

BOUNCE

Learning to
THRIVE
through Loss, Tragedy,
and Heartache

AARON FRÜH



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Aaron Fruh, *Bounce*
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For Nora

Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except
bull-fighters.

Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*

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PART 1

The Keys to Resilience Are within You

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1

Matthew Lawson's Paper Plates

Strength is not created by adversity; it is merely awakened by it.

Mark Eddy Smith, *Tolkien's Ordinary Virtues: Exploring the Spiritual Themes of the Lord of the Rings*

Matthew Lawson lived and died without much fanfare. The only proof I have of his existence is a worn-out photograph from the 1960s and a story. The photo is of Matthew, standing in front of his desk piled high with history books and wearing an Indiana Jones–style hat, leather jacket, and a holster around his waist, with a six-shooter in hand and a sly half smile simmering on his lips. An old oil portrait of an Apache Indian chief hangs on the wall behind him. The colors of Matthew Lawson's photograph all seem to have merged with age. Polaroid, perhaps? It's not such a great picture, but the story, well, that's something else. When I heard it, it stopped me in my tracks.

Matthew Lawson's life can be summed up by one thing he did every summer, year after year, without fail. Imagine your life story

being framed by one action that left such a deep impression on others they would repeat it often, with enthusiasm. This one unique thing still has people talking and reminiscing about him—and still trying to figure out why he did it.

Matthew Lawson's story plays out in the wildlands of Mexico, where he went to live each summer. Every July he compelled his wife and three children to leave their comfortable home in Arizona and trek across the border to join him. Friends also joined the family from as far away as Ohio. Every summer, year after year, they followed Matthew Lawson into the wilderness.

To find the perfect camp for the large entourage, Matthew Lawson would cross the border early and alone. Family and friends knew the region where Matthew prepared their shelter but never the exact location.

With no cell phone to communicate his whereabouts, Matthew Lawson would drive stakes along the dirt roads and attach white paper plates as directional signs. As the sojourners got closer to their destination, so did the space between the plates. The story is fascinating because of the three letters Matthew Lawson wrote on each plate. Those three letters written on cheap paper plates represent three of the most inspiring words ever penned, words that challenged their readers to commit themselves to resilience no matter their circumstances. These three letters inspired his family and friends to keep forging down the trail despite any fear of wild beasts or getting lost. As long as they saw the three letters, they knew they were going to make it through the wilderness and eventually find Matthew Lawson.

The Wisdom in Three Simple Letters

The simple letters on those paper plates would impact the lives of Matthew Lawson's three children so deeply that they would become models of resilience, rebounding through those wilderness

seasons when all they had was a dusty road and three letters to hold on to. His children taught the meaning of those three letters to their children, and they also taught it to me.

I never met Matthew Lawson. He passed away twenty-five years ago. I am sure greater stories have been told about resilience but I was captivated by his story and the three letters that anchor it. What would drive a man to draw his family into unknown wilderness? What kind of a man takes the time to write three letters on twenty or thirty paper plates, attach them to wooden stakes, and then hammer the stakes alongside some dusty back roads? Either Matthew Lawson was a wild-eyed, crazed adventurer or he was doing the one thing, if done regularly and often enough, that would cause his children to understand an important life principle. In the end, it would be the greatest thing they would remember about him.

And what are the three letters? POR. These three letters represent words so powerful that if you will follow their encouraging, even commanding, declaration, you, too, will become a model of resilience, never being held back by discouragement, loss, or circumstances no matter how difficult your wilderness experience.

The three words are *Press On Regardless*. With POR, Matthew Lawson taught his kids to keep moving through the wilderness and refuse to get stuck there by pressing on regardless of fear, difficulty, or fatigue. A wise man once said, "If you're going through hell, keep going." Matthew Lawson taught his children one of the most profound lessons of life: how to remain resilient in the face of struggle or pain. *Resilience* is the time-tested truth that we can all bounce back better and stronger after a traumatic loss—if we will just keep pressing on regardless.

In our world today, this truth needs to be examined and investigated once again. It's worrisome that we have become a generation who has lost the raw nerve to keep going when we've hit bottom.

That's why I love Matthew Lawson's story! This story first unfolded to me when I overheard his daughter say, "POR!" when she was facing a tough life challenge. "POR?" I inquired. "Press on regardless!" she shot back.

I have no idea where Matthew Lawson first heard the words *press on regardless*. Because he loved history—military history, to be exact—some say he borrowed the phrase from the Royal British Air Force (RAF). The famous Battle of Britain was fought in the air, and the Brits were severely outnumbered by the Nazi Luftwaffe. Those three encouraging words, *press on regardless*, were used by British commanders to inspire pilots and crews to guide their planes through enemy fire, poor weather conditions, and miles of territory often traveled with low fuel reserves.

So maybe Matthew Lawson borrowed the phrase from British military history. Or maybe he just made it up himself. I don't know how he came to use these three standout words, but he certainly created a one-of-a-kind story around them. Where will POR lead us? Let's find out.

