

## EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE

Week #1 of a 6-Week Series Inspired by the Brené Brown Book, "Braving the Wilderness"

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Here we are, everyone! We have a new six-week series. We're kicking off this series by Brené Brown. It's based on her book, "Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone." How many of you've read this book before? Oh, just a couple. That's good! Okay; so it's going to be new for most of you.

I really love it, because it's more storytelling than some of her other books that tend to be a more "sciencey." So this is, it's an easy read. And she's known -- Brené Brown's known -- as a social scientist/researcher. She's known for her work on vulnerability and shame and empathy and belonging. And this book explores what it means to experience true belonging. Especially when we're in an uber-polarized world right now, how do we feel that we belong? How do we start to feel that we're one together?

So, through her research, she says that what she's noticing is that we are living in a spiritual crisis of disconnection. Does anyone feel that? Sense that? Yeah. So, she introduces in this book four practices of belonging to help us find our way back to ourselves and then, therefore, to each other. First we have to come back to ourselves and then we can come back and belong to each other.

And when I read that phrase -- that spiritual crisis of disconnection -- I actually thought of Unity in our teachings that remind us that our outer world reflects back to us our inner condition. So that sense of separation that we see culturally is first experienced internally. Okay; take a breath. So, it's inviting us into: What needs to be healed within myself? What inside me needs to be healed so that the wholeness I want to see on the outside -- it's in here?

Because everything begins from within -- from within out. So, when we're feeling disconnected from one another, somewhere within us, there's disconnection from ourselves. So, the invitation is: How do we get back to that connection with ourselves so that we can be in connection with each other?

So, the chapters -- there's some great chapter titles. So tonight we're going to be looking at "Everywhere and Nowhere." And then, other chapters are "The Quest for True Belonging." We'll explore that next week. And then there's "High Lonesome: A Spiritual Crisis."

And then the four practices are: "People are Hard to Hate Up Close ... So Move In." I think that's Rev. Jimmie, so that would be a real good one, everyone. And then "Speak Truth to Untruth: Be Civil." She actually has a cuss word in there; we've taken that one out. Then there's "Hold Hands with Strangers." And "Strong Back. Soft Front. Wild Heart." So that'll be a good one to explore together, too.

So tonight we're looking at "Everywhere and Nowhere." And like I said, it reads very autobiographical. Wow; I really can't talk tonight, can I? Autobiographical. But she's sharing how she never felt like she belonged anywhere. Like, she didn't feel like she really fit into her family; she was the odd duck out. She didn't feel like she fit in at school. And even in her research, because she's really doing something in the social sciences that is unique and cutting edge. Nobody was really looking at vulnerability and shame. And so, she said there was no clear path; no clear mentor. And so, she really felt like she didn't belong anywhere. And then, all these experiences of feeling like she didn't belong really led her to develop this theory of true belonging. And what is that? And how do we get there?

So, I just wanted us to sit as we start this evening with: When have you felt like you didn't belong? Just kind of think on that. When did you feel ... when have you ever felt like you didn't belong? Or when have

you felt like you were alone or like an outsider? Or was there a time that you felt like you needed to be someone else in order to fit in? We probably all have had that experience, yes? At some point in our life.

And as you reflect on those questions, what you'll find is that there's usually one positive trait, at least, that is thread throughout those situations. So let me give you an example.

So, my entire life, I have actually felt shy and introverted. I know that surprises you, since I speak in front of, sometimes up to hundreds of people at a time. But my true nature is that I'm shy and introverted, especially when I was a little girl: very shy. Would not have gotten up and been speaking in front of people.

So, when I was growing up, because I was so shy and introverted, I felt like I should be more outgoing; that I should be more dynamic and more confident. And even growing up, I felt like I should be more adventurous. I did not like those big roller coasters or anything that my friends liked; you know, those daring things.

But what I realized over time was that it was okay that I'm sensitive and quiet. It's okay that I like to listen more than talk. And I start to realize that that's actually my superpowers: that my sensitivity and my open-heartedness make me a better minister, a better mom, a better friend, a better daughter.

You know, it was interesting during the pandemic. It was when we were still having some outdoor services at our church in California. And I was getting dressed, and I thought – I had this moment where I thought – *“Ooh, what I'm getting dressed in? Is this really, is this what ministers wear? Is this ‘ministry’ enough?”*

And then my next thought -- and it's very similar; Brené Brown has a similar situation. She was invited to a conference, and they told her she had to wear a suit. And she's sitting there waiting and she feels uncomfortable in her own body. And so, she gets up and she changes back to her jeans and cowboy boots.

And I had that same moment in that moment. And I just thought, *“You know what? I'm going to dress how I like to dress. And if someone has a problem about my clothing, well, then they're missing out on not hearing spiritual truth and making their life better. But I'm not going to change my personality. I'm not going to change who I am and what I'm comfortable in.”* So whenever I hear -- and I don't hear it very often anymore, because I've trained myself now -- but if I ever hear myself say, *“Is that what a minister would wear? Is someone going to comment about that's not very ‘ministry’?”* That's when I know I'm wearing it! [Congregants laugh]

And I had a young, new minister who came. And she was talking to me and said, “Yeah, you know what? Sometimes -- because I like to wear jeans and a nice shirt when I speak – but sometimes I'm guest speaking, and I feel like I should dress up.”

