Resilience and the Desert



* Resilience: being strengthened in adversity by
* Coping, Constancy, Construction
* And attention to Struggle, self, relationships
* A journeyfrom adversity to altruism

Be a bright flame before me
A guiding star above me.
Be a smooth path below me,
A kindly shepherd behind me
Today, tonight, and for ever

St Columba

# Sayings of the desert Christians

1. **The desert experience: the invitation to grow**

Amma Syncletia also said, ‘If you find yourself in a monastery do not go to another place, for that will harm you a great deal. Just as the bird who abandons the eggs she was sitting on prevents them from hatching, so the monk or nun grows cold and their faith dies, when they go from one place to another.’ (Syncletia 6)

A brother came to Scetis to visit Abba Moses and asked him for a word. The old man said to him, ‘Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.’ (Moses 6)

* What prevents you from pausing or staying with your stuff?
* Can you point to desert experiences you have grown through in your own life?

*And Jesus went to John to be baptised and then ‘full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness.’ Luke 4:1*

For what in your life might the Spirit be leading you into desert territory?

1. **Voices** **and self-discipline**

“Abba Anoub asked Abba Poemen about the impure thoughts which the heart of man brings forth and about vain desires. Abba Poeman said to him, ‘Is the axe any use without someone to cut with it? (Isaiah 10:15) If you do not make use of these thoughts, they will be ineffectual too.’” (Poemen 15)

Jesus heard both these voices:

*‘You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.’* Luke 3:22

*‘If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.’* Luke 4:3

Are you aware of voices from the past that have shaped your life?

Can you identify

* some that have inspired or encouraged you?
* some that shocked you with a truthfulness and care that helped you grow?
* any that still have the power to bring your down?

What will you choose to listen to? Are there verses from the bible which you do or could hold on to in times of doubt or temptation? How do you remind yourself of them?

Are there trains of thought you know have you straying into ‘impure thoughts’ – ones that take you to rumination and self-blame rather than to truth, beauty, hope, love, to God?

1. **Non Judgement**

Abba Poemen said that Abba Paphnutius used to say, “During the whole lifetime of the old men, I used to go and see them twice a month, although it was a distance of twelve miles. I told them each of my thoughts and they never answered me anything but this, ‘wherever you go, do not judge yourself and you will be at peace.’”

Are you inclined to use up energy in blaming and judging yourself? Why do you think the Abba thought judging ourselves preventing us from being at peace?

* John 1:23 “Make straight the way of the Lord.” How can you guard your inner life in order to directly pursue loving God?

# Hagar and Moses – Studies in Resilience

**Hagar** Genesis 16:4-15, 21:9-21

**Moses** Exodus 1 and 3

1. What is the adversity?

2. How do they encounter themselves and God?

3. What life does it lead to, what legacy?

4. How could you use the desert theme in your ministry to enable people to grow in resilience?

Quotes of Sayings taken from Ward, B. 1975 *The sayings of the desert fathers: the alphabetical collection*, London, Mowbray.

## See also

Allain Chapman, Justine *Resilient Pastors: the role of adversity in healing and growth* SPCK 2012

*The Resilient Disciple: a Lenten journey from adversity to maturity* SPCK 2018