

**THE GIFTS OF
IMPERFECTION**
by Brené Brown

Summary & Worksheet

durmonski.com

The Book In Three Or More Sentences:

The Gifts of Imperfection is short, full of inspiring stories, and definitions of sparkly words book, that will help you accept yourself the way you really are. The research shared by Brené Brown will give you permission to abandon the life you're supposed to live and embrace the life you really want to live. And though full of touchy-feely passages, the ideas inside the book will allow you to *finally* stand up and believe in yourself.

The Core Idea:

Embrace your flaws and show yourself the way you are. The book will take you on a journey to your own personal oasis – Wholehearted life. A type of living focused on unraveling your true desires, embracing your imperfect qualities, and finally start living a worry-free life where you don't care about what others think about you. The focus of your existence becomes, "how I feel!" not, "what others might say!"

Highlights:

- To get over stress and shame, you need to realize that *perfect* shouldn't be the norm.
- Talking about shame with good friends is the best way to accept your imperfections.
- Your life will start to matter to you when you convince yourself that you matter.

7 Key Lessons from The Gifts of Imperfection:

- *Lesson #1: Embrace The Wholehearted Way of Living*
- *Lesson #2: Practice Courage, Compassion, and Connection*
- *Lesson #3: Fitting In and Belonging Are Not the Same Thing*
- *Lesson #4: Build Shame Resilience by Owning Your Stories*
- *Lesson #5: Living Authentically Is a Process*
- *Lesson #6: You Don't Need Extraordinary to Feel Joy*
- *Lesson #7: Don't Let Self-Doubt and "Supposed To" Crush You*

Lesson #1: Embrace The Wholehearted Way of Living

It's difficult to accept yourself with all of your faulty habits and messy thoughts when all you see in the world is perfect bodies and a lavish lifestyle.

But worrying (all the time) about what others might think will never allow you to reach a point where you live your life completely in accordance with your true desires.

The Wholehearted way of living is about acknowledging your imperfections, embracing them, and still being able to function properly in the world. Or as the author defines, "It means cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up in the morning and think, No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough. It's going to bed at night thinking, Yes, I am imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn't change the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging."

To start your journey of inner discovery, the first thing you need to do, or should we say start doing regularly, is to love yourself for who you truly are.

Only when you start accepting your nasty qualities and the skills you're lacking, without feeling ashamed, you can wake up with a smile on your face and be equally happy when you go to bed every night even if not all of your to-do items are done.

To come up with this worthy way of living, the author had to go through her own spiritual awakening. It took Brené a year of "soul work" with a therapist, to successfully go through her midlife crisis. The whole self-discovery journey with all the practical steps is shared in the book and can help you identify your own struggles so you can unravel the person you've been hiding all those years. The person you've been

hiding because you have been afraid of other people's comments.

According to the author, the Wholehearted type of living can emerge only when we take the risk to show our imperfect qualities and our vulnerable side. When this happens, we start believing fully in ourselves. And, we start living the life we want to live.

“Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light.”
Brené Brown

Lesson #2: Practice Courage, Compassion, and Connection

How do you cultivate worthiness and become truly authentic?

That's the main question Brené Brown tries to answer in *The Gifts of Imperfection*.

Our go-to thought when we imagine authenticity is perfection. But Brené advocates for totally the opposite. Through imperfection, we can reach inner acceptance, thus ourselves.

To start this journey of self-discovery, we need to practice courage, compassion, and connection. And here we're not talking about a one-time thing, these three need to become our daily practices.

Here's how you can exercise these seemingly lofty ideas:

- **Practice courage:** We're not talking about saving-the-princess-from-the-castle kind of bravery. Here, courage is defined as, “To speak one's mind by telling all one's heart.” In other words, to speak up when you don't understand. To tell others that you're afraid and to share your desires and goals with the world even if they don't materialize. The courage to share your vulnerabilities will form inner bravery that will basically shout something along the lines of, “Even if I'm not totally perfect, I still matter.”
- **Practice compassion:** When someone shares a vulnerable story, we try to act as a healer. In response, we usually share how we handled a similar situation with the intention to fix them. By doing this, we put ourselves as somehow superior to the person who's talking to us. But real compassion is not a hierarchical relationship,

it should be a connection between equals. So, don't try to fix people, try to be with them in vulnerable moments.

