

Daring Greatly Summary

By Brené Brown

Shame. It's a feeling we all wish we didn't have to experience, and the crippling embarrassment often lingers with us long after the event. Perhaps that's why so many of us related to that infamous scene in *Game of Thrones*, where Cersei Lannister is paraded naked down the streets, with a bell clanging, and a nun chanting, 'Shame! Shame! Shame!' However, perhaps what's most poignant about that scene is the vulnerability shown by the character. This vulnerability made us forget, even if only for a brief moment, that Cersei was a universally hated villain. Nonetheless, and perhaps in spite of this, we wanted her to rise and get vengeance. The lesson here is that vulnerability is powerful.

Daring Greatly is one of Brené Brown's earliest offerings on shame and vulnerability, and it introduces key ideas on strength and power. Once we accept that struggle is a universal human condition, we find the courage to dare greatly.

Brené Brown is one of the world's leading minds on shame and vulnerability. She gained a mass following by exposing her own story in a TEDx event in Houston. It was then featured as a TED talk that subsequently "broke the Internet" after going viral. Brown is a self-titled "researcher-storyteller," and her qualitative research has led to groundbreaking findings on how we experience shame, vulnerability, courage, compassion, and connection.

We'll briefly explore what it means to "dare greatly," and how all of us need to enter the arena with the tools to acknowledge and overcome struggle. Because, if you enter the arena and participate, you need to

know that struggle is inevitable, and things might be incredibly tough. However, the ultimate glory awaits, which is achieving goals, and actually participating wholeheartedly in the game of life.

Entering the Arena

How brave and courageous does one have to be to enter the Colosseum as a gladiator? What courage do we need to enter arenas where we cannot be sure of outcomes?

The 26th president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, was part of the inspiration for *Daring Greatly*. In one of his most famous speeches, known as "*The Man in the Arena*," Roosevelt explains the importance of courageous living. The speech has become a classic metaphor for living life, and has gained recognition for being one of the most influential speeches of all time. Before the 1995 Rugby World Cup final, Nelson Mandela gave Francois Pienaar a copy of the speech. The words were used to inspire the South African team, and they beat the odds and won the match against the All Blacks. And, not only that, but they helped bring together an entire nation that was fragmented and trying to reconcile the aftermath of apartheid.

Roosevelt's words are a rousing call for all of us to enter the arena. He says, 'It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph

of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.'

The message is clear, we all need to be in the game; we all need to be in the arena. We need to try and fail, and continue. As Maximus Decimus Meridius famously said, in the film *Gladiator*, 'What we do in life echoes in eternity.' This doesn't mean that we have to be brave all the time, but we do have to live courageously. And while you may not think that there's a distinction between bravery and courage, if we look at the etymology of the word courage, it stems from the word "heart." So courage is about living life from the heart, and being aware of our innermost feelings.

The Courage To Enter the Arena

Finding the courage to enter the arena comes down to whether we're half-hearted or whole-hearted.

Brown argues that to live fully, we need to be "all in." We need to be committed to the good, the bad, and the ugly side of life, and we have to find purpose and meaning. Wholehearted living means that we dig deep to find the determination and courage to enter the arena, and give life our best shot.

According to Brown, there are three crucial aspects to wholehearted living. You have to be courageous, compassionate, and connected. We have to find the courage to put ourselves out there and to be vulnerable. Life is filled with struggles and things that'll make us anxious and afraid. We need to forge on, accept failure, and even though our faces may be "marred by dust and sweat and blood," we continue to "strive valiantly."

We also need to be compassionate, to ourselves, and to others. Everyone has it hard, everyone encounters difficulties, and no one is immune from suffering. Once we realize this, we can embrace empathy. And empathy is what leads to the final aspect of wholehearted living, connection.

Our author argues that connection is the reason why we're here. We need to be connected, and once we find connection, we can inspire and change what needs to be changed. John Donne said that 'No man is an island,' which has become a metaphor for how important it is to forge connections with people. Establishing valuable connections encourages us to have a sense of worthiness and purpose, a reason to enter the arena.

What We Face in The Arena

We've established that wholehearted living depends on feeling a sense of belonging and connection, and above all, love.

These feelings are at risk when we face the obstacles around us. Brown argues that we live in a "culture of scarcity" where we believe that there isn't enough. When we think that there's never enough, shame manifests. For example, we often shame and blame entire generations for our own shortcomings. We're also increasingly disengaged from things. We battle to live in the present because we're distracted and always looking for what's not around us. We suffer from FOMO, or the Fear of Missing Out, and we live in a state of wanting what we don't have. When we're not feeling like we're lacking, or distracted and disengaged, we succumb to comparing ourselves to others. Perfection doesn't exist, yet deep down, even if we tell ourselves otherwise, we still hold onto the belief that it does. We need to stop striving for the myth of perfection and start embracing the person we are.

Brown argues that 'what makes you vulnerable makes you beautiful.' Perfection isn't beautiful; vulnerability is. And while vulnerability isn't exactly a comfortable state of being, it's also not excruciating. The bottom line is that it's necessary, and it makes us better people.

Vulnerability is also crucial because it allows us to connect to other people. For connection to happen, we need to exhibit vulnerability and expose ourselves. Brown argues that we need to be open with our flaws and allow ourselves to "be seen." Being seen isn't just the superficial aspects of our personality, or what Goffman terms "impression management." Allowing ourselves to be seen means being vulnerable.

Often we avoid exposing ourselves because we're ashamed of what others may think of us. We fear disconnection. We experience shame in a range of ways.

