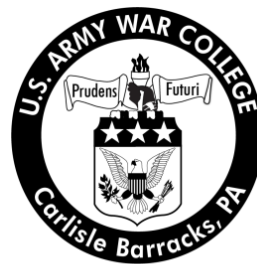


Overcoming Adversity: Suffering as a Capacity Builder for Strategic Leaders

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2012

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STRATEGIC LEADERS**

by

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As Thucydides so aptly stated in the Melian Dialogue: “The strong do what they will, while the weak suffer what they must.” What is it about suffering that bears within it the capacity to forge elements of greatness or to ground down to nothing the little we thought we possessed? In what ways does suffering serve as a capacity builder for strategic leaders? Are leaders better for having sacrificed and suffered? What is the relationship between overcoming adversity and the resilient leader? This paper examines several major themes: first, the nature of suffering and its relationship to resilient leadership; second, the dynamic process of suffering and growth; third, Ulysses S. Grant: a military and civilian leader who suffered and failed miserably, but later recovered to lead the Union Army to victory in the Civil War; and, finally, the lessons learned from suffering for strategic, resilient leaders.

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY: SUFFERING AS A CAPACITY BUILDER FOR STRATEGIC LEADERS

The qualities of a great leader are shaped and formed through the development of character-that moral fiber which comprises the center of our personality. Great leaders lead from the inside out. Character is shaped and formed throughout a lifetime. It is a journey, not a point at which we ever fully arrive. Sometimes it seems like three steps forward, and two steps back. It is a product of many things-our environment, our education, our desires, and our choices. Each person has unique strengths of character as well as flaws. Perhaps this helps us to understand why two identical twins can end up with vastly different lives, even though they are genetically identical in many ways. Character is also significantly molded through adversity. In fact, adversity, or suffering, has the potential to either destroy us on the one hand, or develop us in ways we could never have imagined possible. Many great leaders throughout history, if not most, have found their character profoundly transformed as a result of what they have suffered-those personal experiences which have shaken their very foundations. One has only to reflect on the lives of some of the famous Allied leaders of World War II: Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, George Marshall, and Alan Brooke. Each of them faced significant obstacles in their early years (Churchill and Marshall-family of origin issues, Marshall and Brooke-death of their first wives, and Roosevelt-physical impairment). Each of these great leaders learned to: cope with their trials and tribulations, not to be crushed by them. In some measure, they each overcame and grew as a result of their suffering. This is not a modern phenomenon, but one that can be charted throughout the pages of history.

Take for example, the life of one great military leader, Ulysses S. Grant:

How could a failed peacetime soldier, failed farmer, failed woodcutter, failed bill collector---a thirty-eight year old clerk in a harness store in the spring of 1861---become, by 1862, the object of sober speculation about the presidency of the United States? How was it that this unexceptional small man was, by 1864, the general commanding all the armies on one side of a vast and fierce civil war?¹

No one in their right mind could have possibly predicted that Grant would be the general that President Lincoln would call on to defeat Lee's army and bring victory to the Union.

And, yet, that is exactly what Grant did. Perhaps only Grant's wife Julia saw the potential greatness that was hidden in her husband. She quietly alludes to this in her memoirs. It is said that Michelangelo was able to carve his masterpieces because he saw foremost in his mind's eye, the hidden treasure buried within a slab of marble.

Grant overcame adversity and endured much personal suffering in his early years.

Were these obstacles actually the tools that chiseled away at Grant's character, only

later to reveal his greatness? Was this the genesis for his capacity to formulate

strategy, lead troops in battle, and persevere to the end? In light of Grant's many

failures, where did he get such confidence? "The great thing about Grant, I take it, is

his perfect coolness and persistency of purpose," he (Lincoln) once told the artist Frank