- **Practice connection:** We often confuse communication with real connection. Just because you're regularly chatting with someone doesn't mean that you understand them. To practice connection, Dr. Brown suggests not only give help, but also to ask for help when we need such. Real relationships are formed when we're able to help but more importantly, when we allow others to help us.

“But here's the tricky part about compassion and connecting: We can't call just anyone. It's not that simple. I have a lot of good friends, but there are only a handful of people whom I can count on to practice compassion when I'm in the dark shame place.”
Brené Brown

Lesson #3: Fitting In and Belonging Are Not the Same Thing

We, people, adapt very well. We can tailor our words, clothes, even our thoughts to fit in with a specific group of people.

We do it all the time. We betray our inner desires and acquire things we don't really need to impress groups of people who seemingly have it all figured out.

Yet, by adjusting yourself every time you meet new people you'll never reach a state of inner contentment. You'll only distance yourself further from the real person you are inside.

That's why the author states that fitting in and belonging are not the same thing.

Fitting in is pursuing social connections primarily focused on things – clothes, certain lifestyle, looks, X amount of money, etc.

Belonging, in contrast, is about finding people who accept you for your inner tastes. When you belong to a group, you feel comfortable sharing both your greatest desires as well as your greatest fears and vulnerabilities. You don't act to impress, you act to connect. Because only by presenting your genuine, imperfect persona, when we're part of something larger than us, your human desires will be truly satisfied.

But the above is scary – “What if people reject me?” That's why fitting in has become the norm. We so desperately want to hang around people, to connect, that we often cheat ourselves to find approval.

Still, as mentioned, fitting in will never satisfy your primal desire to

connect with others. It will only happen when you find a group where you belong.

“We can only belong when we offer our most authentic selves and when we’re embraced for who we are.” Brené Brown

Lesson #4: Build Shame Resilience by Owning Your Stories

“What will people think?” probably influenced more people, negatively, in our world than anything else.

Striving for perfection is usually a good strategy but the more you try to be perfect, the worse you will feel when life hinders you and confuses all your plans. And when this happens, when perfect seems unreachable, when others don’t seem to care about us, when we make others our priority, shame quickly enters our life and tells us that we’re not good enough.

The worst thing about shame is that we all experience it. This is a universal feeling that is deeply embedded in our system.

Fortunately, though, Brené Brown is a shame researcher and the tips mentioned in the book can help us fight this insidious feeling and bring a bit more comfort in our minds when we don’t feel like we belong at all to this world.

For this to happen, we first need to understand the difference between shame and guilt.

These two are not the same thing. Guilt is about our behavior. When we feel guilt, the following sentence is true, “I did something bad.”

Shame, on the other hand, is about how we perceive ourselves. In this condition, we think that “I am bad.”

Here is another interesting thing: we don’t necessarily have to experience shame to feel paralyzed by this feeling. The mere thought of doing something can summon “I’m not good enough” notions.

How to fight shame?

After spending more than a decade documenting how we, humans, think about shame, Dr. Brown found that people who handle this feeling best practice the following four things:

1. They are capable of understanding what external things trigger

- shame in them.
2. They don't relate imperfection with inadequacy.
 3. They often share their stories with people they trust.
 4. They speak about shame and express their feelings.

To start, focus on the last one. Talk about your shame to temper this daunting feeling.

“Shame resilience is the ability to recognize shame, to move through it constructively while maintaining worthiness and authenticity, and to ultimately develop more courage, compassion, and connection as a result of our experience. The first thing we need to understand about shame resilience is that the less we talk about shame, the more we have it.” Brené Brown

Lesson #5: Living Authentically Is a Process

Being authentic is not something you have. This is something you build and maintain. It's a continuous process that needs nurturing.

Brown describes it as, “It's a practice—a conscious choice of how we want to live.”

Of course, this is never a single choice. This is a series of choices that we have to make every single day. That's why it's so hard and exhausting.

After all, our society is built around people-pleasing. Often you can't express what you really think because this will threaten your job or your relationship with other people. Therefore, we're often forced to bet on safety. We deflect our real thoughts and say what is expected of us to “fit in” and basically ensure our survival.

