

## The Critical Role of Vulnerability In Relationships

### Midweek Session #6

Think of vulnerability as one of three legs in a healthy relationship.



1. Love will not grow without vulnerability... (Consider our love for God, and His vulnerability. See Psalm 145:8; Romans 10:21)
2. Vulnerability will not remain without safety...
3. All three – Safety, vulnerability, and love – are required for a secure, dependable, and trustworthy relationship.

#### **Vulnerability is:**

- The **center** of all emotion; neither good nor bad;
- The **birthplace** of love; belonging; joy; courage; empathy; trust; innovation; creativity; and gratitude;
- **And in the workplace:** accountability; ethical decision-making; learning; engagement; adaptability to change.
- The **courage** to “show up and be seen” when you have zero control of the outcome.
- Vulnerability is **NOT** synonymous with weakness.
- Unfortunately, **Vulnerability** is also the opportunity for shame; scarcity (“not enough”); fear; anxiety; uncertainty; failure. But, when we “armor up” against vulnerability we lock ourselves away from the many desired fruits of healthy relationship. (See above)

**NOTE:** You may recall from a previous session that the number one potential for men in our culture to feel shame is weakness. Is it any wonder that there are men among us who have difficulty identifying and claiming emotion because of the mistaken notion that vulnerability is the same as weakness?

**Consider this question:**

“Are we so much influenced by the ‘wisdom’ of this world that we CANNOT act in love toward one another?”

The willingness to be vulnerable in love – genuine love – is the paramount character of Jesus...It is what attracted the wayward son (Luke 15:18) and the “tax-collectors and sinners”. (:1)

#### Four Myths about Vulnerability

Myth #1: “*Vulnerability is the same as weakness.*”(This is a myth)

The truth: **You cannot separate courage from vulnerability.**

Myth #2: “*A person can ‘Opt out’ of being vulnerable.*” (This is a myth)

The truth: To be alive is to be vulnerable. To be in a relationship, to be a leader, to care, all are vulnerability based. One can either be aware of vulnerability and how you’re functioning with it...or deny vulnerability and let it control you.

Myth #3: “*Vulnerability is ‘letting it all hang out’.*” (This is a myth)

The truth: Vulnerability without boundaries is not vulnerability. It is self-serving, egocentric, and uncaring, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as “floodlighting”. The goal of vulnerability is to enhance trust, intimacy, and connection. “Floodlighting” works against these goals.

Myth #4: “*I can ‘go it’ alone.*” (This is a myth. Consider Genesis 2:18)

The truth: In the absence of healthy connection is always suffering. Vulnerability is the pathway that connection uses to flow between “you” and “me”. **THERE IS NO CONNECTION WITHOUT VULNERABILITY!**

- We all need at least one person who, when we try and fail, will come to us and say, “You know what? That pretty much ‘stunk’ as bad as you think it did. But I’m going to support you when you’re ready to go back and give it another try.”
- Part of the power of “sharing” like this is “normalizing”. That is, understanding how much more we’re alike than different from every other person who has ever taken a risk, failed at a task, or simply got it wrong.

- The greatest threat to vulnerability is the fear of shame...the fear that “I am not enough”, or “I am inherently flawed, and that will be discovered if I don’t shield against it.”

#### “Shame Shields” that Block Vulnerability

- The obsession to present an image of “excellence” is a shield from criticism and shame, and blocks the connection which is necessary for healthy relationship.
- Numbing: We often “numb” vulnerability with food, alcohol, sex, internet, and other means.
  - o You cannot selectively numb emotions and affect. When you numb, you also block love, belonging, joy, trust, etc.
  - o The emotions we need, and want more of, get blocked, along with the uncomfortable emotions.
- The most vulnerable human emotion we experience is joy! When we become concerned about being overcome by vulnerability, we engage FOREBODING JOY! That involves hedging our joy against what will happen when “the other shoe drops”.
- We engage ‘dress rehearsals’ of tragedy. We imagine the most horrible possibilities, because we think that will “soften the blow” if/when they actually become a reality.
- We “move away”, remaining silent, and not “showing up” to take a risk.
- We engage “people pleasing and then get mired in the resentment it brings.
- We use shame as an “offensive weapon”.

#### Strategies for “Living Well” with Vulnerability

1. Dwell within the grace of God through His enduring love, made known through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Find regular reminders in Romans 8.
2. Recognize the truth of the Apostle’s words in Romans 3:23...We all have fallen short of God’s expectations...have “missed the mark” for what he desires for us.
3. Discover one or two individuals with whom it is safe to be “you”, and who will lovingly support you at times of failure, without unkind criticism, or making you feel “judged”. It’s best if you can cultivate this with your spouse.
4. Begin to recognize and name emotions you are feeling, and fears you are anticipating.

5. Learn to be comfortable with saying:
  - a. "I may be wrong...and you may be right."
  - b. "I don't know"... "I need some help here".
  - c. "I'm not sure of the outcome, but I'd like to give it a shot...it's important to me."
  - d. "I disagree...can we talk about it?"
  - e. "It didn't work, but here's what I learned..."
  - f. "Here's what I need..."
  - g. "What do you think I could do better next time?"
  - h. "Can you teach me how to do this?"
  - i. "I accept responsibility for that."
  - j. "I'm sorry...can we move on?"
  - k. "That means a lot to me...thank you."
6. Engage the world from a position of worthiness as a redeemed sinner and child of God who has been declared righteous by grace.
7. Embrace your vulnerabilities and imperfections.
8. Value hard work, perseverance, and respect.
9. Maintain a sense of transparency and authenticity in whatever you engage.
10. Engage our rapidly changing world with courage and a resilient spirit, because your righteousness is in Christ.

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Additional help is available at:

***GracePoint Institute for Relational Health*** – 402.614.6287 – [www.relationalhealth.org](http://www.relationalhealth.org)

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