And I said, *“Ooh, no. You wear those jeans, because that's you. That's your personality.”* That's what belonging requires us to be: it requires us to be unapologetically ourselves ... which means it requires vulnerability. It requires you to show up as your real messy self; to share your authentic feelings; to let people see you for who you really are. It's in the vulnerability that true connection happens and, therefore, belonging happens.

See, it's through connection that we experience that belonging. We learn to be vulnerable with ourselves and then vulnerable with other people. And that's where we learn: Where am I safe? Who can I trust? Where do I belong?

And that's a big point that she makes in the book – that belonging means belonging to ourselves first. We have to belong to ourselves first. The more we hold on to ourselves, the more comfortable we are.

The more comfortable we are, it means the more that we can go out and accomplish and be successful in that area in our life.

Belonging does not require us to change who we are. It requires us to be who we are, our real selves, our authentic selves. And Unity teaches that we're unique expressions of this Divine Intelligence; this Divine Wisdom and Love.

And Charles Fillmore, Unity's co-founder, distinguished between personality and individuality. So, he said personality is that outer mask, shaped by culture and conditioning. It's what we have come to believe about ourselves based on conditioning and culture. But our individuality is our real spiritual self: the I AM. The expression of God that each of us uniquely express as that divine I AM. So, we're here to express our individuality, not the mask of personality.

So true belonging requires us to stand alone long enough to discover our individuality. And as we become familiar with that through self-awareness and compassion and grace, then we remember our divine identity. And then we go back to: *"And here's where I belong; I'm actually part of the One."*

That's that wilderness part -- when we start to look at: How do I just show up as my vulnerable self? That's the wilderness. But the wilderness is sacred. Even Jesus went out into the wilderness -- to the mountaintop -- to be alone, to spend time in quiet solitude. The wilderness is not punishment. It's actually preparation. It helps us clarify our identity and our purpose. So, it's about giving permission to yourself to belong to yourself.

So Brené Brown tells a story about the first time she was going to be on "Oprah." And the night before, she went to dinner with her manager and one of the producers. And she was, you know, friendly and kind, but she was really nervous and just not feeling like herself. She was struggling to enjoy the moment. And her manager said to her, *"What is going on?"*

And she said, *"Just when I get afraid, I just feel like I can't really be myself."*

And he said, *"This is a big deal. I don't want you to miss it. So, I don't want you to study the moment. I want you to be in the moment."*

So, she took that to heart. She was kind of thinking about that. And it's the next day; she's in the green room, you know, about to go out and record with Oprah for the first time. And then her daughter texts her from Texas and asked, *"Hey, mom, did you sign this school permission slip for a trip?"* Talk about working moms, right? We've all been there.

So, but with that, then Brené Brown has this idea. She thinks: *"What if I wrote myself a permission slip?"* So, she grabbed a piece of paper and a pen, and she wrote, *"Permission to be excited and goofy and to have fun."* And she said that was the first of thousands of permission slips to herself, and she still writes them today. Because she later realized that those permission slips were attempts to belong to herself; to give herself permission to be her true authentic self; to be in the moment.

And, in fact, it's only when Brené Brown stays true to herself -- her beliefs, her personality, her style (jeans versus a suit) -- that's when she becomes successful. That's when she became a household name: when she fully embraced who she was. And then she found a larger community to belong with, who wanted to belong with her, right?

So, after that time with Oprah and giving herself permission, she started to -- when people would request her to be a speaker and they would say, *"But we want you to dress up in business suit"* -- this is what she would write back. She would say, *"There are a lot of great teachers and speakers. You'll just need to find one who will dress up, clean up, and shut up."* [Congregants laugh] *"That's not me; not anymore."*

And there was a Maya Angelou poem that she loved that she hung on to,. And there's this one line that became her mantra: *"I shall not be moved."* I shall not be moved 00 meaning I will stay true to myself.

And she later, of course -- don't we all -- she later goes on to meet Maya Angelou. And Maya Angelou is a fan of hers. And so, as she's speaking to Maya Angelou, Maya Angelou says and encourages her, *"Brené, do not be moved by anyone but yourself. Stay true to yourself and your work. You're doing great work."*

What a moment, right? To be holding on to this poem for decades and now to meet the writer of the poem. And she's saying to you, *"Do not be moved. Be yourself."*

And yet, how often are we waiting for someone to give us permission to be who we are? And sometimes that's our own selves giving us permission to be who we really are.

But in Unity, we would say, hey, you already have divine authorization. Myrtle Fillmore, our co-founder in Unity, said, *"I am a child of God."* That declaration was about claiming her divine identity. Suddenly, when everyone was telling her that she'd be sick for her lifetime, that there was no cure; suddenly that became false. Because when we claim our spiritual identity, we stop seeking that external validation. We don't need external validation. We're claiming who we truly are.

