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BOOK REVIEWS

DARING GREATLY: HOW THE COURAGE TO BE VULNERABLE TRANSFORMS THE WAY WE LIVE, LOVE, PARENT, AND LEAD

By Brené Brown
New York, NY: Gotham Books (2012)
Hardcover, 256 pages

Reviewed by SARA WITHERS

Have you ever thought of vulnerability as weakness? Many leaders do whatever it takes to avoid being caught in a position of vulnerability for fear of how they may be perceived. Dr. Brené Brown, in her book *Daring Greatly*, seeks to help readers come to a new understanding of vulnerability, to see that vulnerability is actually “courage beyond measure” and is “daring greatly.” This book is a culmination of twelve years of Brown’s research leading to the conviction that “the courage to be vulnerable will change the way we live, love, parent and lead.”

The testimony of thousands of men and women make up a large portion of Brown’s research. Her interviews reveal that her respondents all share the desire to be free

of fear and what she calls “the never-enough problem”—“never good enough,” “never perfect enough,” “never thin enough.” Throughout the book, Brown expounds on the aspects of our culture that create “the never-enough problem”: shame, comparison, and disengagement.

Brown does a phenomenal job of assessing the current state of our culture as a society in which we heap shame not only upon one another but also on ourselves. By sharing stories, Brown makes a very convincing case for the need to better understand the difference between shame and guilt, and the need to know how to work through those emotions.

Although Brown seems to clearly recognize the effects of shame on our society, I am not convinced that she has clarity on how to go about dealing with the problems of shame. She approaches the problem from a humanistic perspective, giving advice and solutions that are devoid of any deliverer other than self. Her three-step process for dealing with shame exemplifies this. In the chapter “Understanding and Combating Shame,” she describes the process as sharing your shameful experience with someone you trust, talking to yourself with love, and accepting that the shameful experience happened. Brown’s premise throughout this process is that once you can recognize shame’s attack, you can go through these steps and move on unscathed. However, this approach is incongruent with the Christian perspective that we cannot be our own healers, nor can we remove our own shame.

Brown focuses a great deal on the understanding that shame is bad and must be overcome. Although she differentiates between guilt and shame (“Guilt = I did something bad”; “Shame = I am bad”), she misses something by attempting to eliminate

shame from our lives. It is true that unwarranted shame is a harmful emotion. This is revealed in situations where one unjustly experiences shame caused by an abusive relationship, whether physical or emotional. As a result, many have lived lives filled with events that have led them to think shamefully of themselves, even though the guilt lies with others.

In Brown's attempt to reach her goal of helping the reader discover how vulnerability can be a courageous act, she does not acknowledge the Christian view of innate sinfulness. Consequently, she neglects the Christian solution to shame—to accept Christ and the sacrifice He made on the cross. While this doesn't make us any less shameful, it allows Christ's shamelessness to be judged in substitution for our own shame. In turn, we are free to be vulnerable for Him.

I agree with Brown that vulnerability is truly courageous. Leaders especially need to embrace vulnerability. But with Brown's main focus on shame as the reason we resist vulnerability, she tends to neglect many of the other factors that cause leaders to disregard the "daring greatly" value of vulnerability. These factors, which many leaders struggle with, can include greed, arrogance, pride, hate and fear. The Christian view, which Brown does not address, demonstrates that Christ provides the way to deal with legitimate and illegitimate shame. He is also the way in which leaders may address these other factors affecting vulnerability.

In addition to presenting a self-focused solution for our problems, Brown weakens her book by using a great deal of foul language. This reliance on curses to intensify her points makes for a very awkward and uncomfortable read.

Though devoid of the Christian perspective, there are many truths

detailed throughout the book, including great suggestions for how to have a positive and healthy way of life. I would recommend this book to those seeking a better understanding of how the secular mind deals with shame and takes steps toward a courageous lifestyle. But I would not recommend this book for those seeking a holistic and Christ-centered journey to vulnerability.

SARA WITHERS is a pastor in the Oregon Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and is currently a student in the Master of Divinity program at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

THE HUMANITARIAN LEADER IN EACH OF US: 7 CHOICES THAT SHAPE A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE LIFE

*By Frank LaFasto & Carl Larson
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (2012)
Paperback, 191 pages*

Reviewed by SHIRLEY FREED

The thesis of this book is that humanitarian leaders develop a commitment to help others in need by following a path through seven choice points. These opportunities to choose are presented in a linear fashion beginning with "leveraging life's experiences" and ending with "persevering" and "leading the way."

The authors identified the development process by interviewing 31 individuals who had in some way taken charge of helping people in need. The humanitarian leaders varied in age, gender, ethnicity, religious background and socio-economic status. The negative forces they had taken action to ameliorate included exploitation of children, limited access to water, unavailable health