Our Path toward Resilience

In this book we are going to investigate how we can rebound from the traumas of life and bounce back stronger, happier, and wiser than before. The truth Matthew Lawson taught his children with a black marker and paper plates in the barren landscape of the desert can be your truth as well. You too can learn the exhilarating wonder of character that allows you to be knocked down at times but come back stronger than ever.

Sadly, many never quite make it through suffering the shock of loss. They are stuck somewhere in the middle of a parentheses. The emotional devastation loss brings is a game changer. Loss has stolen initiative from myriads of souls: rich, poor, big, small, great intellects, and simpletons. Loss is no respecter of persons. Most

likely you picked up this book or someone gave it to you because you have suffered a setback.

Like many others, you may have experienced a financial loss in these days of worldwide economic uncertainty. Perhaps you've lost a business or retirement portfolio. Maybe you've confronted a setback in your career and now you're working two jobs. You may even have joined the unemployment lines. Or, with all of the outside pressure on families, your marriage may have suffered a breakup and you're mourning the disintegration of your home. Perhaps you've lost a loved one through sickness, tragic accident, or suicide.

In all honesty, you may be thinking you're not able to rebound this time. Game over. You may be reading these pages and are already thinking of checking out. I encourage you to finish this book before you sell your business, leave your marriage, quit the ministry, or make a rash decision because you are clouded by the pain of the moment. One of my favorite lines from the Bible is, "And it came to pass."



This book is organized into three parts. In part 1, you will discover that you have been wonderfully designed for resilience, you will learn how to reframe your perspective of loss, and you will discover three powerful questions whose honest answers will inspire you to begin the journey back to the land of the living. In part 2 you will look at four resilience blockers and how to defeat them. Be prepared for intense work, honesty, and transparency in this section, because fortified obstacles to resilience don't budge easily. Highlighting part 3 are four ways to activate your comeback.

And, by the way, you are coming back, I promise you. I can make this promise because the core principle of this book—that you can bounce back from life's painful losses—is actually a deeply rooted idea that comes straight from God's heart to us through

His Word, the Bible. We will discover the far-reaching significance of the biblical call to a resilient life throughout this book, but first let's consider two statements from the apostle Paul:

Not that I am saying this to call attention to any need of mine; since, as far as I am concerned, I have learned to be content *regardless of circumstances*. I know what it is to be in want, and I know what it is to have more than enough—in everything and in every way I have learned the secret of being full and being hungry, of having abundance and being in need. (Phil. 4:11–12 CJB, emphasis added)

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I *press on* toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (3:13–14 NIV, emphasis added)

In the first passage, Paul lets us in on his secret of dealing with the reality of loss: he has learned to be content regardless of circumstances. This is a penetrating statement. It tells me the brash tenacity it takes to press on regardless is not something you are born with but rather something you learn. Pressing on regardless of circumstances had nothing to do with Paul's personality but was a part of his character, learned over time through his relationship with Christ. This is great news because the belief that people are resilient by nature is simply not true. We will uncover this fallacy in our next chapter and discover the encouraging reality that the rebounding spirit is available for everyone!

In the second passage, Paul tells us he disregards the failures and mistakes of his past, forgetting what is behind and pressing on. He is saying, "Whatever happened to you yesterday, whatever loss you endured, press on regardless." The word translated "press" in Greek is *dioko*, and it means "to pursue by speeding on earnestly." The word translated "goal" or "mark" in Greek is *skopos*. Paul

is using athletic terms from the Olympic games. As the runners raced they “pressed on” by speeding earnestly toward the *skopos*, the rectangular pillar at the far end of the Roman coliseum. They focused their eyes on the *skopos* rather than turning their heads and looking behind in order to see if they were winning or losing. The runners were trained to focus on the *skopos* and press on regardless of their status in the race. Paul’s *skopos* was God’s call upon his life, his personal destiny.

My prayer for you is that by the end of this book you will learn Paul’s secret of bouncing back from life’s perils and pitfalls and focus your eyes once again on the *skopos*, reaching your personal God-ordained destiny. Paul learned how to press on regardless, and so can you! So, if you will permit me to be your Matthew Lawson, I have a black marker, a stack of paper plates, some wooden stakes, and a hammer. I would be honored to lead you across the border. Will you take this journey with me and learn the joys of bouncing back?

In our next chapter, I’m going to introduce you to a children’s storybook character you may have more in common with than you think.

POR!

BOUNCE TAKEAWAY:

Reflect on Your Own Story

1. Who is the most resilient person you have ever met?
2. What lesson did this person teach you about resilience?
3. Are issues from your past (a failure that has opened the door to shame, a tragedy, a loss, a heartache that has left you clawing for answers) keeping you from pressing on regardless? What are these issues?

As we begin this study on resilience I encourage you to purchase a journaling book. On the cover write: “My Bounce Journal.” Your first challenge begins with writing these words on the first page of your bounce journal: “Bounce Challenge #1” (there will be twelve bounce challenges, so you can write this headline for each challenge and number them accordingly).



BOUNCE CHALLENGE #1

I will press on regardless of . . . List all of the things that come to your mind that are keeping you from bouncing back.