

DL Armored Leadership

Last week we reacquainted ourselves with our friends, vulnerability and shame. If that sounds odd to you, you have to listen to last week's sermon or read the book our series is based on, Dare to Lead. Although the book is written as a secular book with a bias towards leadership in work environments, we know that there is no separation in Unity practice between our secular and our spiritual lives. If we can only be spiritual one hour a week in a specific building we are not practicing our 5th principle: We must live the truth we know! Who we are in life is who we are as leaders. I think most of us would agree our world could use more spiritually grounded leaders right now and we are the ones we're looking for. This series is about how we can show up as Daring Leaders wherever we happen to find ourselves: in work environments, community work, church community, family or wherever.

Today we're going to explore how we might be showing up as armored leaders; what daring leadership might look like and how to bridge the gap. Why would we show up as armored leaders and what does that even mean? Most living species are designed for survival. Adaptations that mark evolution are also ways to assure survival. Extinction results when the environment changes faster than the species can evolve and adapt. Don't get me started on humanity's role in the extinction of other species—we'll save that for another sermon. Our armored behaviors are developed out of ego's perception that there are ways to protect ourselves from hurt, pain, and vulnerability. The author, Brené Brown, proposes that **vulnerability** is **valued** so we have to figure out the behaviors we've adopted that separate us from feeling vulnerable. Honestly, Armored Leadership doesn't produce the kind of results we truly want so there is no motivation to perpetuate it *except* to avoid vulnerability. If you are reading the book, these are not all the armored leadership traits Brown talks about and they are not in order. It's my sermon!

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Hurt people hurt people"? It's pretty accurate. The challenge is that until we become self-aware, we have no idea we are working out our pain through our leadership. Many of our primary wounds arise from our families of origin or early events buried in our subconscious. Brown describes not feeling valued at home with partners and children as driving work behavior that demands recognition, maybe takes credit for ideas, and makes comparisons. We lead to avoid getting hurt any more than we are and we try to feel better about ourselves through interactions. Daring Leaders lead from the heart; and **not** a broken heart.

So it shouldn't be a surprise that the way to bridge the gap is to stay curious about our wounds and hurts, how they show up and how we can do our healing work in private, not through leading. Leading from the heart doesn't mean you haven't been hurt or that you might not be in a painful struggle right now. Leading from the heart means that you are aware of your pain and you stay conscious to the ways your pain can show up in your interactions with others.

In other series and book studies we discuss duality thinking and oneness thinking. Duality is our primary default in sense consciousness and promoted by most of our social dynamics. We have winners and losers. Kill or be killed. Tyler Perry has a hilarious monologue in one of his movies when the character Madea is sent to anger management and has a conversation with Dr. Phil. Madea is intent on convincing Dr. Phil that in this world you have to get the getters before you get got! Promoting this approach in leadership means that you armor up and sacrifice a broader sense of belonging and empathetic connections in favor of the illusion of winning as your measure of success. This is the tricky part of Armored Leadership—we have come to socially promote it as we portray armored behavior as successful. We ignore the costs and a fuller sense of what feels like success in our hearts and in healthy lives. Daring Leadership practices the integration Brown talked about in *Braving the Wilderness: Strong Back, Soft Front and Wild Heart*. Brown says, "For me, that strong back is grounded confidence and boundaries. The soft front is staying vulnerable and curious. The mark of a wild heart is living out these paradoxes in our lives and not giving in to the either/or demand that reduces us. It's showing up in our vulnerability and our courage, and above all else, being both fierce and kind." How often do we pause to assess whether we have made a situation a Win or Lose outcome and excluded an integrated and compassionate outcome that might take more emotional work and might call us to be vulnerable and empathetic? Our ability to stop and assess might depend on how much we value the Daring Leadership outcome. Think about it.

In Armored Leadership, during times of uncertainty—when fear is our common response—that fear can be weaponized to the advantage of the leader. Brown says, "If you can keep people afraid, and give them an enemy who is responsible for their fear, you can get people to do just about anything." History demonstrates countless times this has occurred in politics, religion and business. It is exactly how leaders convince masses of people to commit acts that are inhumane and immoral and I am not going into that list.

Fear, like shame, is one of those universal emotions. In doing emotional work with children we may try to narrow the categories to Mad, Sad, Glad, Afraid. I generally point out to adults that my experience tells me that Mad is Fear wearing a disguise that makes me think I am in control; the vulnerability of fear makes me feel out of control so I'd like to avoid that. Weaponized fear looks like anger because it gives you a target to blame for your fear and lets you feel like you are back in control. Brené Brown didn't say that but I do. A Course In Miracles says there is only Fear or Love. Weaponized fear tries to give you anger as a third alternative and a way out that isn't love.

