

Book Review

Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead

Brené Brown, (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2012), 304 pages.



Reviewed by MYRIAM HERTZOG

Brené Brown describes the animating idea of *Daring Greatly* with a quotation from Theodore Roosevelt.

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, ...but [he] who does actually thrive to do the deeds; 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.

At the heart of “daring greatly” is the courage to be honest, and thus vulnerable.

Brené Brown is a therapist, social worker and shame researcher whose 2010 TED talk on the power of vulnerability currently has over five million views and has been translated into thirty-eight languages. Her book, a #1 New York Times bestseller, expands that talk.

The premise of *Daring Greatly* is that we should aspire to live a life of wholehearted vulnerability. We should open up to others. We should candidly face shortcomings. We should seek to make a true connection with others. That, she says, is “why we are here.” But we have a problem. Shame is a nearly universal part of the human condition, and it causes people to

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question their worthiness. This destroys meaningful connection and short circuits vulnerability. Brown's solution is for us to believe in ourselves and to become resilient in the face of shame. This will enable us to live worthy, authentic and wholehearted lives.

I was interested in this book because it is being widely read and recommended by Christians. I wondered if Brown is seeing something that is true and helpful about people and shame. But I discovered that her ideas, in the end, are a shallow approach to profound human struggles, and so she misses the riches of gospel solutions. Let me first give you enough information to understand Brown's teachings, and then I will show how Scripture's insights go deeper and further than hers do.

A Summary of *Daring Greatly*

Brown's book centers around four themes. Each deals with some aspect of how people can overcome shame and pursue meaningful connection in order to live a wholehearted life.

1. *What is shame and why do we feel it?* Brown defines shame as “the fear of not being worthy of real connection” with other people. As human beings, “we are hardwired to connect with others...it's what gives purpose and meaning to our lives” (p.8). But shame interferes, telling us “we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging” (p.69). We fear that “something we have done or failed to do, something about who we are or where we come from, has made us unlovable and unworthy of connection” (p. 253). Over time, if these shame messages become entrenched, we become paralyzed and locked into a lifestyle of fear and disconnection from others.

Brown also asserts that we feel shame because we live in what she calls a “culture of scarcity.” We feel we are “never enough.” We are never good enough, smart enough, thin enough, safe enough, and so forth. We compare ourselves to those around us and to those in the media who live seemingly perfect lives—and we always come up short. Interestingly, her solution to shame is not to become *more* worthy of connection to others or to become smarter or thinner. Her solution begins with accepting your limitations.

2. *Wholehearted living is the antidote to shame.* If love and belonging are the “irreducible needs” of all people, we must overcome the “never enough” mentality in how we view our limitations. We must

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The Journal of Biblical Counseling
(ISSN: 1063-2166) is published by:

Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

1803 East Willow Grove Avenue
Glenside, PA 19038

www.ccef.org

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