

Change A Kid's Life!
Books with Bowman

The Gifts of Imperfection

by Brené Brown

HalBowman.com

Two Sentence Summary:

The Gifts of Imperfection, teaches us not to change ourselves to adapt to expectations, instead, we should embrace and engage with our imperfections. The core insights center on empathy, understanding, and adopting "wholehearted living," so that we start living for ourselves, and not for other people.

Brief Overview:

Wholehearted living is a philosophy about being able to wake up every morning and think, 'No matter what gets done, or how much is left undone; I am enough.' And, it's also about going to bed at night and acknowledging our imperfections, vulnerabilities, and fears. Brown maintains that despite our flaws, the ultimate truth is that every human can be brave, and is worthy of love and belonging.

Brené Brown is a professor, best-selling author, public speaker, and podcaster, and she has a fresh approach to popular discussions. There are so many books centered around the ideas and ideals of love, belonging, and worthiness. Brown's approach offers a unique insight because it's based on her research around shame. Although Brown is a researcher, she describes herself as a "story catcher." In this way, she's managed to explore many people's concerns and ideas regarding shame and vulnerability. She suggests some shifts that we need to make, to engage in life from a place of worthiness. In other words, to live wholeheartedly.

This brief summary illustrates that wholeheartedness is a skill that anyone can learn. But, according to Brown, it means letting go of the search for perfection, and it also means stopping the need to want to please others constantly. Furthermore, it's about learning to embrace who we are, with all of our flaws. The truth is that we connect with others through our vulnerabilities, not our perfect facades. The Gifts of Imperfection, explains why embracing who we are, takes courage, compassion, and authentic connection. The book isn't just theoretical advice though, Brown offers ten practical guideposts to wholehearted living, and provides daily practices to help us on this journey.

The 10 guideposts to wholehearted living include:

1. Letting go of what people think.
2. Letting go of perfectionism.
3. Letting go of numbing and powerlessness.
4. Letting go of scarcity and fear of the dark.
5. Letting go of the need for certainty.
6. Letting go of comparison.
7. Letting go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as self-worth.
8. Letting go of anxiety as a lifestyle.
9. Letting go of self-doubt and "supposed to".
10. Letting go of being cool and "always in control".

Connection to Others is What Matters, and Gives Us Purpose

As a social worker, Brené Brown was confident of one thing - our connection to others matters. This, she argues, is what gives purpose to our lives.

When Brown began her doctorate, she wanted to investigate how we develop meaningful connections. But, as often happens along the research road, she ran into an important finding, which was the notion of shame. This research took her on what she refers to as "an 8-year detour". This new angle encouraged her to understand the anatomy of shame, and how it affects us. Shame, she argues, erodes connection.

Three Things About Shame

There are three things that Brené Brown says that she knows, absolutely, about shame.

The first thing is that all of us carry it around with us. In other words, shame is universal. Shame is one of the most primitive of human emotions, and despite this, we're uncomfortable talking about it. The problem is that the less we open up about it, the more it controls us. Shame flourishes in the company of secrecy, silence, and judgment.

Brown also argues that shame is different from guilt. While guilt tells us that we may have done something terrible, shame takes the focus away from the action itself and reframes it around the person. In other words, it makes us feel as if we're bad. Shame targets the core of who we are, whereas guilt addresses our behavior. Although guilt might be an uncomfortable feeling, it can also be constructive if we use it to highlight how we can grow and improve. Shame, on the other hand, is usually destructive.

At the heart of shame is that it carries the fear of disconnection. We feel that something about us, would make us unworthy of love and belonging, if others knew or saw it. Hence, there's an excruciating sense of vulnerability that underpins shame.

What Brené Brown didn't expect to uncover is that vulnerability is the key to cultivating deep, authentic connections. She realized that people who feel that they belong, and are loved, believe they're worthy of relationships. If we don't feel worthy, we hold back.

When Brown analyzed her interviews with people, who had a deep sense of worthiness, she noticed that they dared to be imperfect. They were able to be compassionate to themselves first, and then to others. What's more, is that they could then connect because of their authenticity. They were willing to let go of who they thought they should be, and just be who they were. They fully embraced vulnerability. They believed what made them vulnerable, made them beautiful. They didn't see vulnerability as uncomfortable or excruciating, but just another aspect of themselves that they were willing to acknowledge.

An Insight Into Vulnerability

Two examples of vulnerability include being willing to say, "I love you," before someone else does, and to do something with no guarantees of a successful outcome. Brown was able to embrace her vulnerability after going through a personal journey. She jokingly calls this journey a "mini-breakdown, slash, spiritual awakening."