As a society we **prefer** someone assure us there is a way out of fear rather than name the fear, assure us that it is perfectly normal AND tell us fear need not drive us into lizard brained decisions. Change is uncertain. Love is uncertain. Life is uncertain. We do not tend to welcome the news that fear is normal and that we should learn to work with it. You may have heard that courage is not a lack of fear but facing your fear and doing it anyway. Fear is another one of our protective instincts, designed for survival, and not meant to drive all of our choices. There is an element of fear which is our belief we are powerless to protect ourselves or do what is before us. Daring Leadership says, "You might get hurt but love anyway; You might fail but give it a try; You will die someday but live fully today." Try not to lead by appealing to everyone's lizard brain. Listen to the story you hear in the news, in your workplace and in the community. If it sounds like fear and the leader is offering someone to blame, be aware there are alternate paths forward and that you have access to divine wisdom to discern when someone is trying to lure you into the illusion of powerlessness.

Numbing is any behavior we use to distract ourselves from pain, discomfort and feelings of vulnerability. Everyone, including leaders, has their own numbing behavior. For some it might be drug or alcohol addiction. For some it might be shopping or gambling or eating or working or Facebook. Work is the most socially acceptable addiction we encounter. Daring Leaders set healthy boundaries AND know what feels like real comfort and renewal. Daring Leaders can say "No" appropriately and confidently. Daring Leaders have found their fire and so instead of staying at work endless hours, or spending a couple hours online shopping for items they don't really need, they garden or write or invite friends over for a meal together. Armored Leaders tell themselves they just need a couple drinks to take the edge off. Armored Leaders fret about finances while spending without keeping track of a budget.

Brown suggests, “Instead of asking ourselves ‘What is the quickest way to make these feelings go away?’ we could ask ‘What are these feelings and where did they come from?’ Second, figure out what brings you real comfort and renewal.” And I might add, then DO the real comfort thing.

Daring Leaders understand that to endure the momentary discomfort of saying “No” allows them to feel at peace and enjoy the fruits of what they consciously choose to do. We all have to identify what our numbing behavior is, what triggers it and where we fail to set healthy boundaries. Then we have to identify what feeds our soul. How do we connect with the endless supply of peace and love and comfort and renewal that is our Source? And when our impulse is to turn to numbing, we have to begin to choose renewal. Daring Leaders take the time and effort to build healthy habits!

Brown talks about numbing pain also numbs joy. Brown talks about joy as those temporary events in the material world and therefore when we feel joy we feel vulnerable. Joy could be finding out you are pregnant and immediately being filled with the vulnerable uncertainty about what could go wrong. Joy could be getting married and then a friend’s spouse dies suddenly and you are reminded of the vulnerability of love. In Leadership, the Armored Leader tries to avoid the vulnerability of changing fates or disappointment by living in a sense of scarcity and lack. The Armored Leader is bracing for what comes next and misses the times of gratitude and celebration. We accomplish one goal and move on to the next. We don’t speak about success so that we don’t “jinx” it. Anyone familiar with this? Brown says something interesting about Daring Leadership. “What is the one thing that people who can fully lean into joy have in common?” Anyone want to guess? “Gratitude. They **practice** gratitude.” She says, “It’s the antidote to foreboding joy, plain and simple. It’s allowing yourself the pleasure of accomplishment, or love, or joy—of really feeling it, of basking in it—by conjuring up gratitude for the moment and for the opportunity. It’s allowing yourself to recognize the shiver of vulnerability—‘Oh no, I have something to lose’ feeling—and to just sit with it, and be grateful that you have something you want, in your hand, that it feels good to hold and recognize.” At ULV we talk about an attitude of gratitude AND we have a gratitude practice every Sunday. The Abundance Journals are a practice that gives us concrete moments of gratitude every day. When our true sense of gratitude and joy are based in our spiritual connection to Divine Source, I think it moves us away from some of the scarcity and fear based behavior. This is the advantage of doing this work in church—we get to identify ways our spiritual beliefs can be practical tools for living!

As spiritual beings, we continue to be in this human experience. My human experience tells me I need to continue to be aware of maintaining that divine connection **and** noticing when my mind goes back to limited beliefs, protective behavior, and ego and fear driven actions. It happens. When it happens, and that is how we are showing up, that is how we are showing up as leaders. Daring Leaders demonstrate a desire to be Daring, fierce and kind and brave, and a willingness to do the work, the self-work, necessary to make shifts and develop healthy habits. There is an audio read-along online at Daretolead.brenebrown.com. Or you can order the book from Amazon Smile and designate ULV as your charity. Or you can simply begin to pay attention to when it feels like you are living in a fear story, or engaging in numbing behavior, or acting out of your own wounding, or stuck in a win or lose paradigm or skipping the celebration and gratitude as you prepare for the next awful thing to happen. And when you see those behaviors, be with it and then consider what a daring leader would do. What would fierce and kind and brave look like in this situation?

Next week we'll explore "Living Into Our Values" Do we have values? How do we live them?