

Week 47: What a Life of Vulnerability Really Looks Like

The alarm sounds at 5am, and my heavy-gritty eyelids creak open. The kids still have two hours of slumber ahead of them, which means I have two hours alone with my thoughts and my keyboard and my craft. The prospect is thrilling.

And terrifying.

Because there's something else nestled right next to my gleeful anticipation. It doubts and it gnaws. It's my fear of the blank page. It's my fear of drying up. It's my fear of not being *enough*. When I sit in front of a blank document, it can feel like my worth is up for grabs. And that kind of fear makes me feel incredibly vulnerable—it's way easier to feel prolific and invincible. In the past, the fear has driven me back under the covers. Fear and vulnerability like a padlock, trapping my words inside. But now I know, my vulnerability isn't the *lock* on my words—it's actually the *doorway* into everything I want to write about.

We live in an invulnerable world. Somewhere along the way, we decided vulnerability is weakness, and we've banished it from the public square. Waiters aren't allowed to confess mistakes for fear of a lawsuit. If a doctor admits doubt, they lose the confidence of everyone they serve. When was the last time a politician admitted they were wrong *before* they were caught in the act? Pillars of virtue cheat their way to the top rather than embracing limitation and weakness.

We've replaced the public square with a winner's circle.

And our homes aren't much different—we've banished vulnerability from our living rooms and bedrooms and hearts. Marital conflict escalates as spouses litigate their love with cross-examinations and Exhibits A to Z. Our children take their cues, and they compete with each other for worth and value. On playgrounds, tears get stifled and punches get thrown. Our strength and invincibility are, quite simply, tearing the world apart.

In the end, the winner's circle stands empty, and so do our hearts.

Who will show us the way out of this morass? The answer might surprise you, because the answer *is* you. Before sunrise, I'm a writer, but I'm a clinical psychologist when the sun comes up. And this is what my clients have taught me: we aren't healed by the countless guises of invincibility—better arguments or improved technology or obscene wealth. We are healed by *vulnerability*.

We are healed when we reveal our mess to another and put our real self on the line.

When we connect *in* our brokenness—not in *spite* of it—we discover what makes us messy is also what makes us beautiful. And we give everyone around us permission to be broken and beautiful, too. When we have the courage to embrace

our weakness, we quit competing and we begin loving, we quit fighting and we start sacrificing. A world torn apart by invincibility can only be healed by vulnerability and weakness. And art is one of the last bastions of vulnerability in this invincible-crumbling world.

Which makes you—the artist—the one we’re all waiting on.

“Wait,” you say, “Me? The artist? Me?” And I say, “Yes, you the artist.” Because that’s the other thing my clients have taught me: there’s an artist in all of us. When I began to let go of my protective false self, to listen to the voice of grace inside of me, and to settle into my true self, I became aware of a creative impulse within me. I wanted to *write*. I had no idea where it would lead, no plan, just a creative urge. And I allowed the impulse to lead me. I figured this was my own personal journey, and I enjoyed it. But as a clinician, I’ve discovered something universal:

In each of us, there’s an artist waiting to be born.

When you ask anyone who has begun to release their shame, recognize their worthiness, and reveal themselves to their people what they would do if they followed their heart, they say things like: dust off my camera and be a photographer again, set up a woodshop in my garage, refurbish my ’65 Mustang, start a business on Etsy. They say they want to *create*:

I’d create a curriculum.

I’d create a community.

I’d open a craft shop.

I’d play my guitar.

I’d garden.

I’d sculpt.

I’d write.

I’d paint.

I’d sing.

I’d act.

I’d *live*.

When we quit investing our time and energy in our invulnerability—our protection and pretending and perfecting and performing—we can become the artists we already are. As it turns out, we were created to create. The question is: Do you believe in yourself enough to do it?

We need the artist within you. We need people living from their true selves, people settling into who they are, and then vulnerably coloring the world with what they find there. We need the artist in you to face the demons. We need the creative within you to stare them down. We need anyone willing to bleed on the page or the

canvas or the medium of their choice. We need to fill up the winner's circle with creativity and art and beauty and all things redemptive, until there is no room left within it for ego and violence and invincibility.

We need that kind of vulnerability.