Carpenter.² "I judge he is not easily excited, which is a great element in an officer, and

he has the grit of a bull-dog! Once let him get his teeth in, and nothing can shake him

off."³

All of us will experience some degree of suffering in our lives. We cannot escape it. At times, we may not be able to endure it. Suffering, which might be broadly categorized as adversity, in all its many forms, attacks us from without and within. I once heard in a funeral sermon the poignant saying that suffering will either be a cruel

enemy or a difficult teacher. Sometimes, to be frank, it is both. Suffering may be self-induced, or it may be imposed on us by others. As Thucydides so aptly stated in the Melian Dialogue, “The strong do what they will, while the weak suffer what they must.”⁴ Sacrifice, on the other hand is often embraced voluntarily, as a matter of choice. What is it about suffering that bears within it the capacity to forge elements of greatness or to ground down to nothing the little we thought we possessed? In what ways does suffering serve as a capacity builder for strategic leaders? Are leaders better for having sacrificed and suffered? What is the relationship between overcoming adversity and the resilient leader? These questions can be addressed as major themes. This paper will examine these themes: first, the nature of suffering and its relationship to resilient leadership; second, the dynamic process of suffering and growth; third, the life of Ulysses S. Grant: a military and civilian leader who suffered and failed miserably, but later recovered to lead the Union Army to victory in the Civil War; and, finally, the lessons for strategic, resilient leaders that can be learned from suffering.

James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner in their book, *A Leader's Legacy*, introduce the theme of leadership and suffering.

Our own studies, as well as those of many other authors and scholars who have explored leadership and leaders, have shown that leadership often begins with pain and suffering (our own and in the conditions of others). Nearly every act of leadership requires suffering---and often for the leader a choice between one's personal success and safety and the greater welfare of others. At times we will suffer, and those we love and cherish will suffer, if only because of the trade-offs we have to make between our own personal interests and those of the greater good.⁵

The resilient leader is one who suffers, but is also one who overcomes and grows through the process. In spite of, or perhaps *because* of, what they have endured the resilient leader has somehow managed to use adversity to his or her advantage. They

have, in a sense, embraced their fate, but were not ultimately paralyzed by the ensuing trauma. This is the psychological process of post-traumatic stress which can eventually lead to post-traumatic growth. It should be noted, however, that for some the suffering or trauma is such a severe blow to the psyche that they are unable to fully recover. The wound never completely heals, and a diminished capacity ensues. While this is the experience of some, the resilient leader is able to develop healthy coping mechanisms and not only survive, but go on to thrive. He or she, in a sense, has thus earned the right to lead precisely because of what they have endured. Resilient leaders, who have suffered with and for their people, can literally change the course of events. Perhaps there is no greater model of a resilient leader than that of George Washington at Newburgh.

Commissioned officers, and historians alike, are familiar with the tale of the rebellion at Newburgh. A band of the Continental Army's officer corps had gathered together to discuss their grievances. The victory of Yorktown was now history, but the peace treaty that would formally end the conflict with Great Britain was not yet completed. The officers were fatigued from all the hardships they endured, and to add insult to injury, they had not been paid in nearly a year. The officers were considering a mass resignation and exodus from the Army. Washington learned of the meeting and requested permission to speak to the assembly. He was allowed to speak, so the story goes, not because of his rank or position, but because of the high esteem in which he was held. Washington attempted to read a letter from the Continental Congress, but his eyesight was such that he could no longer read unaided by glasses.

He then hesitated, and reportedly uttered the words that served to save the functional integrity of the Army, and perhaps democracy as we know it:

“Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country”. What has been called the Newburgh Rebellion ended in that moment, as many of his officers visibly wept, not because Washington ordered the rebellion to end, but rather because his presence would not allow it to continue.⁶

George Washington was a resilient leader. He, along with his army, had been severely tried and tested. Washington knew that the stakes were high at Newburgh, but rather than shrink in the face of a daunting challenge, he pressed forward, into the breach. He reminded his officers of the reasons why they had fought the war, what they had been through, and the hope they shared for a better future. In fact, he was the embodiment of this hope. The fact that Washington had suffered with them, endured, and survived, earned him the moral platform on which he could speak with authority to his officers.⁷ A leader who had not suffered with his men would likely not be able to directly influence or shape the outcome in the same way. It seems to be a natural corollary, that suffering and leadership are inextricably linked.

