

Study Guide: The Power of Vulnerability by Brene Brown (TED)

Online Video: www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html

Study guide compiled by Tim Tedder, LMHC, NCC | CurrentsCounseling.com

1. Dr. Brown makes this statement about relational connection: "Connection is why we're here; it's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives."

Reflection...

- *Do you agree, or disagree?*
- *Consider the importance of personal connection in the following stages of your life. What would you say about your need, longing, and experience of connection in each stage?*
The beginning of your life...
Your childhood...
Adolescence...
Adulthood ...
Imagine what connection might mean to you in the last year of your life...

2. In her research, Dr. Brown found the thing that "unraveled connection" was shame. She made the following statements about shame:

- Shame can be understood as the fear of disconnection; the fear that there is something about me that makes others consider me unworthy of connection.
- Shame is universal. We all have it. The only people who don't experience shame have no capacity for human empathy or connection.
- No one wants to talk about shame, and the less you talk about it, the more you have it.
- Shame is expressed in the feeling of "I'm not _____ enough" (good enough, thin enough, rich enough, beautiful enough, smart enough, promoted enough, etc.).

Reflection...

- *Are you aware of the things you feared as a child, adolescent, adult?*
- *Were any of those fears linked to thoughts of "I'm not _____ enough"? How did/do you fill in that blank?*
- *Did this affect your relationship connections? If so, how?*

3. Dr. Brown's research indicated what separated people who experience a strong sense of love and belonging from those who struggle for it is this: "The people who have a strong sense of love and belonging *believe they're worthy of it.*" When studying the data collected from these "whole-hearted" people, she discovered they had these things in common:

- **Courage:** (Original definition: telling who you are with your whole heart.) They had the courage to be imperfect.
- **Compassion:** They were kind to themselves and to others.
- **Connection:** Their connections were rooted in authenticity (letting go of who they thought they should be in order to be who they were).
- **Vulnerability:** They embraced vulnerability as something that was necessary for connection. (Examples of vulnerability: asking someone for help, initiating sex, being turned down, waiting for the doctor to call back, getting laid off, laying off people)

Reflection...

- *Consider these qualities: the courage to be imperfect, genuine kindness, authenticity, vulnerability. In what ways are these evident in you? In what ways are they lacking?*
- *What makes you feel most vulnerable in relationships? (Think about what you tend to avoid.)*

4. Dr. Brown defined the the following strategies we use in our attempt to eliminate or minimize the feeling of vulnerability:

- We NUMB it (e.g., over-spending, over-eating, over-medicating). The problem is, we cannot selectively numb our emotions. When we numb negative feelings (vulnerability, grief, shame, fear, disappointment) we numb positive ones, too (joy, gratitude, happiness, love).
- We make things CERTAIN. We don't leave room for ambiguity or uncertainty in our opinions and beliefs.
- We PERFECT. We attempt to remove or replace perceived imperfections in our lives and in our children's lives.
- We PRETEND. We act as though we are not responsible for the way our lives affect others instead of accepting responsibility, especially when we have caused hurt.

Reflection...

- *Which of these do you tend to use most often?*
- *List some examples of the ways you've used that strategy in order to minimize feelings of personal vulnerability.*
- *Are you aware of ways in which those choices and behaviors have had negative impact on any relationships? If so, how?*

5. Dr. Brown suggests "another way" of dealing with vulnerability:

- To let ourselves be seen, deeply and vulnerably.
- To love with our whole hearts, even when there is no guarantee.
- To practice gratitude and joy, even in moments of fear and uncertainty.
- To believe "I am enough."

Reflection...

- *Do any of these challenges stir a longing in you to be more like that? If so, take the risk of being vulnerable and TALK about it with someone.*
- *Do you believe, "I am enough"? What does that mean? What hinders that belief? What helps that belief? Do your spiritual beliefs have any impact? If so, how?*
- *Think of an important relationship in your life. What is one specific, measurable thing you can do within the next 24 hours that would be an act of vulnerability in that relationship? Will you do it?*