



## **Vulnerability is the Path, by Brene Brown**

Vulnerability isn't good or bad: it's not what we call a dark emotion, nor is it always a light, positive experience. Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable. To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness. To foreclose on our emotional life out of a fear that the costs will be too high is to walk away from the very thing that gives purpose and meaning to living.

Our rejection of vulnerability often stems from our associating it with dark emotions like fear, shame, grief, sadness, and disappointment—emotions that we don't want to discuss, even when they profoundly affect the way we live, love, work, and even lead. What most of us fail to understand and what took me a decade of research to learn is that vulnerability is also the cradle of the emotions and experiences that we crave. We want deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives. Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper or more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.

I know this is hard to believe, especially when we've spent our lives thinking that vulnerability and weakness are synonymous, but it's true. I define vulnerability as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. With that definition in mind, let's think about love. [...] Love is uncertain. It's incredibly risky. And loving someone leaves us emotionally exposed. Yes, it's scary, and yes, we're open to being hurt, but can you imagine your life without loving or being loved.

To put our art, our writing, our photography, our ideas out into the world with no assurance of acceptance or appreciation—that's also vulnerability. To let ourselves sink into the joyful moments of our lives even though we know that they are fleeting, even though the world tells us not to be too happy lest we invite disaster—that's an intense form of vulnerability.

The profound danger is that, as noted above, we start to think of feeling as weakness. With the exception of anger (which is a secondary emotion, one that only serves as a socially acceptable mask for many of the more difficult underlying emotions we feel), we're losing our tolerance for emotion and hence for vulnerability.

It starts to make sense that we dismiss vulnerability as weakness only when we realize that we've confused feeling with failing and emotions with liabilities. If we want to reclaim the essential emotional part

of our lives and reignite our passion and purpose, we have to learn how to own and engage with our vulnerability and how to feel the emotions that come with it. For some of us, it's new learning, and for others it's relearning. Either way, the research taught me that the best place to start is with defining, recognizing, and understanding vulnerability.

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