Suffering, and the process it entails, is literally pregnant with possibilities. This would appear to be counter intuitive at first, but it has nevertheless proven true in the lives of many leaders. It is to be acknowledged that current cultural trends attempt to avoid trouble at all cost. The current mantra of the western world might be summed up in the phrase: maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This is an essential element of the human condition, and understandable to a large extent. No one, generally speaking, seeks out pain or undue stress. No one wants to suffer. But, if our energy and focus as individuals and society is consumed by efforts to avoid pain at all costs, then it is we who are the lesser for it. Growth, and wisdom to a large extent, comes as a result of the challenges we face, not in spite of them.

Resilient leadership is most needed during times of crisis. The most fundamental challenge for those who exhibit this quality is the ability to recognize the true nature of a crisis and the hidden potential within it. Further, the resilient leader must possess the self-confidence (self-efficacy) to exploit hidden opportunities.⁸

Many athletes are familiar with the oft-repeated phrase: No pain, no gain. This phrase supports what coaches are trying to teach their athletes. Athletes must train hard, push through the mental and physical barriers, in order to achieve a greater outcome. This wisdom is applicable to overcoming adversity as well, even though it may again seem counter intuitive at times. The body is stretched, bruised, and even battered through demanding physical exercise. The body literally goes through an experience of suffering. But, it is in this way, and only in this way, that greater strength, stamina, and resilience are built up. When eye-hand coordination is included in the physical exercise, then other competencies are developed: throwing a football, shooting a basket, hitting a pitch. Suffering, voluntarily embraced, can lead not only to greater physical resilience, but also to increased capacities in other areas as well.

I vividly recall visiting a young Marine Corps officer with whom I had served. He was in a poly-trauma, rehabilitation unit. His convoy had encountered several improvised explosive devices. His command vehicle was decimated. His right leg had been amputated just below the knee. He was a natural athlete and a respected leader. He was quite surprised to see me as it had been a few years since we served together. As he began to tell me the story of what happened to him, he blurted out: "Chaps, I didn't think this could happen to me."⁹ I inquired about the pain, as he had just been fitted with a new prosthesis. He told me that it was a bigger hurdle than he had imagined it would be. He said that he was building up a tolerance to the pain, but only slowly, gradually, and with regular practice. Today, this young officer is again leading

the Marines he fought and served with. He serves as another example of a resilient leader who squarely faced his circumstances, determined that he was going to work through them, and experienced multiple layers of growth in the process. Mental health professionals encourage embracing this new normal as a fundamental step toward developing adaptive capacities.¹⁰ Many would categorically state that he is a better Marine, leader and person because of his recovery. His story is representative of many others. Stephen Joseph expressed a similar belief in his book, *What Doesn't Kill Us: The New Psychology of Posttraumatic Growth*.

The idea of transformation through trauma goes against the grain of all that is written about the devastating and destructive effects of trauma. Psychological studies have shown that adverse life-events are often the trigger for depression, anxiety, or posttraumatic stress. Psychiatrists, too, recognize that life-events such as serious illness, accident or injury, bereavement, and relationship breakdown can be threatening to mental health. What, then, are we to make of the stories of people who have encountered a life-threatening illness, a harrowing natural disaster, even a man-made horror, and then go on to tell of how it was a transformational turning point in their lives? Such stories seem to point to the truth of Nietzsche's dictum: "What doesn't kill me makes me stronger." But are these merely the articulations of the lucky few? Or can psychological trauma really have a silver lining for all of us? Surprisingly, the answer to this second question seems to be yes. Adversity, like the grit that creates the oyster, is often what propels people to become more true to themselves, taken on new challenges, and view life from a wider perspective.¹¹

Psychologist Victor Frankl is a hero to many. Stephen R. Covey, in the video presentation of his popular book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, describes the highlights of Frankl's life in a special adaptation developed for the Army Medical Command. Summarizing his argument below demonstrates the importance of suffering to developing leadership. Frankl was a brilliant Jewish psychologist from Austria. During World War II, Frankl, along with many of his family and friends, was rounded up and shipped off to the Nazi death camps. Under Nazi rule, Frankl was humiliated,

