

MASTERING RESILIENCE: LEARNING HOW TO LET GOD TURN EVIL TO GOOD

INTRODUCTION

Are you in a place of darkness, in a valley of shadows where you can't imagine the light to ever shine again? Maybe you received a bad medical report, or your employer of 15 years just showed you the door, or the love of your life walked out on you.

Take heart.

This book will teach you a principle that will help you be resilient and turn defeat into victory.

This principle will lift you from the pit to the palace, making stars out of your scars and turning your battlefield into your blessing field.

This principle is based on Romans 8:28 - "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".

When you put your faith in the promise of Romans 8:28, believing that God can turn what's evil into your life into something good, this belief will enable you to see God turn your tragedies into triumphs.

This book will teach you how to be resilient through your faith in Romans 8:28. As you believe in the promise of Romans 8:28, it will give you the patience to endure the pain and darkness of adversity and allow God to work His miracle power to rescue you from your troubles and make what was meant for your harm to something which benefits you.

Let's look at some stories and testimonies from the Bible and contemporary life to see the principle of Romans 8:28 at work.

FROM MADNESS TO MYSTICISM

A story that demonstrates the reality of the promise of Romans 8:28 is my own experience of emerging from madness to mystic joy.

My personal testimony starts in 2004, when I was working at a bank. I struggled with depression then as I was bored with my job, which led me to feel a grey flatness whenever I sat in my workstation, fettered behind the dull, soul-sucking glow of the computer screen.

A good friend suggested that I try doing yoga and I took his advice. After my first yoga session, I felt my spirits rise slightly, so I started pursuing my yoga practice passionately. Every day I would contort my body in various yoga poses to lift my spirit. I flowed in vinyasa sequences as I performed a salutation to the sun, bent downwards like a dog stretching in the downward facing dog pose, arched my back in backbends and stuck my feet up in the air as I rested on my shoulders in a shoulderstand.

The power of yoga exercises in lifting my spirits led me to become curious about yoga philosophy. I felt that maybe if I followed yoga philosophy, it would give me the cure to my ennui. As I read books about yoga philosophy, a teaching gripped my soul. The word “yoga” in the original Sanskrit means union with God. This teaching appealed to me as I had always wanted that sweet joy that came from a mystical union of God with my soul. I’ve always been passionate about pursuing union with God. At university I had studied Christian mystics like Richard Rolle, who wrote the medieval classic “Fire of Love”, which described his soul’s union with the divine like burning with the warmth of a honeyed flame. However, even though I had been a Christian since I was 13, I felt that Christianity wasn’t able to give me the joy I craved for that could lift my grey spirit. So I started fervently to pursue attaining enlightenment, what the Zen monks call “satori”, that flash of insight that would liberate the soul from earthly suffering. I delved deeply into New Age and Buddhist teachings and practices in my quest to find my True Self and reach the serenity of Nirvana. I practiced yoga every day, twisting my body in the Half Lord of the Fishes pose and bending forward in the pose dedicated to the sage Marichi. I also meditated daily, sitting on my bed cross-legged in the lotus position, my fingers resting on my palms in the dhyana mudra, being mindful of every breathe that I inhaled and exhaled. I joined meditation groups, believing that the cosmic energy generated by group meditation in the quiet hush of the meditation hall would lift me to deeper levels of peace. I devoured Eastern spirituality books, from biographies of the Buddha that described how his mother dreamt that a white elephant with six tusks entered her right side before he was conceived to tales of hermits attaining moksha, the liberation of their souls, in isolated mountain caves. I became vegetarian, following the principle of ahimsa, or non-harming, not wanting to hurt animals in what I ate. Instead of eating animal flesh, I would eat Chinese mock meat, sweet seasoned gluten chunks of protein. I even bought a varied collection of crystals, believing that the energy from those brightly coloured rocks would bring wealth, love and happiness into my life. I went for Reiki massages, where the therapist held her palms inches above my body, manipulating my energy fields while the vibrating wail of the singing bowl music played in the background of the dimly lit room.

Then one day, I decided to attend a Zen Buddhism retreat. I hoped that it would help me achieve what the Zen monks called “satori”, a flash of insight that led to Enlightenment, a revelation that

would release me from suffering into nirvanic bliss. For five days, I sat with my legs folded in lotus position, counting the inhalation and exhalation of my breath for eight hours every day. During the retreat, I started hearing voices and these voices continued to ring in my head even after I left the meditation hall. I was so happy thinking that I could now hear voices from God telling me things, not realising that the voices were actually deceptive instructions from the devil leading me astray. Later, as I did more research about my experiences, I discovered that what had happened was that the intense meditation practice had led to the opening of my third eye, the opening of the chakra or energy center located on my forehead. The third eye is the portal to the spirit realm, and once open can lead to the person experiencing psychic phenomenon like hallucinations, where they start hearing voices and seeing visions from evil spirits.

