

Deep Change (Week 5) - Vulnerability is the Path
Yesterday's Sermon - In 10 Bullet Points or Less

Deep Change 6 - Vulnerability is the Path:

1) American culture has a complicated relationship with strength and weakness: we prize strength but much of how we present and discuss it rings hollow, while we hide weakness at all cost.

2) As with so many other things, Christianity will transform how you see both: as United Church of Christ pastor Kenneth Samuel writes, "For many years of my life, I thought that the portrayal of power meant the downplaying of weakness. I gravitated toward...depictions of Christianity that promulgated proclamations of spiritual invincibility. But I've come to realize that a spotlight on victory without the corresponding reality of vulnerability was not a true representation of my own experience. There is no strength without struggle. It is precisely the acknowledgement of my own struggles and weaknesses that has given me the power to connect with the struggles and weaknesses of others, and this shared compassion...is precisely what fuels authentic community. It is true that only bruised hands can bless. Only a broken heart can even hear the hurts of others."

3) The point at which strength and weakness meet, or from which both are birthed, is vulnerability.

4) According to Brene Brown, one of the world's greatest researchers on vulnerability, vulnerability is best defined as a feeling of risk, uncertainty, and emotional openness or exposure. Thus, vulnerability is neither good nor bad, it just is. To be human is to be vulnerable.

5) Renowned American Christian author Madeleine L'Engle draws the same conclusion this way: "When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability...To be alive is to be vulnerable."

6) Brene Brown notes that we all have our own tried-and-true ways of avoiding our own feelings of vulnerability: we numb ourselves, we "armor up" (in her great turn of phrase), we deny our own weakness, we feign certainty when we are not, we seek to control all that we can, even though it's never enough to make us feel secure, and, if all else fails, we blame others for our vulnerability. Biblically, all of these tendencies, and even some of the verbiage itself, is part of what we label "sin" (human brokenness).



7) She concludes that the pathway to the life we really want to experience is vulnerability. We first must acknowledge and own how our feelings of vulnerability, good, bad, or otherwise. What we do not own up to ends up owning us. As we do, we then can choose to show up to the people and places in our lives being incomplete and even unsure, but still ready to engage fully.

8) We need to remember that, as she puts it, "the cradle of all we crave - like love, creativity, adventure, belonging, and connection - is vulnerability." To choose not to risk is to choose against all the best things in life, and certainly to choose against the life of faith.

9) Churches, like KirkWood, can choose to be safe place - maybe the only safe place in America 2024 - in which people can be vulnerable, unsure, incomplete, and even afraid together. This defines real Christian community.

10) To conclude, Irish philosopher and poet David Whyte agrees with Brene Brown's research when he writes, "Vulnerability is not a weakness, a passing indisposition, or something we can arrange to do without, vulnerability is not a choice, vulnerability is the underlying, ever present and abiding under-current of our natural state. To run from vulnerability is to run from the essence of our nature, the attempt to be invulnerable is the vain attempt to be something we are not and most especially, to close off our understanding of the grief of others. More seriously, refusing our vulnerability we refuse the help needed at every turn of our existence...The only choice we have as we mature is how we inhabit our vulnerability, how we become larger and more courageous and more compassionate through our intimacy with it, our choice is to inhabit vulnerability as generous citizens of loss, robustly and fully, or conversely, as misers and complainers, reluctant, and fearful, always at the gates of real life, but never bravely and completely attempting to enter, never wanting to risk ourselves, never walking fully through the door."

Explore More This Week

1) Intrigued by Brene Brown's seminal research on vulnerability?:

- Check out her famous TED Talk (20 min.): [Brené Brown: The power of vulnerability | TED Talk](#)

- So that you don't have to read her whole book, here are two short pieces of hers, the first an interview with her, and the second an article she wrote, both focused on vulnerability: [Daring to be Vulnerable with Brené Brown | Taking Charge of Your Wellbeing \(umn.edu\)](#) and [Vulnerability is the Path, by Brene Brown \(awakin.org\)](#)

- Brene Brown herself has been through the ringer recently - caring for her mom with dementia, and ultimately losing her mom to that disease. It has stretched her and made her aware of her own vulnerability in stark, trying new ways. She muses about that here, from her own website in Jan. 2024: [Hard Seasons and Wild Hearts - Brené Brown \(brenebrown.com\)](#)

2) Read some Psalms this week, each one crackles with vulnerability, both faith and insecurity, often simultaneously...you can start in Psalm 2 and work your way forward: [Psalm 2 NRSVUE - Psalm 2 God's Promise to His Anointed - Bible Gateway](#)

3) Make these phrases, taken directly from the prayer at the end of chp. 9 in our Lenten book, part of your prayer life this week: "I asked for strength that I might achieve; I was made weak that I might learn humbly to obey. I asked for power that I might have the praise of others; I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God. I got nothing I asked for, but everything I hoped for."

4) How can you better acknowledge and own how often and deeply you feel vulnerable?

5) How can you respond to your own vulnerability with courage? What risk or act of faith is God asking of you that you've been avoiding? What are you missing in life - love, purpose, creativity, connection? Odds are, a courageous response to your own vulnerability, perhaps involving a little risk on your part, is the how to get it.

6) How can you help create a safe space for yourself and others to be vulnerable, perhaps here at KW?