tortured, and barely survived his time in the camps. Ghastly experiments were performed on his own body. Frankl was a keen observer of his fellow prisoners. He noticed that some of his comrades were able to maintain their humanity throughout the ordeal, while others simply lost hope and gave up. He had grown up believing that human beings are simply a product of their environment. Frankl discovered that even in the midst of excruciating circumstances, people still have a choice to make as to their response. In fact, he said that this is what makes us uniquely human: the power to choose. Namely, that in between an action and our reaction there is a space. In that space lies the capacity to choose. We are not merely the products of our environment or circumstances, regardless of what others may do to us. During some of the darkest days in the concentration camps, Frankl would imagine himself lecturing to his students in Vienna. He thought about what he would teach them, what lessons he could share with them from what he had been through and witnessed. Frankl went on to write what has become a classic: *Man's Search for Meaning*, to describe the life lessons he learned in the death camp.¹² The following passage reflects the main argument of his book: man has agency for his own actions.

The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity-even under the most difficult circumstances-to add a deeper meaning to his life. He may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal. Here lies the chance for a man either to make use of or to forgo the opportunities of attaining the moral values that a difficult situation may afford him.¹³

Victor Frankl made a conscious effort to choose his own response, even in the midst of horrendous torture and a desperate situation. He refused to allow his captors to either take away his dignity, or determine his response to their actions. We see a similar

pattern at work in those American military personnel who survived the grueling years of confinement in the Hanoi Hilton. The leader who is resilient in the face of suffering is one who maintains his or her capacity to choose, while at the same time believing in the possibility of a brighter tomorrow, even when the future seems bleak. There is a dynamic mixture of realism and faith, or trust and hope, at work balancing both in a life giving and life affirming tension.

A young soldier came into my office during a particularly dreary, winter day. He walked with a limp, and I could tell that he was in some degree of pain. He was reluctant to talk. He had not spoken with anyone about his wartime experiences. He was personally responsible for ending the lives of many enemy insurgents. This weighed on him terribly. It was a heavy burden to bear, and at times felt overwhelming. He seldom slept much at night. He would dream of the enemy coming at him with lethal force. He himself was one of the few survivors of an ambush to his convoy. Despite his lingering survivor guilt, he wanted to know only two things from me. First, could God possibly forgive him for all that he had done and seen? And second, would the mental anguish ever end or get better? His life would never be the same again, he had come to grips with that reality, but would he ever have the same quality of life following the trauma of war? I was able to assure this young soldier, both from my own experience, and from years of counseling others like him, that yes, he could work through the pain, and surprisingly, even become a better, more whole person for it.¹⁴

In his groundbreaking work: *What Doesn't Kill Us: The New Psychology of Posttraumatic Growth*, Dr. Stephen Joseph introduced the concept of posttraumatic growth. His research was based on many years of scholarly study and scientific

research as well as counseling with those affected by trauma. His research was groundbreaking in many regards. He argued that this new field of study holds tremendous hope and promise for the treatment of future trauma patients.

Many survivors of trauma have experiences that haunt them for the rest of their lives, experiences they can never forget. They may struggle for many years with considerable psychological pain. The new psychology of posttraumatic growth does not deny this fact but, rather, simply recognizes that there is another side to the coin---that in the midst of great psychological pain there can also be new perspectives on life that are valuable to the survivor, including a new recognition of one's personal qualities and a deeper and more satisfying connection to others.¹⁵

Dr. Joseph articulates three essential principles for those who would embark on the journey of growth following their suffering.

The first is the recognition that life is uncertain and that things change. This amounts to a tolerance of uncertainty that, in turn, reflects the ability to embrace it as a fundamental tenet of human existence. The second is psychological mindfulness, which reflects self-awareness and an understanding of how one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are related to each other as well as a flexible attitude toward personal change. The third is the acknowledgment of personal agency, which entails a sense of responsibility for the choices one makes in life and an awareness that choices have consequences.¹⁶

