

## ***Braving the Wilderness* by Brené Brown**

### **Chapter 2: The Quest for True Belonging**

*Belonging is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us. Because 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. Because **true belonging** only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance. (p.31-32)*

*Belonging to ourselves means being called to stand alone – to brave the wilderness of uncertainty, vulnerability, and criticism. And with the world feeling like a political and ideological combat zone, this is remarkably tough. We seem to have forgotten that even when we're utterly alone, we're connected to one another by something greater than group membership, politics, and ideology – that we are connected by love and the human spirit. (p. 32)*

Brené begins her research on belonging with the following questions:

*What are people trying to achieve? What are they worried about? (p.33)*

She finds:

*People want to be a part of something – to experience real connection with others – but not at the cost of their authenticity, freedom, or power. (p.33)*

AND

*People are concerned that the only thing that binds us together now is fear and disdain, not common humanity, shared trust, respect, or love. People report feeling more afraid to disagree or debate with friends, colleagues, and family because of the lack of civility and tolerance. ...People feel they must “fit in” by choosing between being loyal to a group and being loyal to themselves. (p.33)*

**Do these findings seem right to you? Are they consistent with what you see in the world? Do they resonate with your own thoughts, experiences, and feelings?**

Brené 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. (p.34)*

**Spend time in your groups talking about this. Is this a full definition of spirituality? If not, what do you think is missing here?**

Continuing her research, Brené asks more questions and develops four elements of true belonging (which are also the names of chapters 4-7). She then describes the context of wilderness and provides us with an acronym to help us hone our “braving skills”.

We all have [more than one] areas of wilderness in our lives. And there's a long history of "wilderness" in our faith tradition (brief references to these on p.36) **Invite group members to consider their own wildernesses. If people are comfortable, invite them to share those with the group.**

She suggests the following "braving skills" (full definitions of each concept on p.38-39):

- Boundaries
- Reliability
- Accountability
- Vault
- Integrity
- Nonjudgment
- Generosity

Help each group member explore individually or with the group: **How am I doing with each of these? Am I practicing these skills with others? Am I practicing them with myself? Where do I really need to focus in and work toward growth?**

*True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.*

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Prayers this week: