



*Christine Riffel Herbel*

DeLayne, Chris, Landon, Carson, and Erich Herbel hiking the native Konza Prairie, near Manhattan, Kansas.

Grit. Recently, a group of our elementary school teachers completed a book study on *How Children Succeed* by Paul Tough. One significant trait in successful children and adults is determination or *grit*. The word may bring to mind John Wayne's 1969 movie *True Grit*, or maybe you think of sand in your eye. The Bible is full of men and women who possessed true grit. They persevered through very tough situations, and by doing so, benefitted the larger group for success. This week, we'll take a look at a few grit-worthy people from the Bible and from our nation's history.

Here in central Kansas we have experienced severe drought for the last two years. In February 2013, we were blessed with 20 inches of snow within several days. The dusty and parched ground soaked up the moisture-laden heavy snows. My husband, DeLayne, and I (along with our children: Landon, a college junior; Erich, a high school senior; and Carson, a high school freshman) live on the farm home place that has been in his family over 75 years. We worship at First Baptist Church of Durham. I teach elementary school in Hillsboro, where I daily work to build grit in hopes of developing strong leaders for our world.

*BIBLE READING: Genesis 45:4-11*

Imagine being in Egypt when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. Joseph told them not to blame themselves for selling him, that God was behind it and had sent him ahead to ensure a remnant remained in the land. Joseph's grit helped save his people.

Joseph's story is similar to a situation within the history of Lewis and Clark and Sacagawea, epitomes of grit. It was August 1805, and the travelers were at a grim point. Ahead was the most imposing landscape they had ever encountered—the jagged peaks of the Continental Divide. Boats could no longer be their transportation; they needed horses. The group encountered the Shoshone who had horses for purchase, but dealings between parties were not going well. Sacagawea interpreted, attempting to persuade the Shoshone chief to help them. Suddenly during the heated discussion, her voice became emotional and she spoke directly to the chief. Like Joseph, Sacagawea had been taken from her people as a young child, and she now realized this chief was her brother, Cameawait! With this turn of events, the explorers could acquire horses, while without, the mission could have ended.

True accounts of grit-worthy people like Joseph and Sacagawea make it easier to remember that when a situation is unpleasant, a greater good for a larger people may be found just around the corner, or realized in years to come.

*SONG: Trust and Obey*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Keeper, don't let me be discouraged when all seems lost. Give me determination to keep going. Sometimes when things seem to be falling apart, they may actually be falling into place. Amen.*

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*BIBLE READING: Nehemiah 2:1-9*

What kind of working relationship do you have with your boss or employees? Nehemiah, a Jew in Babylon, was a cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes. It had been about one hundred years since other Jews had returned to Jerusalem. Apparently, the king and Nehemiah saw each other daily and had some verbal interaction. One day, when Nehemiah brought the wine, the king noticed Nehemiah was obviously upset about something. Nehemiah responded with steadfastness, telling the king about his broken heart because his ancestral home was in ruin. The next thing said is the king asking Nehemiah what he wants! Up to this point, Nehemiah had not yet asked for anything. Could the king have noticed a sense of purpose in Nehemiah, one that led the king to offer him anything? Could the king have liked Nehemiah because of Nehemiah's steady confidence, grit, and strong work ethic?

Nehemiah asked to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and gates. If you read carefully, you'll notice that it's written in first person. Nehemiah exerts great humility in his asking, always putting the king's needs first. Then the king wisely inquires as to how long Nehemiah would be gone, knowing a replacement would have to be found.

King Artaxerxes grants Nehemiah's wish, but that's not all. Nehemiah asks again with great humility for safe-conduit and timber. King Artaxerxes grants his wishes, *and* he throws in his personal royal army of officers as well as a cavalry to protect the cupbearer! And so Nehemiah starts the journey back home.

*SONG: Rivers of Babylon*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Great Master, when I work at completing any task, help me work with resolve as working for you, Lord, not for human masters. Amen.*

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*BIBLE READING: Nehemiah 2:11-18*

Nehemiah uses great leadership skills, and his grit strengthens men around him. He and his army have just arrived from far-off Babylon to the rubble of Jerusalem. Does he rush in? No, Nehemiah *stops*. He needs time to assimilate the chaos before him. Then, leaving the entourage, he secretly takes a few of his closest men to assess the damage by night on his mount—no grand entrance.

Nehemiah begins to figure out how he could accomplish the grand task of rebuilding the walls. The group strategically enters the obscure section of Jerusalem—the sewage area. Nehemiah *thinks*. Stealthily winding through the streets on foot, Nehemiah quietly takes stock of what needs to be repaired, and his plan is realized.

Only then does Nehemiah reveal the reason for coming. And Nehemiah *asks*. He asks those living in the area to join him in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, describing how God’s gracious hand has been on him and the king’s support is behind them. The men rally and reply with true grit, “Let us start rebuilding!” Despite great ridicule from neighboring enemies, the work is completed in a miraculous 52 days. Everyone acknowledges the effort was completed with the help of the Almighty God, who receives the glory.

Thank you, Nehemiah, for being humble, thinking creatively, exhibiting grit, strategically planning, and successfully enlisting the team. “Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened” (Billy Graham).

*SONG: Through It All*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Great Grit-giver, when you give me a large project, remind me that I don’t do it alone. You are merely using me as your hands to complete the task. Amen.*

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*BIBLE READING: Acts 20:24*

Each year, a neighboring town hosts a women's 5K run that draws over a thousand women of all ages. This last year, we all saw true grit and determination at its best. I had finished the race but was unable to stay for the awards ceremony afterwards. Pulling out of my parking stall, I found myself in a long line of vehicles also waiting to get away early—but we couldn't leave! Officials were stopping traffic and not letting anyone out of the parking lot until the last runners had finished the race!

I was about five cars back. Knowing I was going to be very late for my appointment, I got out of my car and walked up to a race official who said it would be about five more minutes. Finally, we were waved on. I was very upset and felt a little self-righteous—I had trained harder and had run faster, and I shouldn't have had to wait for the slower walkers.

Then as I pulled out I beheld an amazing sight: a 94-year-old woman was walking as fast as she could, pushing her walker along the road! She was apologizing to everyone for being so slow. As I drove by her, I cheered her on. My friends who stayed until the end shared with me how all the runners gathered at the end to encourage and cheer her across the finish line.

That day we experienced true grit. We were so encouraged by this older woman's commitment to staying fit and working out, no matter her age.

*SONG: Each Step I Take*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, thank you for humbling me. Help me be an example of endurance and stamina in my Christian walk. Amen.*

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*BIBLE READING: Luke 12:48b; 1 Corinthians 1:7*

“There is no happier place than where God’s will and our giftedness meet!” I love this quote by Veggie Tales creator, Phil Vischer. Daily I pray for our three sons. I pray that they would discover what they enjoy doing and learn to become very good at it, to be able to better our world. I pray for them to have perseverance and grit. But teaching children the concept of delayed gratification isn’t easy. They want the rewards now—instant benefits. We constantly seem to be telling our children that all that studying they are doing until late at night—sticking with it—will eventually pay off.

In Paul Tough’s book *How Children Succeed*, he talks about the non-academic skills children need to possess in order to be successful in school and in life. Among those skills are: curiosity, self-discipline, conscientiousness, and grit (or perseverance) when the going gets tough. God has given each of us unique, specific gifts. When we fully use our God-given gifts, we will undoubtedly run into walls, problems, and roadblocks. Does this mean that we are out of God’s will? Or do we just need to keep praying, seeking God, and moving forward?

We have been given gifts from God that are for us to develop and use for his ultimate glory. Expect to pull a lot of grit from your back pocket. And don’t forget to pull from the Source who created this world—God the Father. By doing so, the world will be a better place.

*SONG: It Only Takes a Spark (Pass It On)*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Beautiful Creator, you fashioned your Son as a gift to me. Continue to show me ways I can be more Christlike, using the gifts and talents you’ve given me to create and give in your name. Amen.*

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*BIBLE READING: Romans 8:26*

It would be easy to deduce that in order to really possess true grit, one must be self-sufficient and never ask for assistance. But I truly believe we do not walk our journey of life alone. We need encouragers and helpers around us.

When our son was in Boy Scouts, he attended a survival weekend of camping in January, a weekend only for those with grit. Kansas was experiencing record lows. He had made it through the day, and when night fell, he took off his boots to settle into his sleeping bag. But he forgot one thing: to take off his socks. The small amount of sweating in boots leaves stocking feet slightly damp. Mix that with below-freezing temperatures, and feet turn cold very quickly. Cold feet equals cold body. As brave and enduring as Landon wanted to be, it wasn't until the middle of the night that he finally realized he needed help. No amount of grit would warm him up. His pack leader got him to the medical tent, and his body temperatures came back to normal. We were contacted, and soon Landon was home enjoying a bowl of hot chili and a warm bath.

As Christians, we want to be courageous and do our best to live life with gusto and grit. But we should remember that we need encouragers. We need that cheering squad to help us stay on the right path and keep us going when life brings hardships. Do you accept those moments when grit is not enough? Receiving help from others allows them a chance to give. After all, God designed it that way.

*SONG: Throw Out the Lifeline*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Mighty Protector, when I've braved the weather and fallen, I know you are always there to pick me up. Amen.*

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*BIBLE READING: Psalm 91:9-14*

As I was growing up, our family's priorities were God, family, education, and travel. We did a lot of camping. In 1968, Dad and Mom took us to the Great Salt Plains in Oklahoma. Toward evening, the radio cautioned of approaching severe thunderstorms. With his loudspeaker the park ranger advised campers to securely tie down belongings. I never felt we were in danger. As the sun set, my brother, David, and I were playing along the lake's edge. A neighboring camper saw the water moccasin snakes swimming around our ankles. Within seconds, Mom was running to our rescue.

Then the rain and fierce wind cut loose. Tornadoes were headed our way. The ranger was helping everyone evacuate. With grit, I clearly remember helping haul the heaving, drenched, cotton canvas tent into our Chevy Caprice trunk. Thoroughly soaked, we drove away into the stormy night.

Dad was getting sleepy while driving in the night while I stood on the hump on the backseat floor (this was before child car seats), praying Dad would stay awake. God provides in the most unique ways. We pulled into a coffee shop, and there was Dad's brother whose railroad crew had stopped at a nearby train depot. Meeting his brother and finishing off the strong coffee helped Dad get a second wind, and he got us home safely.

The One True God not only provided our safety, but also brought together Uncle Kenneth and Dad at that bright spot in the night. God provides direction, guidance, and protection; the Son is our Bright Light in the night.

*SONG: God Will Take Care of You*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Lord you provide those "angels in the night" when we least expect them. Thank you for your protection when we need it most. Amen.*

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