

## Week 29: Embracing Your Limitations and Being Embraced by Your People

Having three kids in a dual-earner family feels a lot like juggling.

Except the balls are children, and the balls are unpredictable and crabby, and they bite the hand that catches them. My wife and I are supposed to keep these precious balls aloft, but they don't want to be caught—they want to watch television and eat sweets and show me *they* are in charge of the act. Sometimes, I feel like *I'm* the one being juggled.

And sometimes, there are simply too many balls in the air and I don't have enough hands.

Several years ago, my oldest son had a baseball game. When I looked at the family schedule, I knew there was absolutely no way for my wife or me to transport him to the game. I contacted his coach's wife and told her my son wouldn't be able to go to the game. Her response was simple. And obvious. "Kelly, *we* can take Aidan." Except it hadn't been obvious to *me*.

The thought of asking for help had never crossed my mind.

It rarely occurs to me to ask for help, in part because I've lived most of my life pretty independently—I've always just taken care of myself. But of course there is another reason, a deeper reason: *asking for help is a vulnerable experience*.

More recently, a friend of mine gave my kids a ride to another extracurricular event. Later that afternoon, as we picked our kids up from the event, I offered to drive all of the kids to their next appointment. He looked back at me and smiled slyly, "No, that's okay. I want you in my debt."

My friend put into words a great truth. Asking for help feels vulnerable because it usually comes from a place of neediness and insufficiency and dependency. It comes from the place at the end of ourselves—the place where we are no longer up to the task. And this makes it a risky place—the place where we are most exposed—the most revealed—and the most at risk of rejection. To ask for help in this place feels vulnerable, and it therefore requires *courage*.

There are many kinds of courage. Clearly, courage is the stuff of battlefields—the soldier on the first day of boot camp and the last day of his deployment. But vulnerability—revealing one's true self to another and forsaking the carefully constructed false self we normally present to the world—is also courageous. This is why I'm convinced the waiting room of a therapy office is populated by the most courageous of souls—people who have, in one way or another, come to the end of themselves and are stepping into the vulnerability of a request for help.

As a parent and a psychologist and a writer, there are too many balls in the air, and I don't have enough hands. And the truth is, this is very, very good. We all

need to come to the end of ourselves. Because once there, we discover it isn't *really* the end of ourselves. It's the end of our *false* self—that carefully crafted image of competency and perfection we have erected in order to protect our *true* self—that part of us that is a complicated amalgam of mess and beauty, shame and glory. When we are bowed low we come face to face with our true self, and the truth is this: we need help, we are worthy, and we are worthy *of* help.

In the midst of our identity revelation, we have come to trust that we are a worthy giver of love. Now, we have to trust that we will also be worthy if we are a *receiver* of love.