

Resilience Is God's Design for our Children



-Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

As I've been invited to speak at a medical conference in Williamsport, Pennsylvania in March, an honor I hold deeply, and now for the second time, I've been spending time reflecting on the topic I've been asked to address: raising competent children and adolescents in these challenging times. In that process, one word has continued to surface and hold my attention—**resilience**. What does it truly mean? How is it formed? And how do we foster it in children in a way that honors both God's design and the realities of the human nervous system? This short essay represents some of those early reflections, offered as a kind of preamble to the conversation I hope to have in Williamsport and hopefully beyond.

Why We Don't Raise Children to Be Happy We Raise Them to Live Well

A Loving Desire and a Hidden Assumption

Many parents say it instinctively. **"All I want for my child is to be happy."** The longing behind that wish is deeply human. To love a child is to want joy rather than pain, ease rather than struggle, laughter rather than tears. There is nothing shallow about that desire. It is rooted in love.

And yet happiness was never meant to carry the weight we have placed upon it.

Happiness is transient. It rises and falls with circumstances, seasons of life, relationships, health, success, disappointment, and the shifting terrain of the human heart. When happiness becomes the goal, suffering begins to feel like failure. Discomfort feels abnormal. Struggle starts to look like something has gone wrong.

But life does not work that way. And neither do human beings.

Pain, frustration, loss, uncertainty, and disappointment are not malfunctions of the human experience. They are part of it. Any vision of parenting that treats difficulty as something to be eliminated rather than navigated prepares children not for strength, but for fragility.

What we truly want for our children is something deeper and more enduring. We want them to live well.

Resilience as God Designed It

This understanding of resilience sits at the heart of the NeuroFaith® model. NeuroFaith® does not begin with techniques or diagnoses. It begins with a simple theological and human conviction. God designed human beings with the capacity to endure adversity and return to wholeness.



The word **resilience** itself quietly carries this truth. It comes from the Latin **resilire**, meaning “to spring back,” “to rebound,” or “to leap again.” Embedded in the word is the assumption of impact. Nothing springs back unless it has first been pressed, bent, or struck. Resilience does not describe a life without stress. It describes a life that has been acted upon and yet is able to return. That return is not accidental. It is built in.

Within NeuroFaith®, resilience is understood not as a personality trait, but as a lived and embodied capacity. It grows when several essential dimensions of human life are aligned. We need internal steadiness rather than chronic reactivity. We need relationship, because no one was designed to carry burden alone. We need meaning, so that suffering does not feel random or pointless. And we need faith, a stable orientation toward God that holds us steady when circumstances shift.

NeuroFaith® does not ask people to master these dimensions perfectly. It recognizes that we move in and out of balance over time. Resilience is not staying calm, connected, hopeful, and faithful at all times. It is the ability to return to those places when we drift, to rebound rather than remain bent, to reorient rather than collapse.

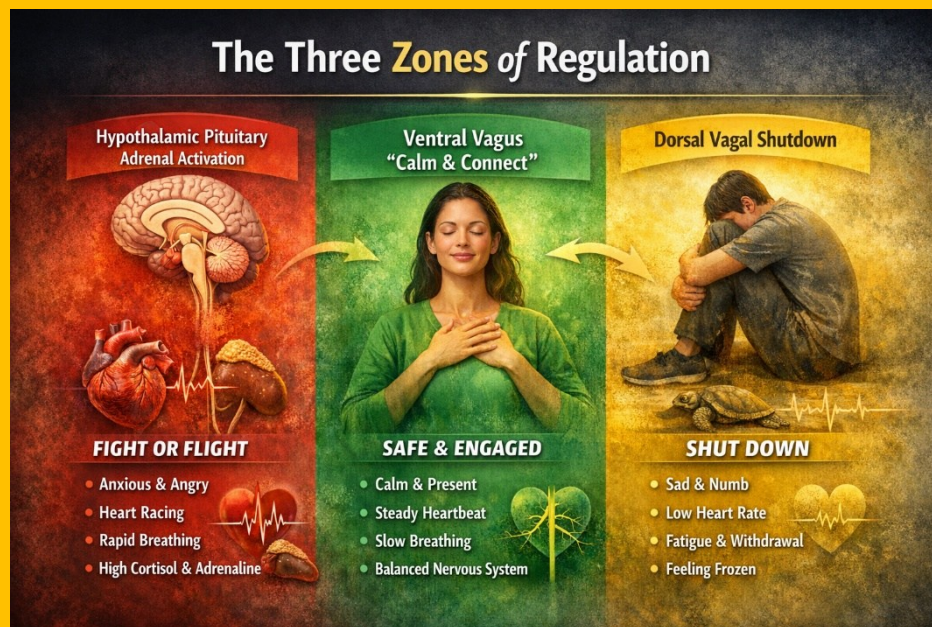
This rhythm of departure and return is not weakness. It is how we were made.