There's individual shame, which is that nagging feeling we get when we think we're not enough and have feelings of inadequacy. Relationship shame is when we fear intimacy and showing our vulnerable side. Having a lack of honesty in relationships means trust isn't nurtured, and the relationship breaks down. You can't have intimacy without being able to open yourself up to vulnerability and trust.

In *Dare to Lead*, Brown talks about shame in the workplace, and how so much of contemporary workplace culture is based on a foundation of shame. We all need to be more critical of shame, particularly when it comes to children. According to Brown, raising a generation that isn't bogged down by shame and anxiety, could literally change the world. The fact is that shame is particularly harmful to children, who need to feel confident in order to have the freedom and joy to be creative. Shame stifles joy and creativity, so it's important to nurture positive messages about vulnerability at school and at home. You can't learn if you're too afraid and anxious, and we need to teach children to be able to enter the arena.

Vulnerability in the Arena

Vulnerability is a paradox.

How do you feel when people expose their vulnerability?

Here's the thing, we tend to admire other people's vulnerability, yet we're ashamed of our own. Why is this? Brown encourages us to view vulnerability as a strength rather than a weakness, and she says that we need to identify it and embrace it.

As an example, our author spoke about her "breakdown," or spiritual awakening that she experienced. In 2010 she presented her experience to 500 people at a TEDx conference. This candid and honest account resulted in her skyrocketing to fame, and *The Power of Vulnerability* garnered huge online attention. The reason for this is her open and direct account of her ill attempt to live wholeheartedly. She exposed her so-called flaws, made them relatable, and in short, her audience admired her honest vulnerability.

So why is it that when we turn the mirror to ourselves, we don't admire these qualities? Why do we hide these things and stray away from showing other people our weaknesses? This is why we refer to the vulnerability paradox, because why is vulnerability courageous in others, and weakness in ourselves?

Once we understand vulnerability, we can identify that, yes, vulnerability centers around shame and fear, but it also centers around joy and creativity. It's also where we find connection and love.

Exposing ourselves and opening ourselves up to scrutiny is scary. The arena is a frightening place after all. You might find that after exposing vulnerability, you may experience "the losies" or what Brown terms a "vulnerability hangover." After daring greatly, there's a tendency to regret our decision, and we may greet the morning with a feeling of, 'Oh crap, I can't believe I told people that!' Sharing is difficult, and opening ourselves up can be terrifying. Sometimes we wish more than anything that we could take back moments where we've exposed ourselves. Brown's TEDx talk exemplifies this. After her talk, Brown had a massive vulnerability hangover and wanted more than anything to delete what she had shared. However, she noticed that by sharing her vulnerability, she had inspired other people to dare greatly, and take leaps where they usually wouldn't.

Are You Not Entertained?

We've established that being in the arena is no easy feat.

The question is, how do we relate and react to the spectators around us?

The arena will always be filled with crowds of people who will respond to us in different ways. If we're lucky, we're not alone in the arena, and we can lean on others for support.

But what do we do with the onlookers? The first thing is that we can appreciate that they're there. They've shown up, even if it's just to watch. Brown notes that we should always be appreciative of the people who show up. Some people will believe and support us; some people will even be in the arena with us. However, the truth is that the majority of the people in the crowd don't add anything of value. So often spectators are there as a mob, and often this mob arrives fuelled with resentment.

These people usually want you to fail because they have low opinions of themselves, and therefore if you fail, they have an excuse for not trying.

Brown says that people who have low opinions of themselves need to work on themselves, and it's not up to us to try and change them. We need to be aware that there will be people who don't like us, and we need to shift our focus. People who occupy the stands instead of the arena tend to project resentment and live vicariously through others. So often, we focus on people who don't like us; instead, we should ask ourselves, 'Why should I care if they don't like me?'

Only people who occupy the arena achieve greatness. As the film *Gladiator* so eloquently put it: 'Today I saw a slave become more powerful than the Emperor of Rome.'

In Conclusion

Life has to have meaning, and entering the arena is the first step to living wholeheartedly. But for those of us who may be afraid or anxious, how do we go about this?

We all need to embrace hope, and the good news is that hope can be learned. We cultivate hope by setting goals so that we have something to live and strive for. Goals make us excited for the future, and they challenge us to keep pushing ourselves. Write down your goals and then visualize a path that will help you to realize them.

So often we expect things to be easy. We need to adjust our thinking to anticipate that things will be difficult and that there will be obstacles. However, everyone deals with obstacles and we can lean on each other

when things get tough. Prepare for challenges, and be honest about your vulnerability. By doing this we create the willpower to hope.

Brown says we all need to walk into being vulnerable. We need to make choices that align with courage, compassion, and connection, and we need to truly understand that asking for help is a sign of strength. When we numb our vulnerability, and all of the things that make us anxious, we also numb the positive emotions we experience.

Our author's profound message is that the key marker of someone who lives wholeheartedly is that they believe that they're worthy. This self-belief results in having a self-assured sense of love and belonging, whereas people who feel unworthy are disconnected, not because of others, but because of their own fear and self-sabotage. Hence, if we believe that we genuinely deserve connection and love, we can have it.

So expose yourself, hold the mirror up and be honest about the reflection, be vulnerable, love wholeheartedly, and express gratitude even when things are tough. Believe that you're enough. And then, when it comes to others, we need to raise children to believe that they're enough, that they're loved, and that they belong. With these feelings they will be more inspired to live wholeheartedly, and to be creative and abundant.

Having the courage to enter the arena, having the courage to fail, having the courage to be vulnerable is how to truly live. And remember, he who fails, 'fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.'