These actions come at a cost, of course. The more we're not real with our interests, the more of the following feelings we'll invite: blame, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, addiction, rage, resentment.

It seems that we're either likable by others or by acting authentically we condemn ourselves to live a lonely life.

While this might be true on some occasions, it's only 100% correct if the group of people we surround ourselves with are only interested in our belongings.

If you decide to choose authenticity, you can practice the following things:

- Allow yourself to be imperfect and vulnerable.
- Embrace who you are and let go of the desire to please everyone.
- Strive to connect with people who accept you for who you are.

“If you’re like me, practicing authenticity can feel like a daunting choice—there’s risk involved in putting your true self out in the world. But I believe there’s even more risk in hiding yourself and your gifts from the world.” Brené Brown

Lesson #6: You Don’t Need Extraordinary to Feel Joy

What’s the quickest way to feel unworthy and regretful? According to the author, it’s the pursuit of perfection.

Brene Brown suggests, instead of chasing the ever-fleeting excellence and beat yourself up when things aren’t flawless, to become an aspiring good-enoughist.

When we start to appreciate the small moments of joy in our everyday life, we’ll realize that things are not as bad as we thought. Actually, we’ll finally see that they are better than what we’ve been telling ourselves all that time. Dr. Brown writes, “Sometimes we miss out on the bursts of joy because we’re too busy chasing down extraordinary moments. Other times we’re so afraid of the dark that we don’t dare let ourselves enjoy the light.”

Our worth is not measured by the amount of cash we have stashed in our bank account or the number of followers we have on social media. It’s more related to how you treat what you already have along with your values and ambitions.

The simplest thing you can do to cultivate your self-worth and your current accomplishments is by reminding yourself what you’re grateful for.

To acknowledge the daily moments that bring you joy and to stop wishing for grandiose things to fix your mood. After all, if you can’t learn to care for the small moments of delight in your life (talking to your friends, kids, the work you do), you’ll be anxious most of the time and rely solely on outside events to instill a dose of happiness.

“Our culture is quick to dismiss quiet, ordinary, hardworking men and women. In many instances, we equate ordinary with boring or, even more dangerous, ordinary has become synonymous with meaningless.” Brené Brown

Lesson #7: Don't Let Self-Doubt and "Supposed To" Crush You

Your life will start to matter to you when you convince yourself that you matter.

It's not that easy though. The pressure from our society heightens our self-doubt and helps our inner gremlins grow stronger. These are wretched self-doubt maintainers who convince us that our gifts are not big enough to be valuable or perceived as a talent.

That's why most people never start doing things related to their passion because the "supposed to" narrative is too strong.

Or in the words of the author, "You're supposed to care about making money, not meaning... You're supposed to choose: Work you love or work that supports the people you love."

How to fight the inner crippling thoughts that only exist to sabotage you?

There are two things to get started:

First, don't ignore the self-sabotaging thoughts and the inner demons. Take a moment to write the things that horrify you. This will help you understand why you're afraid of these things and give you the power to do them despite the self-doubt and the worry.

Second, focus on doing the things you love. You don't have to think about making a living. You don't even have to worry about making something perfect. Simply start creating stuff, regularly, that make you feel who you are and help you go through your day with a smile.

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Howard Thurman

Actionable Notes:

- **Share your shame:** When we feel embarrassed, to go through the episode of guilt, so we can actually emerge stronger, it's essential to share our shame with a good friend. After studying shame for nearly 10 years, Dr. Brown shares that, "Shame hates it when we reach out and tell our story." If we keep it to ourselves, the guilt will

eat us from within and prevent us from doing what we want to do in the future. When we share it though, we'll defuse the self-sabotaging thoughts and feel better about our identity.

