

Resilience and Perseverance

My Story

Rebekah Naylor

It was noon Saturday. The neighborhood police constable sent a message to a hospital colleague to come to the police station. The setting was Bangalore Baptist Hospital, and I was the hospital CEO. We had faced months of labor union difficulties, threats, and negotiations. My effigy was hanging over the front gates surrounded by posters and pickets. The constable informed me that a non-bailable warrant had been issued for my arrest.

This policeman locked up the warrant and said he would not serve it for two days to give us time to go to court. He did not want to put me in jail. In front of the court, a close friend and co-worker stood surety for me. I was free, and months later the case was dismissed. Eventually, the union activity died away, never to recur. During that very stressful and traumatic time, I learned to count it joy when facing this situation because I knew that this testing of my faith would develop perseverance (James 1:2-3) so that I could continue what God had sent me to do in India.

Resilience is the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties. There is stretching but then springing back into shape. It includes dealing with adversity in constructive ways, adapting, and becoming stronger.

Resilience includes flexibility. A key to resilience is purpose. The resilient person, motivated by the purpose, perseveres toward the goal.

Having defined resilience, it is evident that this is something that should characterize Christ-followers sent out to serve and address lostness cross-culturally. In facing overwhelming need, cultural stress, isolation, sickness, and danger, how can we be resilient people, persevering in our work? I will share some things I learned during fifty years of active engagement in healthcare missions.

I was a teenager when God spoke to me about becoming a medical missionary. Over an eighteen-month period, I tried to understand what God was saying and even resisted it. It seemed impossible that I could be used like that. But when I told God I would obey and go, I felt complete peace. This for me was a specific call to service. I knew no details and would not know for years to come. But the purpose and goal were set, and I did not waver from that. I trusted God to direct my way, and He surely did. And over all the years that followed, it was this call that allowed me to be resilient and persevere. I did not go just because there was a great physical and spiritual need. I went because God sent me.

After I completed my education and surgical training, I arrived in India ready to begin and full of excitement. In those early years, I encountered some unexpected things: conflicts in our small missionary team, clinical responsibilities beyond the scope of training, and job assignments for which I was not prepared. There was the separation from family and almost no possibility for direct or immediate communication. I realized so acutely my dependence on the Lord and the need for time in His Word and prayer. Abiding in Christ and remembering His call to me to serve sustained me, and I persevered. Even on hard days, I was grateful for the privilege to be where He had placed me to see God at work.

I had been in India almost seventeen years when I learned that I was required to have a specific license to practice medicine. My visa clearly stated that I was a surgeon at Bangalore Baptist Hospital. When I realized

this situation, the authorities were no longer licensing American doctors and did not recognize US qualifications. My application to the central government was refused. At that point, I had to stop all clinical work and avoid even being around patients. I appealed the decision, and that was also refused. I thought perhaps God was telling me to go elsewhere, but then doors both overseas and in the US closed.

I waited and prayed. In a time of prayer regarding submission to God's will, God showed me that submission might include leaving medicine altogether. Submitting skills might include giving them up. I told God I would obey. Within ten days, the license was granted for two years. We never knew how this happened. It was a definite answer to the prayers of countless people, but I learned valuable lessons about submission and waiting on the Lord. In the ten years that followed, granting the license was delayed multiple times and I would stop work. There were many encounters with hostile government officials as I pled my case. Resilience and perseverance grew.

Resilience was also important in the hospital. In the 1980s the IMB was divesting itself from ownership and management of institutions. As the CEO of the hospital and the only worker then assigned to the hospital, I was instructed to sell Bangalore Baptist Hospital. I was shocked and shaken but went all over India trying to sell it. That proved impossible because of its value.

Ultimately the IMB worked out a management agreement with a national Christian hospital. We then had a new governing board. Financial support from the IMB was being withdrawn. My national colleagues and I felt abandoned and overwhelmed. It was my job to instill hope and to lead them forward. We were committed to the mission of physical and spiritual healing. We prayed much and identified our core values. We began to raise funds for support. Plans for growth were put in place. We determined to take what seemed negative and to make it positive. And, we trusted God's promise in Romans 8:28 that all things work together for the good of those who love

Him. Now Bangalore Baptist Hospital is still a light for Jesus Christ and has become a nationally recognized medical center and academic center. With the purpose of the institution firmly in mind, we were able to be resilient and persevere through such adversity.

The Bible teaches us much about resilience and perseverance. While I was completing my residency in surgery, I was privileged to know a missionary doctor who had been years overseas as a single woman. She told me that often she was able to keep going because of the promise in Isaiah 40:30-31. These verses state, “Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” Though we may be tired and even fall, if we hope in the Lord, He will renew our strength so that we can keep going, even soaring.

Correct focus on the Lord is essential to perseverance. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Moses persevered because he saw Him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27). Then he goes on to say in chapter 12 that we should run the race set before us with perseverance with our eyes fixed on Jesus. Paul told the Corinthians not to lose heart because inwardly they were being renewed daily. He told them to fix their eyes on the unseen which is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Faith and hope are foundations for being resilient and persevering.

In Scripture, we read about wonderful results of resilience and perseverance. Hebrews 10:36 encourages us to persevere so that when we have done the will of God, we will receive what He has promised. We will be blessed when we persevere in difficulty and will receive the crown of life that God promised those who love Him (James 1:12). Peter included perseverance in his list of qualities we should have. He said these qualities in us would keep us from being ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of Jesus (2 Peter 1:5-8). Paul admonished us not to become weary in doing good because we will reap a harvest if we do not give up (Galatians 6:9). At the end of

his life, Paul said he had fought the good fight and kept the faith and was anticipating the crown of righteousness that the Lord would give him (II Timothy 4:7-8).

Fifty years have passed by all too quickly. God has kept every promise. He has given so much joy. He enabled me to be resilient and to persevere in the calling He gave me. I close with these words by the apostle Peter: “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:10-11, NIV).

Rebekah Naylor, MD, served as IMB missionary surgeon and church planter at Bangalore Baptist Hospital, India, from 1973 to 2009. Following retirement from field service, she led IMB’s global health strategies work, including mobilization of healthcare professionals for service overseas and development of strategic healthcare missions, from 2010 to 2023.