Many practitioners of the helping professions: social workers, chaplains, mental health professionals, counselors; are skilled in the art of listening. They provide a safe place where those who have experienced suffering, and are often still suffering, can share their stories. Suffering may have been physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual in nature. The wounded individual is the one that determines if suffering has occurred even if the suffering is accepted or justified in a society. Suffering occurs when one transgresses a personal belief system and can take many forms. The wounded are trying to understand the violation of their beliefs. Many earnestly seek to discover the meaning or purpose behind their experiences. They need to have their unique

experiences and feelings validated by a caring, competent professional that they have grown to respect. But many are also desperately searching for some glimmer of hope, some ray of light that will illuminate their path so they can perhaps begin to take the next step. Dr. Joseph offered an interesting analogy as to why some people grow through trauma, while others remain the same, or even regress. He used the example of three trees which are violently shaken by a storm. The first tree does not bend to the wind. He labels this tree, and people who similarly do not bend after enduring a trauma as resistant. The second tree bends, but snaps back. These trees, and the people who bounce back from trauma, are said to recover. Surprisingly, it is the third tree which experiences growth following the trauma of the storm. The third tree, and associated group of people, is damaged, but new growth emerges as a result of the experience.¹⁷

The third group of people is permanently changed. He stated,

There is a group of people who, like the third tree, grow following adversity. They may remain emotionally affected, but their sense of self, views on life, priorities, goals for the future, and their behaviors have been reconfigured in positive ways in the light of their experiences. It is to these people that the term posttraumatic growth refers.¹⁸

Much of the current effort to assist those recovering from episodes of trauma and suffering is focused on the first two groups: those who are resistant and those who recover.¹⁹ The current literature on resilience is primarily focused on helping individuals to use their own unique strengths, along with various coping mechanisms, in order that they might become more resilient. Perhaps, based on Joseph's research, this approach does not go far enough. Perhaps the current model for resiliency only provides two legs of the stool-resistance and recovery? A third leg may need to be added to the stool called posttraumatic growth, which could enable both the acknowledgement of the injury, and support for realistic, abiding change.

Dr. Stephen Joseph's research may provide this third leg. He makes a strong case for the relatively new science of posttraumatic growth. He observes that growth is a distinct possibility for many average human beings. It is not limited to a remote category of above average intelligence. In fact, as Joseph points out, some level of stress is a necessity for growth to occur. This is illustrated above in the example of the third tree. His findings run counter to the prevailing view which claims that most trauma patients will inevitably face a life that is far less than what it could have been had the trauma not occurred. Trauma or suffering, by its' very nature, diminishes rather than enhances human capacities. Contrary to this prevailing view, expert opinion suggests that this fairly new avenue of psychological study (posttraumatic growth) is able to offer realistic hope to those who have suffered trauma. This field potentially can assist various trauma victims of war, natural disaster, or other elements. Suffering is not the final word, but may actually serve as the mechanism towards an enhanced life. Joseph represents this in his book, *What Doesn't Kill Us: The New Psychology of Posttraumatic Growth*.

A frequent misunderstanding about posttraumatic growth is that it is the opposite of posttraumatic stress, and that those of us studying growth are claiming naively that traumatized people do not suffer posttraumatic stress or any other psychological difficulties. But posttraumatic growth does not imply that the person is free from posttraumatic stress. Indeed, as already mentioned, posttraumatic growth seems to go hand in hand with posttraumatic stress.

People who report growth are often deeply distressed and also experiencing posttraumatic stress. Growth emerges through their emotional struggle. One is reminded of Bobby Kennedy, who, while giving a speech the night of Martin Luther King's assassination, quoted the poet Aeschylus: "He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God." Research backs this up. Studies have shown that higher levels of posttraumatic stress are often associated with higher levels of growth.

Initially, some degree of posttraumatic stress is actually necessary for positive change to arise. Posttraumatic stress seems to be the engine that drives psychological growth following adversity.²⁰