- **Act authentically:** To be authentic, genuine, don't aim for people to like you. Stand your ground and say what you want to say. Often you'll feel uncomfortable and you'll want to self-protect by blocking your thoughts and keeping them for yourself. But the more you resist to open up, the more you'll bury your real identity. Strangely, the more you share with the world your real desires, the less shameful you'll feel over time, plus people will like you more. Eventually, this daily practice will lead to inner approval of you. You'll transition from, "I'm not good enough" to, "I'm OK if they don't like me."
- **Learn hopefulness:** Brené Brown writes that hope is not an emotion. It's actually something we practice that can help us stay on the path we want to pursue. To get to the hopeful state of mind you need the following things: First, set realistic goals. Second, figure out how to achieve these goals and write it all down – create a flexible plan. Third, don't stop believing that you can do it. Our world promotes things that are fun, fast, and easy. But as we all know, important things are rarely always fun, don't happen fast, and are surely not that easy to achieve. Inspire others, and yourself, by promoting this self-talk, "This is tough, but I can do it."
- **Schedule time for play:** When you're an adult, it's hard to justify spending time doing things unrelated to your to-do list. The mere thought of not working on your project(s) will invite the troubling duo: stress and depression. But this push-through mentality it's not sustainable for the long run. We need time off goofing around as much as we need rest. The benefits of pursuing not-related to your main goal creative projects, or simply playing video games might not immediately occur, but after a while, these pleasant deeds will help you get through the long-term projects and also give you time to connect with your loved ones.
- **Embrace imperfection:** Perfectionism is the default norm when we think about doing or creating something. After all, we're all surrounded by "awesome" people and items. Sadly, this mentality prevents us from trying new things and even being OK to be ourselves. Dr. Brown describes perfectionism as a shield we use to protect ourselves from blame, shame, and judgment. And while it is good to strive for creating perfect things, at its core, this is addictive and self-destructive behavior. We start to pass on opportunities and jobs because we don't believe that we can do the "perfect" job. To overcome this seemingly ideal state, embrace your vulnerabilities, and have the courage to do things, knowing that there may be flaws.

Commentary and My Personal Takeaway

Usually, hearing the words love and compassion in a sentence immediately triggers an eye-rolling effect in me.

I simply can't stand the conclusion these two words usually lead to. Authentic, self-love, yadda yadda. Yet, this book, despite being full of these commonly loathed words, is somehow readable and realistic. In fact, I believe it's one of the best self-help books I've read in a while.

The author talks about topics like love and connection in a more adequate way, not in terms of trying to trigger fake emotions.

Brené Brown heavily promotes the journey of Wholehearted living which aims to make us accept others for what they are, so we can ultimately accept who we are.

In a society that places blame and finger-pointing on the top, these two qualities are worth exploring.

This is surely a great book for everyone who strives towards perfection and feels not enough in terms of what he does.

The stories and the practices inside *The Gifts of Imperfection* will give you the strength to do things even if they are not 100% amazing. Additionally, it will help you realize that even experts are often doubtful in their skills.

The key takeaway:

Allow yourself to be imperfect. That's the only way you can go through your day without feeling regret, unaffected by the outside pressure, and also the only way you can build something worthwhile.

Notable Quotes:

“Perfectionism is self-destructive simply because there is no such thing as perfect. Perfection is an unattainable goal. Additionally, perfectionism is more about perception—we want to be perceived as perfect.” Brené Brown

“A small, quiet, grassroots movement that starts with each of us saying, “My story matters because I matter.” Brené Brown

“Heroics is important and we certainly need heroes, but I think we've lost touch with the idea that speaking honestly and openly

about who we are, about what we're feeling, and about our experiences (good and bad) is the definition of courage. Heroics is often about putting our life on the line. Ordinary courage is about putting our vulnerability on the line. In today's world, that's pretty extraordinary." Brené Brown

What to read next:

- [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#) by Carol S. Dweck [Summary]
- [Quiet](#) by Susan Cain [Summary]
- [The 5 AM Club](#) by Robin Sharma [Summary]

INTERACTIVE SHEET FOR NOTE-TAKING

Reading alone won't help you understand the actionable notes. You need to engage with the content. Answer the question below (just type inside the boxes) to outline your future steps:

- 1. What are you ashamed of? Write it down and share it with a good friend.*
- 2. What thoughts are you suppressing to fit in?*
- 3. Practice hopefulness. Convince yourself that you can do it.*
- 4. Schedule play time to relax and connect with family members:*
- 5. Do good-enough things and ask yourself: Why I always aim towards perfection?*

Don't forget to save your changes.