

The Gifts of Imperfection
YOUR GUIDE TO A WHOLEHEARTED LIFE
by Brené Brown

Introduction: Wholehearted Living

1. Brené Brown defines Wholehearted living as "engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness." (p. 1) What does living Wholeheartedly look like in your life?

2. On p. 3, the author introduces the idea of the "dig deep button." She said she used to "push through, soldier on, suck it up" when she was exhausted and overwhelmed and there was little time for self-care. What do you typically do when you are at that point?

She goes on to explain that when we are living Wholeheartedly, we dig deep in a different way. (p.4)

We get:

D _____

I _____

and

G _____

How do you dig deep the Wholehearted way?

Courage, Compassion, and Connection: The Gifts of Imperfection

1. Brown begins this chapter by asserting that, "Practicing courage, compassion and connection in our daily lives is how we activate worthiness." (p. 7) Can you think of a time when you or someone you know practiced courage or compassion in the face of shame or imperfection, and how that led to connection?

2. How does Brown define "ordinary courage" (p. 13), and how does that differ from heroism, in her view?

<u>QUOTABLE QUOTE:</u>	"Courage has a ripple effect. Every time we choose courage, we make everyone around us a little better and the world a little braver." (p. 15)
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3. Brown says that she does not believe our first response to pain—ours or someone else's—is compassion but self-protection, and that our first reaction is to find someone or something to blame or go into fix-it mode. (p. 16) Can you think of any examples of this?

4. What is the connection between compassion and setting/maintaining boundaries with others, according to the author? (p. 17 & 19)

5. In her discussion about connection, Brown identifies technology and the myth of self-sufficiency as barriers to connection. (p. 20) Do you agree or disagree, and why?

6. Do you agree with the author when she says, "When we attach judgment to receiving help, we knowingly or unknowingly attach judgment to giving help." (p. 20) Why or why not?

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The Things That Get in the Way

JUST AN OBSERVATION: In this chapter, Brown continues to tell us that we overcome our feelings of inauthenticity and shame by talking about them.....and that is exactly what she illustrates by her story of her speaking engagement with UP! On p. 35, she describes how her "a-ha" moment regarding the truth about herself came while she shared the story with her husband.

1. Brown observes that it is often the expectations we put on ourselves that result in our feeling unworthy or never good enough. Which of the "shame tapes and gremlins" she lists on p. 38 can you relate to?

2. On p. 40, Brown shares her definition of "shame resilience" and identifies characteristics of people who have shame resilience. Would you add anything to her list? Can you identify with any of the shame resilient characteristics she names?

3. How does the author differentiate between shame and guilt? Why does she recommend not using shame in parenting? (pp. 41, 42) Your thoughts or experiences?

4. Brown ends this chapter with a list of questions she says can kick-start our shame resilience and story-claiming. (p. 47) Reflect for yourself how you would answer each question. What clues do your answers--along with her statement that shame needs secrecy, silence and judgment to thrive--offer you for conquering your shame?

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Guidepost #1: Cultivating Authenticity

1. In this chapter, the author makes the point several times that being our authentic selves is very difficult to do (p. 50, 51 and 52). Do you agree with her or not? What have you seen or experienced that leads you to your conclusion?

2. In spite of the difficulties and risks we face when we put our authentic selves out into the world, the author claims on p. 53 that being authentic is less risky than hiding ourselves and our gifts from the world. Do you agree with her (or not) that there is a connection between not being authentic and the items she lists in her "warning label"?

3. **DIG DEEP**—In the first chapter, Brown describes how we can push past what stops us from living Wholeheartedly in a 3-part process she calls "Digging Deep." When you are faced with a situation that tempts you to trade in your authenticity for safety, how do you dig deep? (p. 53, 54)

Get Deliberate: _____

Get Inspired: _____

Get Going: _____

Guidepost #2: Cultivating Self-Compassion

1. This chapter is about letting go of perfectionism and aiming for healthy achieving instead. She says one way we can accomplish this is by being aware of our self-talk and changing it. Can you think of an example of something you are perfectionistic about? What is your self-talk like when you are in perfectionist mode? Rewrite that self-talk to reflect a healthy-striving perspective.

Perfectionist self-talk:

Healthy-striving self-talk:

2. **DIG DEEP**—In the first chapter, Brown describes how we can push past what stops us from living Wholeheartedly in a 3-part process she calls "Digging Deep." How do you dig deep when something happens and you need to practice self-compassion? (p.61,62)

Get Deliberate: _____

Get Inspired: _____

Get Going: _____

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Guidepost 3: Cultivating a Resilient Spirit

1. Brown defines *spirituality* as “.....recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning and purpose to our lives.” Would you add anything to her definition? How do you define the difference between spirituality and religion?