I heard the voices telling me that I would be rich and the best way to become rich was to spend money like I was rich. So in the next few weeks after the meditation retreat, I spent thousands of dollars. I signed up for an annual membership at a hip yoga club and bought a luxury watch that mesmerised me with its dazzling bezels and blood red face. The voices told me to attract clients by dressing like a prosperous pro, so I spent hundreds of dollars going to an Indian tailor to custom make golden silk shirts. The voices also told me to throw away things, like my favourite silver DKNY watch. My mother discovered the discarded watch in the wastepaper basket, leading her to become alarmed about my bizarre behaviour. In addition to that, the voices would also often tell me something funny, and I would suddenly laugh, disturbing people around me who wondered why I laughed out loudly of the blue for no reason. There was even once the voices told me to get into the taxi and to look at the taxi driver with a Holy Spirit stare, to hypnotise him with my look. My descent into madness went so deep that one evening I heard the voices telling me to keep shouting – “It’s Tiger time!” – a line from a beer commercial on TV.

My family became so alarmed by my mad behaviour that they took me to our family doctor who told them to put me in a mental hospital. It was only when I was in the mental hospital, tied to the bars of my bed, unable to move, that I realised that something was seriously wrong.

I calmed down from my mania attack when I was in the sanitorium and returned to normal life after spending two weeks in the mental hospital. The voices went away after a few days so I resumed living a sane life after that.

Fast forward to April 2020. It was the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and Singapore entered a lockdown, called a “circuit breaker”, to try and keep the virus from spreading uncontrollably. Everybody had to stay at home and all businesses, apart from essential ones, were shut. When the lockdown first began, I was worried about many things. Would I be able to get any freelance writing work so my finances won’t take a hit? Would I get lonely as I wouldn’t be able to meet my friends?

However, when the lockdown started, something amazing and unexpected happened. My prayer life just took off. When I closed my eyes and focused on Christ, I felt a deep sense of peace and joy. I soaked in waves of bliss that swept me into ecstasy as I experienced a deep immersion of God’s presence. Since I didn’t have any work to do, I spent 4-5 hours a day in prayer, just basking in God’s serene presence, uniting my soul with God in bliss.

This Christian form of prayer that I soaked my soul in was different from my experience with Buddhist and New Age meditation. When I meditated, all I felt was relaxed but it didn’t give me the ecstatic bliss that I felt when I was praying in Christ. When I engaged in Christian prayer, I felt not just a sense of relaxation but a feeling that I was connected to a real Person, like there was a spiritual being that touched my soul, lifting me to peaks of joy. For me, when I prayed, I felt so happy

it was like I had died and gone to heaven. In fact, it gave me a deep belief that heaven must be real, because this bliss I felt when I was praying must be what it feels like to be in heaven.

During my prayer sessions, I also started hearing the voice of God. This voice was different from the one I heard when I was meditating, it had a different sound and feeling because God's voice was full of peace and wisdom. Through this voice, God started teaching me amazing things and I knew it was God because they gave me wise insights that I couldn't have thought of by myself through my own logic.

For example, one thing that God's voice told me during my prayer times was about the importance of rest. God told me that my path was to be the path of rest. At first, this didn't make sense to me as I tend to have the kind of type A personality of an over-achiever - I tend to value busyness and productive activity over rest. Whenever I rest, I feel guilty, like I'm being lazy. I can't rest until I put in a gruelling day of work and feel that I have earned my rest. So for God to tell me to get lots of rest went against my basic instincts and logical mind. Thus I asked God – "why is rest so important?" I heard God's voice telling me – "that's because the essence of God is rest". I realised that whenever I'm deep in prayer, feeling God's peace and presence deeply, there's always a sense of rest. Rest is important because the essential nature of God is rest. Whenever you're connected to God, you will always be connected to His calm, peaceful rest. It was then that I realised the importance of living a life of rest, compared to one driven by hectic, self-striving activity. Thus I committed myself to living a restful life, one that is dedicated to restful prayer.

Ever since the circuit breaker in April 2020, I have consistently had amazing prayer times with God, where I feel His blissful presence and hear his wise voice guiding me. Unlike the voices from the devil, God's voice has changed my life for the better, guiding me and lifting me to greater heights.

