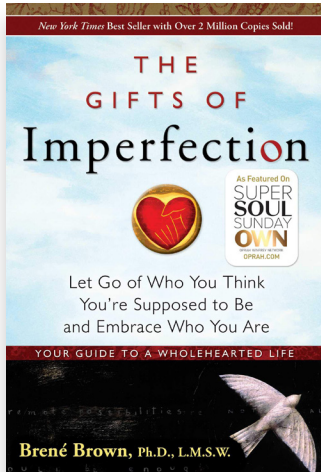


# EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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## The Gifts of Imperfection THE NUTSHELL

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Wholehearted living is about engaging in our lives from a place of worthiness. It means 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.*

Wholehearted living is not a onetime choice. It is a process. In fact, I believe it's the journey of a lifetime. Before embarking on any journey, including this one, it's important to talk about what we need to bring along. What does it take to live and love from a place of worthiness? How do we embrace imperfection? How do we cultivate what we need and let go of the things that are holding us back? The answers to all of these questions are courage, compassion, and connection—the tools we need to work our way through our journey.

Practicing courage, compassion, and connection in our daily lives is how we cultivate worthiness. The key word is practice. Mary Daly, a theologian, writes, "Courage is like—it's a habitus, a habit, a virtue: you get it by courageous acts. It's like you learn to swim by swimming. You learn courage by couraging." The same is true for compassion and connection. We invite compassion into our lives when we act compassionately towards ourselves and others, and we feel connected in our lives when we reach out and connect.

# The Gifts of Imperfection

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Courage originally meant “To speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart.” Over time, this definition has changed, and, today, courage is more synonymous with being heroic. Heroics are important and we certainly need heroes, but I think we’ve lost touch with the idea that speaking honestly and openly about whom we are, about what we’re feeling, and about our experiences (good and bad) is the definition of courage. Heroics are often about putting our life on the line. Ordinary courage is about putting our vulnerability on the line. In today’s world, that’s pretty extraordinary.

The heart of compassion is really acceptance. The better we are at accepting ourselves and others, the more compassionate we become. It’s difficult to accept people when they are hurting us or taking advantage of us or walking all over us. This research has taught me that if we really want to practice compassion, we have to start by setting boundaries and holding people accountable for their behavior.

I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship. Our innate need for connection makes the consequences of disconnection that much more real and dangerous. The Wholehearted journey is not the path of least resistance. It’s a path of consciousness and choice. To be honest, it’s a little counter-cultural. The willingness to tell our stories, feel the pain of others, and stay genuinely connected in this disconnected world is not something we can do halfheartedly.

When we can let go of what other people think and own our story, we gain access to our worthiness—the feeling that we are enough just as we are and that we are worthy of love and belonging. When we spend a lifetime trying to distance ourselves from the parts of our lives that don’t fit with who we think we’re supposed to be, we stand outside of our story and hustle for our worthiness by constantly performing, perfecting, pleasing, and proving. Our sense of worthiness, that critically important piece that gives us access to love and belonging, lives inside of our story.

Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. This yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and by seeking approval, which are not only hollow substitutes for belonging, but often barriers to it but our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance. It’s so much easier to say, “I’ll be whoever or whatever you need me to be, as long as I feel like I’m part of this.” From gangs to gossiping, we’ll do what it takes to fit in if we believe it will meet our need for belonging. But it doesn’t. We can only belong when we offer our most authentic selves and when we’re embraced for who we are.

If we want to live and love with our whole hearts, and if we want to engage with the world from a place of worthiness, we have to talk about the things that get in the way, especially shame, fear, and vulnerability.

# The Gifts of Imperfection

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Shame is basically the fear of being unlovable. It's the total opposite of owning our story and feeling worthy. In fact, the definition of shame that I developed from my research is: *Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging.*

Shame needs three things to grow out of control in our lives: secrecy, silence, and judgment. When something shaming happens and we keep it locked up, it festers and grows. It consumes us. In order to deal with shame, some of us move away by withdrawing, hiding, silencing ourselves, and keeping secrets. Some of us move toward by seeking to appease and please. Some of us move against by trying to gain power over others, by being aggressive, and by using shame to fight shame (like sending really mean e-mails).

If you want to kick-start your shame resilience and story-claiming, start with these questions. (Figuring out the answers can change your life.)

1. Who do you become when you're backed into that shame corner?
2. How do you protect yourself?
3. Who do you call to work through the mean-nasties or the cry-n-hides or the people-pleasing?
4. What's the most courageous thing you could do for yourself when you feel small and hurt?

We don't need love and belonging and story-catching from everyone in our lives, but we need it from at least one person. If we have that one person or that small group of confidants, the best way to acknowledge these connections is to acknowledge our worthiness. If we're working toward relationships based in love, belonging, and story, we have to start in the same place: I am worthy.

Choosing authenticity and worthiness is an absolute act of resistance. Choosing to live and love with our whole hearts is an act of defiance. You're going to confuse, piss off, and terrify lots of people, including yourself. One minute you'll pray that the transformation stops, and the next minute you'll pray that it never ends. You'll also wonder how you can feel so brave and so afraid at the same time. At least that's how I feel most of the time...brave, afraid and very, very alive.