively on the soul and miss the holistic nature of a person. The soul affects the body, and the body affects the soul. We are, as Nancy Pearcey states, an “integrated psychophysical unity” (78), and we are woven together by God, body and soul (Ps 139:13–16). The authors point to the importance of viewing eating and exercise as gifts from God, to be stewarded for his glory. “Everything we do matters to God” (90). This is a practical section of the book and spoke much needed truth. It is one of the highlights of the book, in my opinion, because of its uniqueness in a book about faith.

The gospel, with its power to save and sanctify, is the center of section 5. Ephesians 6 serves as a springboard to help us meditate on the gospel daily (chapter 11), use the gospel in our battle against sin and Satan (chapter 12), and walk by faith in Jesus’ purchased righteousness (chapter 13).

Making much of the means of grace comprises the final four sections. The Word of God, prayer, and the local church are emphasized in turn. Section 6 shows us the power of God’s words, the importance of confession and forgiveness, and the necessity of truth (found in the Word) in order to stay faithful in weakness. Section 7 shows us the importance of godly habits. J. I. Packer said, “Habit forming is the Spirit’s ordinary way of leading us on in holiness” (151), and the Allens challenge readers to live out their faith in their daily choices. We are called to memorize the Word, storing it in our hearts (Ps 119:11), and to share the Word, ministering grace as Jesus did.

Section 8 is a call to prayer, prayer that shows dependence and prayer that intercedes for others. We are specifically encouraged to pray for those who annoy or frustrate us, looking for evidence of his grace in their lives. We can expect God to work in changing our attitude towards them. Lewis admonishes us to pray for what the Spirit desires. “When the Spirit is at work, he is driving us to Jesus, to his kingdom priorities, and to care about and pray for what he wants” (184).

The final part of the book exalts the local church and God’s purpose of having his children grow *together* into Christ. “The hardest thing for struggling Christians to recognize is that church is exactly the community they need” (193). God designed the body to build itself up in love as each part does its work (Eph 4:16). As the Allens remind us, worship nurtures faith (195). The church, like a family, does not choose each other as a friend group would. That is God’s wise intention at work. It is the very diversity of the church, united around the truth and the gospel, that allows its people to serve one another well and shape one another into Christlikeness.

I love the conclusion of this book: success in the Christian life is standing firm in Christ (215). It is not easy, but it is simple. So many young Christians flounder in their faith when the going gets

tough. They despair in the battle against sin when the same besetting temptation overtakes them. They grow bitter over the deep hurts or ongoing suffering that plagues them. They search psychological labels and self-help podcasts and Bible app plans for an answer to what they must be missing. Why is this so hard? How are they supposed to keep going? Lewis and Sarah Allen bring us a book with wise answers, set in a readable and simple format. God has given us everything we need that pertains to life and godliness through the knowledge of his Son (2 Pet 1:4). The chapters are short, and the flow of the book overall feels natural. One of the best features is the set of questions at the end of each chapter, placed under the heading “reflect.” Each reflection asks specific questions and helps the reader apply the chapter in real-life ways. The reflections are also rich with Scripture and cause the reader to meditate on the Word as he considers the questions posed. At the end of each reflection, the Allens have written a prayer that the reader is asked to pray. This puts into practice the very things the Allens are trying to teach throughout the book.

I believe *Resilient Faith* is an encouraging read for any Christian and a good resource for believers engaged in discipling or for “young” believers. I have no significant criticisms of the book. While I did not find the Allens to be unusually gifted writers, I did find much wisdom to glean. I appreciated the consistent wedding of position and practice, of doctrine and life, all in a spirit of grace and Spirit dependence. This, in my opinion, is one of the greatest gifts we can give the younger generation. We are calling them to look to the great cloud of witnesses that has passed before and to run with endurance the race set before them, looking unto Jesus. Yes, standing firm in Christ *is* indeed the answer.

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