As the result, after the prayer breakthrough during the lockdown, I've never been happier in all my life. I feel like I'm one of the most blessed people on earth, because I have achieved my most important dream – the peace and joy that comes from the mystical union of the soul with God through prayer. What I couldn't achieve through my pursuit for Enlightenment through Eastern religions, God has given me through my return to Christ. I can now happily say that I live the Ephesians 3:20 life, where I have been blessed immeasurably more than what I have asked for or imagined. I never could have imagined to be so blessed and so happy. To go from being locked up in a mental hospital because of the devil's voices to being able to hear God's voice and experience his transcendent peace in Christian prayer is something I never even dreamed could happen.

Thus the circuit breaker during the height of the COVID-19 crisis unexpectedly became the best time of my life. My money worries were calmed when the Singapore government gave US\$6500 to all freelancers to help make up for their loss of income during the pandemic. My social life also unexpectedly took off. Since everyone was stuck at home, I managed to chat with a different friend each day on Zoom. My sister, a teacher, had to work from home and so we spent a lot of good quality time together, cooking dinner every night. For example, I would be the sous chef, chopping garlic into fine sandy particles while she fried the sizzling beef mince for our Bolognese sauce. Instead of feeling lonely, I had better bonding times with friends and family than ever before.

Thus Romans 8:28 became a reality in my life during the COVID-19 circuit breaker period, with God working good out of time of crisis in the world. What I thought would be the worst time in my life turned out to be the happiest season of my life as God fulfilled His promise of using trouble for my good. During the circuit breaker, I had amazing prayer times, money from the government,

abundant social support from friends and family – all totally unexpected. And because of that, I felt incredibly blessed.

Now, whenever something bad happens to me, I can stay resilient by reminding myself of the time when I descended into madness and how God unexpectedly brought mystic joy into my life during the COVID-19 circuit breaker. My memory of these events in my life gives me the faith and strength to believe that no matter how bad things get, God can work it for my good.

THE BLESSED DREAMER

The power of Romans 8:28 to create resilience in our lives, to help us overcome problems, can also be found in the story of Joseph, the boy with the technicolour dreamcoat who became the Prime Minister of Egypt.

Now Joseph was the favourite son of Israel, the one who basked in the warmth of his father's love. Israel favoured Joseph so much that he even made him a special coat, a brilliant garment that shone with its bright rainbow of colours.

One night when Joseph was in the quiet cocoon of sleep, he had a vivid dream. In the shadowy cloak of night, Joseph saw the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. When he told this dream to his father and eleven brothers, they burned with anger. "Are you telling us that you will rule over us and we will bow down to you?" they told him.

One day, Israel sent Joseph to check on his brothers who were grazing their flock in Shechem. When Joseph's brothers saw him in the distance, they plotted to kill him, so great was their venomous jealousy of him. When Joseph met his brothers, they stripped him of his ornate robe and threw him into a pit. They were about to leave him there to die when they saw a caravan of Ishmaelite merchants approaching them, their camels laden with precious cargo like shiny silver and fragrant spices. The brothers sold Joseph to the traders, who were on their way to Egypt. When they arrived in the sweltering desert land of the pyramids, the Ishmaelite merchants sold Joseph as a slave to Potiphar, the captain of the guard.

God was with Joseph and gave him success in everything he did. When Potiphar saw the blessing on Joseph's life, he put him in charge of his household and everything he owned. With Joseph taking care of Potiphar's household, his crops flourished, yielding bumper harvests of golden grain. So things started looking up for Joseph – he was now the head slave, blessed in everything he did.

But an unfair turn of events soon devastated Joseph's life again.

Joseph was handsome man and Potiphar's wife burned with lust for him. She pressured Joseph day after day to go to bed with her but he refused and avoided her as much as possible. One day, however, he went into the house and no one else was around. Potiphar's wife grabbed him by his cloak and demanded he sleep with her. Joseph tore himself away, but he left his cloak in her hand as he fled from her.

When Potiphar returned home, his wife told him that Joseph had tried to rape her. When Potiphar saw Joseph's cloak in his wife's hand, he boiled with anger and immediately threw Joseph in prison. Joseph was back in the pit.

Yet even in the cold dark dungeon, God was with Joseph, shining His blessings on him. The prison warden liked Joseph so much he put him in charge of the prisoners and over everything that happened in the prison. God was with Joseph and His divine presence made Joseph succeed in everything he did in jail in the same way he had success in Potiphar's household.

