Session 3

Gratitude & Resilience

Learning Goals & Outcomes

- We will examine how resilience comes from our willingness to adapt when the losses and wounds of life bring us adversity and hardship.

  Outcome: Participants will learn the three "R's" of resiliency: Recruiting, Reframing, and Resolving. Participants will discuss how resilient they consider themselves.

- We will explore how to cultivate the spiritual gifts of gratitude and an awareness of God's unconditional love.

  Outcome: Participants will pray with their memories, recalling times of gratitude and people they are grateful for.

Key Concepts & Topics

- Resilience
- Gratitude
- How to find a grateful heart even in difficult situations

Contemplative Practice

Examen of Consciousness and Gratitude

Activities

- Discussion of "Resilience" and how this attribute of adapting to change relates to the types of spiritual needs discussed in Session 2
  - + Name the 3 "R"s and invite discussion of how participants might practice them
- Discussion of "Gratitude" and how it can enhance resiliency
  - + Watch Br. David Steindl-Rast, "Gratitude" (5:21)
  - + (Small) Group discussion on participants' awareness and practices of gratitude
- Visit and Discuss: "30 Daily Practice Ideas for Living Gratefully"
  - + Contemplative Practice: Examen of Consciousness and Gratitude

Resiliency

Resiliency is the process of adapting in the face of adversity, trauma, or tragedy. It is the capacity to heal and grow stronger, turn adversity into advantage. It means 'bouncing back' from difficult experiences. We might think that it is only the young who are resilient. But, this is a quality than can endure our life span.

Three "R"s of resiliency: (from James and Evelyn Whitehead, *The Virtue of Resilience*)

1. **Recruiting** – the capacity to forge vital and enduring bonds with others. Who is your support network, your real friends you can call on?
2. **Reframing** – the ability to reinterpret negative experiences. Viewing the past through an alternative lens, reframing our history of personal pain, perhaps evoking recollections of care and concern by another person. Henri Nouwen identified ambiguity lying at the core of our faith. He wrote that we are both blessed and broken. Our failures and slights suffered can come to dominate, cloud our memories. In resilience, our blessings come to the forefront. He directs us to "pull our brokenness away from the shadow of the curse and put it under the light of blessing."
3. **Resolve** –keeps us focused on our goals, makes us willing to fight back, and to defend our ideals when they are in jeopardy. What persons do you know who endured terrible suffering and yet continued to manifest courage? (MLK, Nelson Mandala, Victor Frankl, Malawa Yousafzai).

Q: How resilient are you? Invite discussion.

- Do you have a supportive social network?
- When feeling overwhelmed, are you aware of the specific emotions you are feeling?
- Do you practice self-care, such as a healthy diet and regular exercise?
- Do you believe that life has meaning greater than what is currently apparent?
- How do you adapt to change? (gather information/plan, or get stuck, or try not to think)

Gratitude

Resilience is cultivated, developed by a life of gratitude.

1. **Living a life of gratitude is relationship-strengthening** because it requires us to see how we've been supported and affirmed by others and by God.
2. **Living a life of gratitude opens our hearts to connect with** the world, other people, and God.
3. **Living a life of gratitude is an indicator of the spiritual freedom and maturity** we are called to.

Let's stop for a moment and consider these statements of faith:

- We are created by God **out of love**.
- We are **never, truly self-sufficient**.
- **We are dependent on one another and on our loving God.** It can be hard to accept and ask for help.

Q: When in your life have these truths come home to you? Can the process of aging bring us to a place of recognizing how much we depend on God's love?

This is more than intellectual understanding. It is a deep awareness, an inner, spiritual knowledge of how much God loves us. That knowledge can bring us the spiritual freedom to live detached from whatever happens to us or whatever happens in the world, so that we can live full lives of peace and freedom, being grateful that we are alive.

As we deepen our appreciation of all that God has done for us and is doing for us (blessings) we develop lives of gratitude and we can pray:

> *Take Lord, and receive, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To you Lord, I return it. Give me your love and your grace. This is sufficient for me.* (Ignatius of Loyola)

Get group's reflection on these ideas or ask questions to prompt brief discussion:

What everyday things are you grateful for? [power failure makes us aware of gift of electricity; a sleepless night reminds us of the gift of sleep]

Is there someone in your life who demonstrates gratitude? What can you learn from their attitude or actions?

Do you have rituals of gratitude to mark life's transitions or even the end of one day?

Contemplative Practice

Examen Of Consciousness

- Center yourself and ask God's Spirit to assist as you prayerfully remember.
- Looking back over your life, think of one person, alive or dead, for whom you are grateful.
- Think about that person and what causes you to feel gratitude for him or her.
- Allow yourself to feel the gratitude more fully.
- Let those feelings sink in deeply and well up and overflow within you.
- Relish the gift of the person in your life, saying "thank you." Silence
- What would you tell him/her now?
- What do you imagine the person might say to you?
- What would you like to say to God about this person for whom you are grateful?
- Close with the "Glory."

Based on Mark Thibodeaux, SJ, "Gratitude," *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen* (Loyola Press, 2015), pp. 38-39.

30 Daily Practice Ideas for Grateful Living

Br. David Steindl-Rast is a Benedictine monk who retired in his 70's when friends asked him to create a website focused on gratitude. "Grateful Living" was a small seed that continues to grow. The practices range from actions that will take you only a moment to those that will take a larger commitment of time. Use the list to try something every day to build the habit of intentionally directing your attention to notice and appreciate the gifts of your life.