This journey is how she developed ten guideposts that mark the course towards wholehearted living. These include authenticity, compassion, a resilient spirit, gratitude and joy, faith, creativity, meaningful work, play and rest, a sense of calm and stillness, and remembering to laugh and dance along the way.

However, each guidepost is like a two-sided coin. For example, to cultivate authenticity, we need to be willing to let go of caring about what people think. To cultivate compassion, we need to let go of perfectionism, and to develop resilience. We need to let go of numbing ourselves against pain.

Guidepost #1: Cultivating Authenticity

Letting go of what people think

If you want to start living your life to the max, you must first separate your life from the lives of the others, that is, to quote Margaret Young, "you must first be who you really are, then do what you really need to do, in order to have what you want."

In other words, you must be authentic and true to yourself, because safety (read: more money, a successful career, and a picture-perfect partner – for the sake of them) is overrated.

Simply put, it may not describe your authentic self:

Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It's about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.

Guidepost #2: Cultivating Self-Compassion

Letting go of perfectionism

First of all, two things: perfectionism is not the same thing as striving to be your best, and it is not self-improvement.

So, what is it?

It is "a self-destructive and addictive belief system" which needs to be overcome.

Why? Because there's no such thing as perfection and because striving for it always results in feeling some void which shouldn't be there in the first place.

To overcome perfectionism, practice self-compassion which (according to Dr. Kristin Neff) consists of three elements: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness.

Guidepost #3: Cultivating a Resilient Spirit

Letting go of numbing and powerlessness

Resilient people do several things differently.

However, as we learned from Viktor Frankl's "Man's Search for Meaning," possibly the most important among them, the very foundation of resilience, is their spirituality, their belief into something bigger, and the ever-present light at the end of the tunnel.

However, cultivating a hope of this kind should always go hand in hand with critical awareness.

Only that way, you can let go of numbing and powerlessness.

Guidepost #4: Cultivating Gratitude and Joy

Letting go of scarcity and fear of the dark

Being joyful doesn't mean that you're happy all the time. It merely means that you're grateful for the happy moments that you have. Stop looking for more than you need.

Guidepost #5: Cultivating Intuition and Trusting Faith

Letting go of the need for certainty

Intuition is not irrational – it's just another more rapid mode of thinking.

In addition, "faith and reason are not natural enemies."

It's just that faith "is a place of mystery, where we find the courage to believe in what we cannot see and the strength to let go of our fear of uncertainty."

And it's good to be uncertain from time to time.

It's the very essence of adventure.

Guidepost #6: Cultivating Creativity

Letting go of comparison

Comparison, writes Brown, is "all about conformity and competition."

In her dictionary, these are not mutually exclusive, but incremental: comparison has the twofold meaning of first fitting in and then standing out!

Creativity, on the other hand, is the expression of authenticity; and it's the nemesis of comparison.

The great part?

Without comparison, "concepts like ahead or behind or best or worst lose their meaning."

Guidepost #7: Cultivating Play and Rest

Letting go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as self-worth

The last time we checked, dying of exhaustion is something that actually happens in this world.

So often, in fact, that the Japanese – who else? – even have a word for it now: *karōshi*, i.e., "overwork death."

Is that the world you like to live in?

Just stop fearing that you'll miss out on something.

Instead: get some rest and play a game or two with your children.

You'll feel great afterward!

Guidepost #8: Cultivating Calm and Stillness

Letting go of anxiety as a lifestyle

Remember your teachers screaming "Calm down!" or "Sit still!"?

It turns out – these are pretty great advices.

They just communicated them the wrong way.

Which is exactly the point.

Guidepost #9: Cultivating Meaningful Work

Letting go of self-doubt and "supposed to"

Unless it's dying or paying taxes, you're actually not supposed to do anything!

So why should you feel self-doubt, fear, and anxiety because of all these "supposed-to-dos"?

Just don't!

Kennedy was wrong. Howard Thurman was right: Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

Guidepost #10: Cultivating Laughter, Song, and Dance

Letting go of being cool and "always in control"

We don't know who actually said it first (Brown says it's Twain), but whoever it was, he or she was more than right: "Dance like no one is watching. Sing like no one is listening. Love like you've never been hurt and live like it's heaven on Earth."

If what's stopping you from doing these things is the fear of being uncool – then you're missing out on your life for the wrongest reason imaginable.

Because you know what's the coolest thing ever?

Living your life!

Key Lessons from "The Gifts of Imperfection"

1. The 10 Guideposts on Your Way to Wholehearted Living
2. The 3 Cs of Imperfection
3. DIG Deep

The 10 Guideposts on Your Way to Wholehearted Living

If you want to stop living a fake life and start experiencing the joy of wholehearted living, it's essential that you pay some attention to the writing on the wall. And start...