2. Has your spirituality contributed to your resilience, and if so, how?

3. The author presents a long discussion about practicing critical awareness and recommends three questions we can ask to reality-check what we see:

***Does what I’m seeing convey real life or fantasy?*

***Do these images reflect healthy, Wholehearted living, or do they turn my life, my body, my family and my relationships onto objects and commodities?*

***Who benefits by my seeing these images and feeling bad about myself?*

How does answering these questions affect your reaction to images?

You may enjoy watching videos on YouTube of the work of Jean Kilbourne on how media images present skewed images of femininity and Jackson Katz on how media images promote a distorted view of masculinity.

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Guidepost 4: Cultivating Gratitude and Joy

1. In this chapter, the author reports that according to her research people who say they are joyful actively practice gratitude and attribute their joyfulness to their gratitude practice. Do you have a gratitude practice? If so, in what ways has it affected your life?
2. Brown quotes work by Anne Robertson in which Robertson identifies the Greek root for the word joy as *chairō*, or “good mood of the soul.” She says that the opposite of joy is not sadness, but fear. Do you agree?
3. On pp. 82 &83, the author discusses the topic of scarcity, and observes that we experience scarcity because we lack gratitude. What connection do you see between scarcity and gratitude?

DIG DEEP

On pp. 84 & 85, Brené Brown shares how she Digs Deep when she is flooded with feelings of fear and scarcity. How do you Dig Deep during those times?

Get Deliberate: _____

Get Inspired: _____

Get Going: _____

Quotable quote: The dark does not destroy the light; it defines it. It’s our fear of the dark that casts our joy into the shadows. (p. 82)

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Guidepost 5: Cultivating Intuition and Trusting Faith

1. This chapter is subtitled "Letting go of the need for certainty." In fact, on p. 88, she says that the need for certainty silences our intuition. Can you think of a time when you listened to (or ignored) your intuition in the face of uncertainty? How did it turn out?

2. Brené Brown claims that to engage Wholeheartedly in life requires believing without seeing (p. 91) If that is so, how does faith play a part in courage, compassion and connection, the three things she calls the "gifts of imperfection"?

Quotable quote: 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. (p. 90)

"...many religious folk insist on answers that are always true. We love closure, resolution and clarity, while thinking that we are people of "faith"! How strange that the very word "faith" has come to mean its exact opposite."—Richard Rohr

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Guidepost 7: Cultivating Play and Rest

In this chapter, Brené Brown spends several pages describing what happened when she and her husband made a list of all of the things that made their family "work." In other words, they considered what things looked like when things were going really well in their family. (p. 102) When they compared this list with their "to-do/ to accomplish" list, they discovered that the things they were working for (their to-do list) did nothing toward making their lives fuller.

Are you curious about how your "joy and meaning" list would compare with your "goals to accomplish" list? Take some time to brainstorm about the items you would include on both lists. Then compare them. Do the items on your list of items that bring you joy and fulfillment in life support the items on your list of goals? Write a reflection about what you learn about your two lists.

Things that bring me joy and meaning in life	Things that I wish to acquire or accomplish in life

Reflection on comparing my "joy and meaning" list with my "acquire or accomplish" list:

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Guidepost 8: Cultivating Calm and Stillness

QUOTABLE QUOTE: If we stop long enough to create a quiet emotional clearing, the truth of lives will invariably catch up with us. We convince ourselves that if we stay busy enough and keep moving, reality won't be able to keep up. So, we stay in front of the truth about how tired and scared and confused and overwhelmed we sometimes feel. Of course, the irony is that the think that's wearing us down is trying to stay out in front of feeling worn down. This is the self-perpetuating quality of anxiety. (p. 108)

Anxiety is extremely contagious, but so is calm. The question becomes, *Do we want to infect people with more anxiety, or heal ourselves and the people around us with calm?* (p. 106-107)

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Guidepost 9: Cultivating Meaningful Work

About meaningful work:

- We all have gifts and talents.
- Squandering our gifts brings distress to our lives.
- Sharing our gifts and talents with the world is the most powerful source of connection with God.
- Using our gifts and talents to create meaningful work takes a tremendous amount of commitment.
- Like our gifts and talents, meaning is unique to each one of us.

In this chapter, she introduces the idea of the "slash career." Some people pursue multiple careers simultaneously as a way to integrate and fully express the multiple passions, talents, and interests that a single career cannot accommodate. (p. 114)

How would you complete this statement:

I am a(n)

Guidepost 10: Cultivating Laughter, song and Dance

QUOTABLE QUOTE: Laughter, song and dance create emotional and spiritual connection; they remind us of the one thing that truly matters when we are searching for comfort, celebration, inspiration or healing: We are not alone. (p. 118)

Final Thoughts

Wholehearted living is about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It's about cultivating the courage, compassion and connection to wake up in the morning and think, *No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough.* It's going to bed at night thinking, *Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn't change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging.* (p. 125)