

## DTL Living Into Our Values

We are at week three in our Fall Series with Brené Brown's book, Dare To Lead. So far we have Rumbled With Vulnerability and examined our Armored Leadership and what Daring Leadership might look like. Today we come to Living Into Our Values.

In the great synchronicity of the Universe, this week Congressman Elijah Cummings passed away at only 68 years of age. The son of an African-American share cropper, he rose to a life of service first as a prosecutor and then as the representative of the 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Maryland, including the city of Baltimore. He has been universally praised as a man of courage, integrity and commitment. How do you get to that point in life where people summarize your life with words like integrity and passion and justice?

I suspect it has to do with how Brown describes "values". She says, "Value is a way of being or believing that we hold most important. Living into our values means that we do more than profess our values, we practice them. We are clear about what we believe and we take care that our intentions, words and behaviors align with those beliefs." I believe Congressman Cummings was clear on his values. Are you?

The first step to living our values is to identify what they are! To be clear about what we believe. We have lists available. One of the things I'd like to invite you to do this week is to look at the list and narrow down your real, core values to 2 or maybe 3. Brown suggests 2. I was honestly surprised at how 2 stuck out for me. I could add a third but two values underpin most of what I love and do. Don't pick by what you "think" should be a value word and understand that the value can show up differently in family and community and church. It's still your value.

Next step I suggest is to write a statement about what that value means in your understanding. This is the way you take a word from vague and ambiguous to a stand you take in the world. For today I'd like to use our church's core values. We've already selected them, they are on the list and we have already developed a statement about what that word means to us. The core values are printed on the bulletin.

Now Brown says we do more than profess them, we practice them. We take care that our words and actions align with our values. In the book, Brown invites us to feel what behaviors feel in alignment and to feel what behaviors are warnings that we are **not** in alignment with our values.

In Unity we might say what it feels like to be our best self, our true self and what it feels like when we are out of alignment with our best self. You know the nagging still, small voice in your head that says, “Not right”. Not the inner critic that says, “You screwed up” but the Jimminy Cricket that chirps, “Is **this** the best choice?” Since we’ve done the value work, let’s look at our church behaviors in and out of alignment with our values. I’ll point out a couple and you can see what you come up with.

**Spiritual Growth.** Behavior in alignment looks like providing opportunities through service, classes and workshops for collective and individual growth; and when we believe everyone is doing the best they can. If everyone is growing, we need to **assume** everyone is doing the best they can.

When we are slipping out of alignment with this value we judge and complain about programs and personalities. We make no room for not being our best self every moment. These are cues to pause and ask ourselves how living in our value looks and feels.

**Creativity.** Aligned behavior might look like allowing experiments and new ideas to unfold. Staying open in our mindset and not believing in limitation.

Slippery behavior might be thinking and promoting only one way to do something. Limiting who gets to express ideas and labeling some as creative and others as, well, **not**. Some of this slippery behavior is what we do to ourselves!

**Joy.** When we are in alignment we know joy is from within and from our oneness with the Divine. It is also allowing ourselves to lighten up!

We might be slipping when we tie our happiness to an outer circumstance or take everything so seriously.

**Love.** Everyone wants to choose this core value because we teach it is our divine nature. In alignment we acknowledge the gifts of each one and we believe in ourselves!

Behavior gets on a slippery slope when we allow “us vs them” mentality to unfold. We doubt ourselves and condemn others.

**Abundance.** In alignment with this core value we give generously in a multitude of ways—time, talent, treasure. We acknowledge God is our Source in all of those ways and so we are not limited.

All of us spend a moment or two in slippery behavior I suspect.

We tighten up at the appearance of lack. We can feel our whole body contract in fear of “not enough”, time or health or wealth. We look to material channels for our good and forget to see beyond every channel is God and God is way more creative than one or two channels we are focused on.

**Community.** In alignment with this value we collaborate and work together, valuing each contribution. We welcome and celebrate our diversity.

Slipping out of this value we focus on personality, power and isolated parts, with value to some and not others. We create subtle barriers that exclude some when we fail to notice our privilege and systems that divide community.

Does this give you a better idea about working with your own values? And the importance of being clear on your values?

Brown suggests that Daring Leaders live **BIG**. And those letters of BIG stand for Boundaries; Integrity; and Generosity. Boundaries are important to Brown and not something most of us are particularly good at.

**Boundaries** allow us to say a simple No to those behaviors that put us on a slippery slope with our values. We say No to activities that are part of the “hustle” but not the healthy leadership we desire to express. We say Yes to those healthy words and behaviors even when they aren’t popular or seen as advancing our career or gaining acceptance. Our boundaries are clear and we don’t make up excuses for letting them grow muddy.

**Integrity.** Brown says, “Integrity is choosing courage over comfort; it’s choosing what’s right over what’s fun, fast, or easy; and it’s practicing your values, not just professing them.” So we don’t have a set of values for work and a set of values everywhere else. We don’t have a set of values for our family and one for ourselves. Choosing courage over comfort and what’s right over what’s easy. Bold words. That is daring leadership.

**Generosity.** Brown goes back to some things we’ve already said. It is not about giving away money. “Extending the most generous interpretation to the intentions, words, and actions of others. The assumption of generosity is believing that people are doing the best that they can.” It is always giving people a way out with dignity. People make mistakes—**we** are people who make mistakes. Do we allow ourselves and others a way forward that doesn’t involve shame? We can’t be responsible for the feelings of others AND we know that sometimes we can create an environment that supports feelings of shame vs responsible feelings of maybe temporary guilt and spiritual growth.

Which brings me to one of Brown's statements that also reminds me of Congressman Cummings: ***Daring leaders who live into their values are never silent about hard things.***

Daring leaders hold themselves and those around them accountable for living values. These are leaders who speak up when the group consensus is choosing easy and comfort over what is respectful, kind and valued. To speak up is fierce. How we address what we say is our opportunity to be kind. To say, "THIS is wrong" rather than "YOU are wrong". It is not zig zagging. It is not weakening our view and our commitment. It is giving others a chance to examine their own values and behaviors. We have to understand that not everyone holds our values or sees them in the world the same way we do. Yet when we are clear about our values and how we see them, we can articulate that in a way that doesn't seek to destroy the dignity of others.

Daring Leadership is being our best self in whatever circumstance we are in. It is more difficult than it is complicated. It calls us to courage and self-awareness as well as boundaries and integrity and generosity. Are we up to the task? Each of us has to answer for ourselves. Each of us finds the way forward in our own way. I invite you to take the value sheet and spend some time discerning your values and then write a statement about what that really means in your life. Then write down some behaviors when you know you are aligned with your value and maybe some behaviors that cue you the ego mind and pressures around you are pushing you off the value driven choice.

Next week we'll end our series by exploring how to write our own story and what might be happening if we don't.