Now examine the effects of trauma in the life of General Ulysses S. Grant. What were the components of his suffering, how did he cope with these experiences, and what ultimately led him to overcome life's adversities? William S. McFeely, in his book *Grant: A Biography*, argued that Grant's relationship with his father was certainly a source of difficulty and frustration. Grant never seemed to measure up in the eyes of his father: Jesse. It was obvious to Jesse that his son did not have the aptitude or desire to pursue the family business of acquiring, tanning, and selling hides. In order to establish his boy's future, Jesse secured an appointment for him to West Point. Even though Grant graduated, and later excelled in the Mexican-American War, he still this was never quite good enough for Jesse. Grant also was pressured from his wife to both maintain a certain standard of living, and to establish himself as a success. While Grant was stationed out west, alone and miserable, with Julia and their young son back east, the evidence points to the darkness and despair that overwhelmed Grant. By all accounts, he began to drink, even heavily some believe. Today this would be labeled self-medicating. It may have been Grant's way of numbing the emotional pain, rejection, and deep loneliness he must have felt. This issue with drinking would shadow him for the rest of his life. In what was certainly an act of desperation, what psychologists would today label a cry for help, Grant tendered his resignation from the Army and headed back east. His father offered him a position in the family business, but insisted that Grant would have to leave his wife and young children behind in order to accept the opportunity in Galena. This Ulysses refused to do. He decided to try his luck

with his wife's side of the family, and instead moved to Missouri.²¹ McFeely used Grant's letters as a source of insight to the general's feelings. He argued,

At thirty-seven Grant had to go back and admit that he was still a failure: the boy who could not bargain for a horse had become a man who could not bring in a crop of potatoes or collect a batch of bills. It was humiliating. The letter he wrote to Julia on March 14, 1860, describing his return to his father's dominion, makes exceedingly distressing reading.²²

After failing at farming on land that belonged to his wife's father, and failing again in a collection business following this, he finally returned to Jesse, humiliated and humbled. Grant knew only too well the pain and anguish of suffering and failure. This time, Grant's father agreed that he could take his wife and family to make a new start in Galena. When the War broke out, Grant attempted to renew his commission in the Army. He wrote the War Department, never receiving a reply, and tried unsuccessfully to see General McClellan on more than one attempt. Finally, the governor of Illinois appointed him to a colonel's post.

Grant leading the Twenty-first Illinois west from Camp Yates may have overcome his earlier reservations about taking a volunteer regiment, but his father had experienced no such change of heart. Jesse, with his unerring instinct for the best way to cut his son down, suggested that in taking the command, Ulysses once again had not done as well as he should have.²³

Even when Grant was later promoted to general, he wrote in a letter to his wife Julia that hopefully his father would now agree that the failure, being Grant himself, had managed to come out all right.

As summer came in 1865, Grant could look back with satisfaction on a job well done. Time and again, Grant had faced adversity. Sometimes it came on the battlefield: the counterattack at Belmont, the breakout at Donelson, the surprise at Shiloh, the challenge of Vicksburg, the grapple in the Wilderness, the disasters at Cold Harbor and Petersburg, the stalemate of the summer of 1864. Sometimes it came from circumstances: separation from his wife and children, a continuing struggle with a reputation as a worthless alcoholic, an inability to make ends meet no matter how hard he

tried. Sometimes it came from adversaries who wore the same uniform: Robert Buchanan, Halleck, Rosecrans, McLennan, and the officer corps of the Army of the Potomac. Sometimes it even came from Abraham Lincoln himself, as the president juggled political and military priorities, contemplated Grant's replacement, or worried about the general's political ambitions. And on occasion it came from his father-in-law or, most dauntingly, his own father. In each case he may have struggled, worried, even become discouraged and depressed-but he had prevailed.²⁴

Grant's contemporaries bear witness to his abiding air of self-confidence, his innate capacity to surmise a military situation, and his plain old common sense. He became a trusted, military leader not only in the hearts of his men, but even more so in the eyes of those closest to him.²⁵

Ulysses S. Grant clearly suffered at the hands of both friends and foe alike, including the pain he inflicted on himself. Grant's chroniclers and his own memoirs point out that he overcame many adversities in his life. Out of this struggle, he developed the character trait of perseverance that would bear fruit to the very end of his life. Grant learned to control his emotions and himself. He was able to remain calm, even under extreme pressure. This proved to be critical to his success as a leader in combat. He personally knew what it was to have nothing else to lose, and this may have given him the strength behind his ability to form and take calculated risks. Grant's own posttraumatic stress led to immeasurable posttraumatic growth. To his great credit, he never assumed the role of victim through all his trials and tribulations, even when he was tempted to do so, and it may have been understandably justified. This is a critical observation. He relied on his own support group. He relied upon his wife, his children, and the companionship of a few close friends. He was known to have an almost childlike playfulness with his children. He valued the truth and retained friends like his subordinate Rawlins, which were brutally honest. He was a patriot at heart, and

reflected deeply on the interplay between politics and military strategy. He was also gullible, and an easy target for swindlers. He openly acknowledged these things in his memoirs. Grant's life demonstrates the principles of the philosopher Nietzsche, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger".²⁶ Or, as Saint Paul would write, "Suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint."²⁷

