

Week 13: Embracing Your Valuable Flaws

Recently, my son Quinn told me about the game of dodgeball they play in gym class. He said that when someone gets hit by a ball, they must go to the sideline and do twenty jumping jacks before they can get back into the game. He said that rule annoyed him. He said the losers should have to sit and watch for the remainder of the game. I asked why he felt that way. He looked at me incredulously and said, “Because I’m competitive.”

Have you noticed us human beings have a bit of a competition problem?

This is, in part, because most of us have been conditioned to believe our value—our worthiness as a human being—is relative to everyone else’s, that our value is achieved by comparison, by competition, and ultimately by victory over the rest of humanity. The voice of shame, lurking in the dark recesses of our mind, assures us this lie is true. So, we engage in deeply wounding games in which the grand prize is personal worth.

The games we play vary dramatically.

The type of game—the on-going competition for value—we choose to play seems to be dependent on the particular type of wounds we incurred. For instance, many of the messages we swallowed about our value were delivered to us unwittingly, by people who genuinely cared about us and intended us no harm. A glass of milk was spilled at the table, and a parent huffed and griped, or scolded and reprimanded, and a lesson was learned. (*My value is diminished when I make more mistakes than other people.*) Or we brought home our first set of As in the fourth grade and our parents glowed with pride and we got a little more ice cream than usual after dinner. (*My value is increased when I perform well, and it seems assured when I perform better than everyone else.*) Or we gained our adolescent weight before we gained our adolescent height and the kids giggled as we jiggled and our value got confused with the numbers on the scale. (*My value is dependent upon looking as thin as everyone else.*) Or we got our first car, with wheels shinier than anyone else’s and a speaker system with the deepest bass sounds around, and the Facebook friend requests surged. (*My value is dependent upon owning things that are more impressive than the things other people own.*) Or we landed the right job or the right wife or the right house in the right neighborhood and people started admiring what we’d accomplished. (*My value is dependent upon what I achieve and the number of people who admire it.*)

From the moment our minds can comprehend that there is *me* and there is *you*, we begin to crave and seek out an assurance of worth. We are like starved creatures, and we will feed on anything. And so the lies come, and we eat them. But we must fight to remind ourselves that we have eaten crummy food and swallowed

crummy messages. I think most of us *do* want to fight that fight, but the reality is, if we quit swallowing the messages we have been fed, *we are still hungry*. So where do we begin to find some semblance of assurance about our value as a human being, our worth as a creature?

Maybe we can begin to find it in the truth of baseball cards.

When I was Quinn's age I would wait for my allowance every week, then hop on my bike and head to the local department store. In those days, baseball cards were a big deal for young boys. I would go, and I would buy as many packs as I could afford that day. I would open them quickly, thumbing through the stack for a card of value. But what gave a particular card value? A baseball card's value was only minimally determined by the popularity or batting average of the particular player it depicted.

The value of the card was almost completely determined by its *rarity*.

In other words, if a particular player card was mass-produced, that card was referred to as "a common," and it had the same minimal value as any other "common." But if only a small number of a particular card was produced, the value of that card soared. Furthermore, some of the most sought-after, most valuable, cards were "error cards." These were cards that contained some rare error—a misspelled name for example—that was not detected in the earliest printings, but was later corrected. The flaw gave the card a particular uniqueness and a rarity that elevated its value dramatically.

This is the truth we need to consume.

The games we play in our competition for value, our attempts to do what everyone else is doing but just slightly better, actually have the opposite effect: they make us common and decrease our value as human beings. We need to know our value comes not from what we do or achieve, or how far ahead we are in the pennant race of life, but our real value is due, at least in part, to the fact that *there is only one of us*. Only one person with our particular set of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, passions, gifts, callings, and experiences.

There is no other story like yours,
only one of you has been produced,
and because of that, *you have infinite value*.