When we look for the external validation – I want to touch upon this because she touches upon it in the book. When we tend to feel like we don't belong, we want to a lot of times numb that pain. When we keep looking for external validation, and yet we feel like we're getting rejections. And a lot of times what we do is we numb the pain of thinking or feeling so that we don't have to think or feel about not belonging.

So, for Brené Brown in her 20s, she was smoking, she was drinking. That's how she dealt with her parents' divorce and all the other rejections she felt like she had. And many of us will do that same thing. When we feel like we don't belong -- when we forget our divine identity -- we self-medicate through food, through drugs, through drinking, through shopping, through excess exercising. Through trying to control things.

But she finally realizes that those habits didn't support her belonging to herself.

So, asking ourselves: *"Does that really support me belonging to myself?"* That's a perfect message for Lent, right? Letting go of what is no longer serving me so I can be true to my own self; my Christ consciousness; my Christ self; my divine self.

Because anything that numbs us from ourselves also numbs us from our divine source -- from our divine connection. Because God is expressing as us. So, when we're numbing ourselves, it's numbing us from expressing God as us; God through us. But Creative Life Energy is moving through you right now. It desires expression, not suppression. It wants expression, not suppression. That light within us was never meant to be hidden.

And so, once we remember that – once we remember we're part of the whole – then we can express our uniqueness, which contributes to the whole. And that's how we get to be the "eachness" within the "Allness."

So, here's what Maya Angelou had written: *"You are only free when you realize you belong no place -- you belong every place -- no place at all. The price is high. Thereward is great."*

So, in Unity, we say you belong to the "Allness" as an "eachness." Because here's what Rev. Eric Butterworth -- Unity author/minister -- wrote. He said, *"What is the One that we call God? It is not a One off there somewhere ruling the universe as an absentee landlord. It is the One: the whole of all things,*

*the Allness of which and in which I am an eachness. No matter what I may think I am, I am the flowing forth of the One."*

So, when we feel like we don't belong, what we're really feeling is separation. And yet, separation is an illusion. We're all part of that One Power, One Presence of the universe. We're connected to the Energy that underlies all living beings, all living things. We're all connected to it. Not one of us; not some of us; all of us.

So, when we're feeling like an outsider; when we're feeling different -- like we don't fit in -- we return to that awareness of Divine Presence that surrounds us and that we're an extension of. There's no way to be separate from it. We're only separate from the awareness of it.

We're never separate from God: from that Creative Life Force. We're only separated from our awareness of God, that Creative Life Force. We're never separated. But only in our own thinking do we feel like we're not part of the Allness. We're always part of the Allness; of the Oneness.

Here's what Eric Butterworth continues to write. He says, "I'm unique and different at the surface. There can be no other eachness quite like me. And yet, I have no existence outside of the whole."

You're unique and different; there's no eachness like you. And yet, you don't have existence outside of the whole. So we're spiritual beings having a human experience. And our belonging begins with our divine identity. And in that divine identity -- and remembering that -- we remember we're part of the whole. We don't earn belonging. We awaken to belonging. We learn to flow with that Creative Energy of the universe.

Here's what author and Unity Minister Robert Brummet writes. He says, "*As the eyes and ears of the One, you are destined to awaken within the dream. You are destined to know yourself as a limited, temporal human being living in a physical universe, and simultaneously to know yourself as unlimited, existing beyond time and space, ever present and eternal. As the hands and the feet of the One, you are destined to be a co-creator with the universe.*"

So, remembering that you belong because you are part of the whole. Remembering you belong because you're a co-creator with infinite Spirit; with Creator.

And so, courage over comfort. So again, it's when Brené stays true to herself, she becomes successful. Because authenticity is spiritual integrity. Authenticity is spiritual integrity. Belonging requires courage over comfort, not conformity. It asks us: Will I choose approval or alignment? Do I want approval or alignment?

There's a great quote by author and civil rights leader Howard Thurman. He wrote, "*Do not ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it.*" What makes you come alive? Go do it!

So, standing alone often means honoring what made and makes your soul come, alive, even before maybe the world understands that. But once you understand that, and you're standing in your spiritual truth, well: then we realize we're never spiritually alone. Because we're always spiritually connected. We all belong to each other.

So, as we begin this series, here's where the true belonging starts. Claim who you are. Be vulnerable. Stand alone long enough to remember that you're never alone. To know your uniqueness, and yet that you're also part of the One. And that as an eachness, you belong to the Allness.

And perhaps write yourself a permission slip -- a permission slip this week -- that could say, "*Permission to be myself. Permission to belong to myself. Permission to stand alone while knowing I stand in the all-encompassing, loving, peaceful, wise Presence that is.*" That's what braving the wilderness is all about.

So, I look forward to continuing our exploration of true belonging with you all next week. Blessings on your permission slips and your life homework this week, everyone. Blessings!

Thank you.

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