Some time later, Pharaoh's chief cup-bearer angered the ruler and who cast him into the same prison as Joseph. One night, the cup-bearer had a dream. When Joseph saw the troubled look on the cup-bearer's face, he asked him what was wrong. The cup-bearer told Joseph that he had a mysterious dream that he didn't understand and Joseph offered to interpret the night vision for him. The cup-bearer told Joseph his dream and Joseph explained that the dream meant that the cup-

bearer would be restored to Pharaoh's court in three days. Then Joseph asked the cup-bearer to do him a favour when he was back in Pharaoh's palace and get Pharaoh to free him from prison since he was imprisoned because of a furious woman's lie. The cup-bearer agreed. However, when things happened as Joseph predicted, with the cup-bearer regaining Pharaoh's favour and returning to court, the cup-bearer forgot all about Joseph.

Two years later, Pharaoh had a disturbing dream that he couldn't understand. His magicians didn't know the meaning of the dream either, so Pharaoh's heart was roiled with trouble. The cup-bearer suddenly remembered how Joseph had interpreted his dream correctly and told Pharaoh about Joseph. Pharaoh brought Joseph out of the prison to his regal court and asked Joseph to interpret his dream. Joseph explained that the dream meant that there were going to be seven years of abundant harvest followed by seven years of severe famine. For seven years golden stalks of grain would burst from the ground followed by seven years of empty, hard, scorched earth. He suggested that Pharaoh put a man in charge of storing food during the bountiful years in preparation for the famine. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph that he chose him to be that man and made him the Prime Minister of Egypt.

Thus Joseph underwent one of the most dramatic reversals of fortune ever recorded, going from the pit to the palace. God indeed fulfilled the promise of Romans 8:28 to Joseph, causing good to come out of the evil in his life, working all the events in his life for good. All the bad things that happened to Joseph were meant to lead him to becoming the second most powerful man in Egypt. If he wasn't sold into slavery, he wouldn't have ended up in Egypt. If he hadn't been falsely accused and thrown into prison, he wouldn't have met the chief cup-bearer and showed him his gift of interpreting dreams. If he hadn't met the chief cup-bearer, he wouldn't have someone in Pharaoh's court to tell the ruler that Joseph had the gift of interpreting dreams and give him the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dream, which led to him being promoted to become the second top leader of Egypt. Joseph showed that he understood the principle of God working all things for his good through the words he spoke to his brothers— "you intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people." (Genesis 50:20). It was this deep understanding of the principle of Romans 8:28 that gave Joseph resilience, the ability to overcome great problems, as the promise became the fuel for him to stay in faith and persevere, to see God turn his troubles to good.

ROMANS 8:28 AND THE GOSPEL

You can see how the gospel story of Jesus Christ illustrates the principle of Romans 8:28 at work. Nobody faced greater challenges than Jesus Christ. However, because of his understanding of Romans 8:28, his knowledge that God would turn his suffering to good - this gave him the wisdom and strength to overcome his difficulties, helping him bring salvation to all mankind.

Jesus was a man who went through the darkest of times. At the garden of Gethsemane, as he prayed, his soul was in such agony that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. He was betrayed with a kiss, then mocked by soldiers who pierced his brow with a crown of thorns and tore his skin from his back with a bone-clawed whip. Peter, his close friend, denied Jesus three times with expletives, saying "A curse on me if I'm lying, I don't know this Jesus!" as a rooster crowed. He was crucified at the place of the Skull, nailed to the cross at Golgotha where the sun stopped shining as he cried out in anguish – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Far above his physical pain was the anguish of carrying all the guilt and shame of mankind's sins on the cross.

Jesus' disciples watched all this happening to him. If you would have told them – "this will all work for good" – they wouldn't have believed you.

But three days after the crucifixion, the disciples saw the miraculous turnaround. Jesus' tomb was empty, the stone rolled away by a magnificent angel. Jesus appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room and even let Thomas put his finger through his nail-scarred hands. Jesus cooked the disciples a warm breakfast of fish over glowing coals by the beach before ascending into heaven. And now our Lord is seated at the right hand of God the Father, where He has dominion and authority over all the powers of heaven and of earth.

The crucifixion and resurrection shows how God works all things for good, how the pain of the cross led to the salvation of mankind. Thus you can develop resilience in your own painful moments, when the weight of your problems feels like carrying a cross, by believing that God has a resurrection in your future, that he will work good out of the evil things that might be happening to you.