The aforementioned examples illustrate that overcoming adversity and working through suffering, is not only possible, but that it has the capacity to both enhance and enlarge our lives. Great leaders have experienced great suffering and loss. This perspective is contrary to much of the current thinking on the subject. Nevertheless the evidence is strong in both psychological study and personal testimony. Still, there remains an element of mystery as to why some are able to overcome adversity while others are crushed by it. Some run away from suffering, while others learn from it. George S. Everly and Douglas A. Strouse have studied the concept of leadership for many years and have written extensively on it. They have recovered an age old piece of wisdom for our modern ears.

But adversity is the true test of leadership: some of life's most valuable lessons emerge from it.... In short, we believe the mystery of resilient leadership is revealed, not in the best of times, but in the worst of times-in times of crisis, even during times of initial defeat. From this perspective, we show how great leaders can help us rebound from adversity, and perhaps even more importantly, how leadership can help us adapt to the threat of adversity proactively, before it causes irreparable damage.²⁸

Further, Everly and Strouse go on to summarize the essential concepts which are woven into the soul of the resilient leader. These character traits have been shaped on the anvil of suffering. They are exercised by those whose capacity for leadership has

been significantly enlarged by the adversity they have overcome. They are individuals, great and small, who have earned the right to lead others, including themselves.

We first discovered these covenants of resilient leadership in the ancient Chinese manuals of war. The great military strategist Sun Tzu wrote of leadership in crisis about 500 BC. His principles are simple yet powerful:

Be decisive. Vacillation saps the strength of any army.

If action is necessary, make it swift. Act boldly; no one benefits from protracted conflict of ambivalent leadership.

The foundation for decisive action must be trust and devotion. Follow the law of morality, Sun Tzu wrote. "Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look on them as your own beloved son, and they will stand by you even unto death."²⁹

Endnotes

¹ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, Second Da Capo Press Edition (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001), xix.

² Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 461-462.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, (New York: Free Press, A Division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1996), 352.

⁵ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *A Leader's Legacy*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 13-18.

⁶ George S. Everly, Jr., Douglas A. Strouse, and George S. Everly, III, *The Secrets of Resilient Leadership: When Failure is not an Option---Six Essential Skills for Leading through Adversity*, (New York: DiaMedica Publishing, 2010), 22-23.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁹ Confidential Patient-Chaplain Counseling Session, interview by author, February 2010.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs: National Center for PTSD, <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/pages/ptsd-overview.asp> (accessed March 22, 2012), Article on PTSD: History and Overview by Dr. Matthew J. Friedman.

¹¹ Stephen Joseph, *What Doesn't Kill Us: The New Psychology of Posttraumatic Growth*, (New York: Basic Books, 2011), xi-xii.

¹² Franklin Covey, *Providing Outreach While Enhancing Readiness (POWER): Caring for the Caregiver*, (U.S.A.: Franklin Covey, 2009) Developed for the Army Medical Command.

¹³ Stephen Joseph, *What Doesn't Kill Us: The New Psychology of Posttraumatic Growth*, (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 11-12.

¹⁴ Confidential Patient-Chaplain Counseling Session, interview with author, September 2010.

¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷ Ibid., 67-68.

¹⁸ Ibid., 67-68.

¹⁹ Much of the current effort? Says who? Add citation

²⁰ Ibid., 85.

²¹ William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1952), 64.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 80.

²⁴ Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 455-456.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Nietzsche

²⁷ Romans 5:3-4.

²⁸ George S. Everly, Jr., Douglas A. Strouse, and George S. Everly, III, *The Secrets of Resilient Leadership: When Failure is not an Option---Six Essential Skills for Leading through Adversity*, (New York: Dia Medica Publishing, 2010), xiv.

²⁹ Ibid., 7.