How Resilience Happens in the Body

What NeuroFaith® adds is clarity about how this return happens inside the body. Resilience is not only emotional or spiritual. It is physiological. It unfolds through systems God designed to help us respond to stress and then recover from it.

When a child encounters challenge, the nervous system responds automatically. Energy rises. Attention narrows. The body mobilizes through the stress response. Hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol increase to help the child act, protect, or endure. This is not pathology. It is preparation.

When stress becomes overwhelming or prolonged, another response may emerge. The system



conserves energy by slowing down, numbing, or withdrawing. This shutdown response is not laziness or weakness. It is protection. The body is saying this is too much right now.

But resilience does not live in constant activation, nor does it live in collapse.

Resilience emerges through a pathway oriented toward safety, connection, and restoration. Polyvagal informed therapy helps us understand that the nervous system is designed to return to this state. It is here that a child can calm without collapsing, stay engaged without being overwhelmed, and reconnect after distress. This is the nervous system's way of saying I am safe enough to come back.

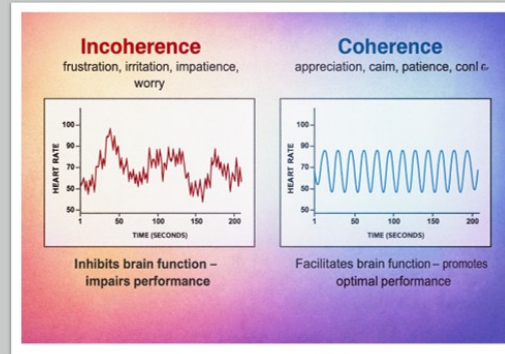
From a NeuroFaith® perspective, resilience is not about avoiding stress. It is about restoring safety after stress. The ability to return is the key.

The Heart as a Regulator of Resilience

The heart plays a central role in this return.

When emotions are chaotic and unresolved, the heart's rhythm becomes erratic. But when emotions begin to settle, the heart rhythm naturally becomes more ordered. Not rigid, but flexible and coherent. The rhythm takes on a smooth wave like pattern. This pattern reflects adaptability, balance, and health.

Emotions and Heart Rhythms



This coherence does more than mirror calm. It helps create it.

A coherent heart rhythm stabilizes blood pressure, supports hormonal balance, and sends clearer signals to the brain through the vagus nerve. The heart's electromagnetic field becomes more organized, and the brain, receiving steadier input, begins to function more coherently as well. Thinking becomes clearer. Emotional regulation improves. Perspective widens.

When the heart settles, the nervous system settles. And when the nervous system settles, the brain works better. The systems begin to operate in synchrony rather than in competition.

This is not mystical. It is design.

How Children Learn Resilience

Children do not learn resilience by being told to calm down or think differently. They learn it by experiencing the full arc of stress and return. They feel upset. Their body activates. And then, with presence, reassurance, and relationship, their system settles again.

Each return teaches the body something essential. Stress rises, and stress falls. I can come back. I am still safe.

Over time, what begins as co-regulation with a parent becomes self-regulation. The child internalizes the rhythm. Their heart learns it. Their nervous system remembers it. Their brain comes to trust it.

Spirituality is not separate from this process. It is woven through it. Prayer, worship, Scripture, and a lived sense of God's presence do not bypass the nervous system. They inform it. Faith orients the heart toward trust rather than threat, surrender rather than control, connection rather than isolation. Biology, relationship, meaning, and faith are cooperating systems.

Why We Do Not Shield Children From Every Storm

Nature has always reflected this wisdom. A rigid tree may appear strong, but when the storm comes, it snaps. Willows, palms, and aspens survive precisely because they bend. Even more striking, trees exposed to steady winds do not become weaker over time. They grow deeper root systems. The stress does not damage them. It strengthens them.

So, it is with our children.

Appropriate challenge, manageable stress, and honest struggle are not threats to mental health. They are its training ground. Shielding children from every frustration, every uncomfortable emotion, and every difficult experience does not create resilience. It creates fragility.

At the same time, resilience does not mean throwing children into storms alone. From a NeuroFaith® perspective, resilience is deeply relational. Children learn how to endure not by being told to be strong, but by being accompanied through difficulty. When a child experiences distress and discovers that they are not alone, that their feelings are survivable, and that their world is still safe, something foundational takes shape inside them.

They begin to learn an enduring truth. I can feel this. I can survive this. I can return. And I do not lose myself in the process.

Scripture speaks to this wisdom with quiet clarity. *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."* James 1:2-3 (NIV)