- #1. ...letting go of what people think
- #2. ...letting go of perfectionism
- #3. ...letting go of numbing and powerlessness
- #4. ...letting go of scarcity and fear of the dark
- #5. ...letting go of the need for certainty
- #6. ...letting go of comparison
- #7. ...letting go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as self-worth
- #8. ...letting go of anxiety as a lifestyle

#9. ...letting go of self-doubt and “supposed to”

#10. ...letting go of being cool and “always in control”

The 3 Cs of Imperfection

According to Brené Brown the three gifts of imperfection can't be more perfectly summarized than as a string of 3 Cs: courage, compassion, and connection.

An Exercise for When You're Feeling Down

Next time you're feeling down, Brown suggests going through the following checklist. It's the A -E -I- O -U -Y.

- **A** is to ask, have I been absent today?
- **E** is whether or not you've exercised.
- **I** is asking what you've done for yourself today.
- **O** is about others, and focusing on what you've done for other people.
- **U** is interrogating whether you may be holding onto unexpressed emotions.
- **Y** is for "Yeah!" In other words, focus on gratitude and focus on something good that's happened on that particular day.

Action Steps For You

- Owning your story isn't the easiest thing to do out there.
- It takes guts to speak about your guilt and shame. It requires courage to tell people how you're thinking instead of what they want you to say. And bravery is needed to live authentically with your imperfections.
- Though when you practice living a true live where you think, speak, and act in congruence with yourself, not how you're supposed to be, you open your heart to love yourself and others.
- The means to do this are to practice courage, compassion, and connection on a daily basis. Those are the gifts of imperfection.
- And don't try to be perfect, you'll live a lie because you're not flawless and no one else is either. You'll be happier when you embrace you're human and have your faults, and allow others to help you or give you a shoulder to lean on
- So don't try to be the Hollywood star you admire (we know they have their issues) or the cool guy at the office. Instead be your authentic self and own your story, then you'll be blessed with the gifts of imperfection.
- I challenge you, today, to go out and tell a trusted family member or friend how you're feeling today and why. Be vulnerable. Open up and allow them to see your imperfection. If they're a good friend, you'll both feel better after this conversation.

- The journey to wholehearted living can start today if you open your heart. The choice is yours. Please do it for yourself and the people around you.
- And practice loving yourself. Find your favorite hobby so you can go to that to find play, rest, and joy. Give your heart and happiness as much attention as you give your career and success. Ironically being happier will fuel you to be more successful.

Brené Brown Quotes

- *“Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest things that we will ever do.”*
- *“Once you see a pattern, you can’t un-see it.”*
- *“We have to own our story and share it with someone who has earned the right to hear it, someone whom we can count on to respond with compassion.”*
- *“When we fail to set boundaries and hold people accountable, we feel used and mistreated.”*
- *“Technology . . . has become a kind of imposter for connection . . . we’ve confused being communicative with feeling connected.”*
- *“If we want to fully experience love and belonging, we must believe that we are worthy of love and belonging.”*
- *“We are biologically, cognitively, physically, and spiritually wired to love, to be loved, and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don’t function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.”*
- *“If we really want to live a joyful, connected, and meaningful life, we must talk about things that get in the way.”*
- *“If you trade in your authenticity for safety, you may experience the following: anxiety, depression, eating disorder, addiction, rage, blame, resentment, and inexplicable grief.”*
- *“The question is, does our (eating, drinking, spending, gambling, saving the world, incessant gossiping, perfectionism, sixty-hour workweek) get in the way of our authenticity?”*
- *“Perfection is not the same as striving to be your best.”*
- *“We’re raising children who have little tolerance for disappointment and have a strong sense of entitlement.”*
- *“Comparison is the thief of happiness.”*
- *“I share this quote by theologian Howard Thurman . . . ‘Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.’”*

In Conclusion

Brené Brown guides us through her research and her conversations with other people. She believes that wholehearted living is revolutionary. A revolution might sound a bit dramatic, but it's a bold act of resistance, to choose authenticity and worthiness over shame and guilt.

We're living in a culture of shaming ourselves and others, so there's never been a better time to engage with Brown's tenets for life. It's a movement fueled by the freedom that comes when we stop pretending that everything is okay when it isn't.

Brown invites us to own our stories, and embrace lives that are messy, imperfect, wild, wonderful, heartbreaking, grace-filled, and joyful. Furthermore, if we can find someone who has earned the right to hear our story, we need to tell it. And, if we choose to step forward, into the journey of wholehearted living, we might feel confused, and terrify lots of people, including ourselves.

It's not an easy process, and we'll wonder how it's possible to feel so brave and so afraid, simultaneously. Because, according to Brown, to live wholeheartedly is to feel brave, afraid, and, most importantly, alive.

Remember, shame loses its power when spoken. So speak your shame.