What can we learn from these stories?

Here's the important part of this book.

I'm going to lay out the lessons we can learn from the stories I've told about my transformation from madness to joy, Joseph's rise from the pit to the palace and Christ's victory over the cross. All these lessons show the power of Romans 8:28 at work.

Firstly, oftentimes when we face a problem, our minds whirl with worry, blackened by discouragement and depression. It's because our logical mind can't figure out how good can come out of our catastrophe.

One of the key things I've learnt is that the good that God promises in Romans 8:28 will often come in ways that we don't expect, in ways which we can't see with our logical mind. God will make a way where there seems to be no way. There was no way I could have expected that my madness would eventually be replaced with mystic joy. Joseph could have never predicted that being thrown into the pit was part of God's plan for him to become the Prime Minister of Egypt. The disciples also couldn't see how the crucifixion could have led to the resurrection. So when you're facing a problem, don't try and figure out how God is going to rescue you with your logical mind, just trust Him and let Him work according to His perfect plan. God will save you in a way that you couldn't

even begin to predict, expect or imagine. If you do that, you'll find that God's peace will calm your heart and give you the confidence to stay strong in your troubles. Instead of worrying and feeling troubled by your problems, you'll have the serenity that comes from knowing that things will turnaround soon and that good is coming your way.

A powerful benefit of believing in the promise of Romans 8:28 is that it creates hope. When you know that God will work all things for your good, you know that no matter how bad things get, good is coming. This hope will make you resilient, giving you the strength and peace to outlast your tough times.

The next lesson we can learn is that all our problems, if we have faith in God, will lead to a good ending. We can be resilient if we believe that all our difficulties will lead us to a life where our dreams are fulfilled.

We also need to learn that God will not let anything bad happen to us without a purpose. There is purpose in our pain.

Another encouraging truth is that God will use every problem to lift you to a new level.

God will also use your problems to move you into your destiny. God will use your problems to help you reach your full potential, so that you can become everything God created you to be.

We see these lessons at work in the stories I've shared in this book. All the problems I had with my madness led me to my purpose, dream and destiny of writing Christian books that would encourage others, and also helped me reach higher levels of mystic bliss in Christ. By passing the test of keeping a good attitude even despite all the bad breaks, all of Joseph's trials led him to his purpose and destiny of saving his millions of people from starvation during the famine, catapulting him to the high level of Prime Minister of Egypt, fulfilling his dream of being a ruler. Christ's endurance of all his sufferings finally led him to achieve his dream too, of bringing salvation to mankind by rising from the dead, enabling him to fulfil his destiny and rise to the loftiest level at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

When we realise all these benefits of problems, when we fully understand the promise of Romans 8:28, when we believe that our trials can lead us to our dreams, purpose, destiny and enable us to become everything God created us to be, we won't be discouraged when we face difficulties. We can be resilient. So I encourage you to stay in faith when you face difficulties. Keep a positive attitude when you face adversity. Keep doing the right thing even when the wrong thing is happening. Keep being good to people who are not good to you. Keep being your best. When you have problems, have the attitude – "God is preparing me for something greater". When faced with a problem, know that God is going to take you to places where you've never been before, places that you couldn't go on your own. If you do all this, you'll activate the power of the Romans 8:28 promise in your life and see all things work for your good. You'll see all your problems become blessings in disguise as God turns your setbacks into set-ups for something greater.

CONCLUSION

It is my prayer that after you've read this book, you'll have the resilience to overcome your problems and see God turning your trials into something good as you put your faith in the promise of Romans 8:28.

If you're not a Christian, or if you are a Christian but your relationship with God has gone cold in recent years and you want to re-dedicate your life to him, may I suggest that you consider inviting Christ into your life?

With Christ in your life, you will have the peace knowing that you can overcome any challenge as God works all things for your good.

If you're ready to start a relationship with Christ, it's as simple as saying the prayer below:

"Dear Lord Jesus, I turn away from all the wrong I've done in my life and come to you for forgiveness. Thank you for dying for me and rising from the dead. I give you control and want to make you my Saviour and Lord of my life. In Jesus name I pray, amen."

If you've said this prayer, then you are now a Christian with a living relationship with Christ. I suggest you contact a good local church and tell them about your decision and then take steps to learn more about how to grow spiritually as a Christian.

If you have found this book useful but have challenges in your life you need help with, I have a consultation service which I run that may be able to assist you. You can contact me to find out more details on how I can help via my email at hwee_tan@hotmail.com