

SUMMARY

RISING STRONG

BRENE BROWN



Summary of “Rising Strong” by Brené Brown

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Discover the power of vulnerability and bravery and learn how to rise strong when life knocks you down.

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Introduction

Brené Brown's mission in life began when she wanted to start a global conversation about vulnerability and shame. She believed that to truly find ourselves, we must be vulnerable, brave and put ourselves out there. Of course, putting yourself out there doesn't always lead to success, you are going to fall and you are going to fail sometimes. For instance, if you're willing to fall in love, you have to be willing to risk heartbreak. Similarly, if you want to try something new and innovative, you need to accept that failure is a possibility. So no matter what you're currently struggling with, whether it's a failed relationship or a small argument with a colleague, it's important to learn how to rise from those struggles. Brown's goal is to slow down the rising and falling process, to bring into awareness all the choices that unfurl in front of us during those moments of discomfort and hurt, and to explore the consequences of those choices.

According to Brown, "If we can learn how to feel our way through these experiences and our own stories of struggle, we can write our own brave stories. When we own our stories, we avoid being trapped in stories someone else is telling." It's time to be daring, brave, vulnerable, and simply rise strong.

The Guidelines of Rising Strong

Theodore Roosevelt once said, “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly;...who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly.” According to Brown, we are facedown in the arena. Our “facedown” moments can be big ones like getting fired or finding out about an affair, or they can be small ones like learning a child has lied about their report card.

After years of research on vulnerability and daring, Brown recognizes three truths. The first is that we should want to be in the arena. Wanting to be in the arena means wanting to be brave in life. When we make that choice to be brave, we also sign up to get our asses kicked. In other words, we can’t be comfortable and courageous at the same time. The second truth is that vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it’s our greatest measure of courage. And lastly, a lot of cheap seats in the arena are filled with people who never venture onto the floor. These people simply hurl mean-spirited criticisms from a safe distance. Therefore, it’s important to be mindful of the criticisms and feedback you allow in your life. For Brown, “if you’re not in the arena getting your ass kicked,” then she’s not interested in your feedback.

There are some basic tenets about being brave, risking vulnerability, and overcoming adversity that Brown believes are important for learning to rise strong.

1. If we are brave enough often enough, we will fail; this is the physics of vulnerability. In other words, when we commit to showing up, we are committing to falling.

2. Once we begin being brave, we can never go back. Rising up is difficult, but we will never go back to the place we were before we were brave enough to rise and fall.
3. The journey is ours but we shouldn't go through it alone. The journey to success is rough so we need support from others around us to come along for the ride.
4. We live to tell our story. When we tell our stories, we make connections and release chemicals in our brains that make us empathize and feel good.
5. Creativity is transferring what is in our head to our heart, then to our hands.
6. No matter your struggles, the process of rising strong is the same. As humans, we are feeling machines and when we are willing to feel, we are willing to grow and rise.
7. Comparative suffering is a function of fear and scarcity. When we fail or screw up, we begin to doubt ourselves and even compare ourselves to others. People believe their problems are comparatively worse or better than others; however, compassion is not finite. Hurt is hurt, and when we can respond to others with empathy and compassion, the healing that results affects us all.
8. The emotional, vulnerable, and courageous process is not a "one-size-fits-all" formula. Rising strong does not offer a step-by-step guide to success, it's not a simple linear process. It's more a back-and-forth action that takes different shapes for different people.
9. Courage is contagious. Your experience can profoundly affect the people around you whether you are aware of it or not.
10. Rising strong is a spiritual practice. Getting back on our feet doesn't require religion, theology, or doctrine; however, it does mean recognizing that we are all connected by a power greater than all of us and that connection is grounded in love and belonging.

The Rising Strong Process

During a vacation at Lake Travis, Brown began to open up to her husband, Steve, who wasn't reciprocating the openness that she was sharing. As they swam together, Brown felt a sense of love and appreciation and voiced her feelings to her husband, stating "I'm so glad we decided to do this together. It's beautiful out here." Her husband's response? A noncommittal half-smile along with the words, "Yeah. Water's good." Not quite the response Brown was expecting.

This turned into a fight about vulnerability and Brown learned that Steve was afraid of not being strong enough to save his family in case of an emergency. For many women, appearance and body-image are common shame triggers while weakness is a common shame trigger for men. During this encounter, Brown analyzed her and her husband's behavior and developed a three-step process for rising strong.

The first step of the process is the reckoning. This step simply means that people who rise strong can recognize their emotions, and when an emotional change is triggered, they can acknowledge this change. They then analyze this change and take an interest in finding out why it happens, taking a genuine curiosity in the connection between their emotions and actions.

The second step of the process is the rumble. This is the part where you own your story and recognize your strengths and weaknesses. When you reflect on the times that you have suffered, take a deeply honest look at yourself and challenge what you think is true or untrue. You must be willing to dig deep into emotions like shame, guilt, heartbreak, and forgiveness to truly learn more about yourself.

The final step of the process is the revolution. This occurs when you use what you've learned from the rumble and turn them into positive changes in your life. When you go through this three-step process, you can begin a

radical shift in the way that you live your life, love others around you, and participate in society. Through the conversation Brown and her husband had at the lake, they were able to own up to their stories, which led to a breakthrough in their relationship as they learned about their fears together. If you're still not quite sure about this process, don't worry, we'll dig a bit deeper in the following chapters.

The Reckoning

Do you ever marvel at the confidence of others? Those who seem to fall and get right back up are people we tend to look up to. We admire their bravery, their courage, their vulnerability and their ability to overcome obstacles is nothing short of inspiring. Do you wonder how people like this exist? Well, it turns out that these people all share a common trait: the ability to reckon with their emotions. But what does this mean?

Simply put, reckoning “is the process of calculating where you are.” When we reckon with our emotions, we must look at our past, survey the present, and engage with our feelings. This can prove to be more challenging than we realize because we typically push our emotions away and refuse to recognize their existence. For instance, when you feel disappointment or anger, you might try to bury that anger by filling your head with rational thoughts and distractions. Unfortunately, the practice of burying our emotions will only lead to a breakdown later on as we continue to let them accumulate and build up within us.

The best way to prevent these breakdowns is simply by permitting ourselves to feel. Brown once did this by writing herself a permission slip giving her the permission to “be excited, have fun, and be goofy.” The next step is to become curious about your experiences, of course, this isn’t always a comfortable experience. This is because “curiosity is an act of vulnerability and courage,” which means we must dig deep down to discover where emotions are truly coming from and why we are feeling them.

Unfortunately, we don’t have a natural curiosity about where our feelings come from, this is what Brown calls the *dry well*. George Lowenstein calls it something different, the *information gap*. According to Lowenstein, “curiosity is the feeling of deprivation we experience when we identify and focus on a gap in our knowledge.” In other words, once we develop an awareness of this gap, we become curious and crave to learn more.

So if you want to begin reckoning with your emotions, “give yourself permission to feel emotion, get curious about it, pay attention to it, and practice.”

The Rumble

The next step of the rising strong process is the rumble, this is the part where we own our stories through honesty and wholeheartedness. When it comes to stories, how many times have you embellished the truth? Or perhaps you've listened to others create a narrative that didn't fit yours. We tell stories all the time and these narratives allow us to feel a sense of purpose and belonging. Unfortunately, it's easy to get caught up in these stories and create false narratives that make us lose our identity. This is where rumbling can help us find ourselves again.

As we go about our lives, we feel emotions like pain, anger, and heartbreak. We then feel confused as we try to make sense of the situation we are in, which leads to telling ourselves a story that connects with the unhappiness we've experienced in the past. We begin to make sense of the struggles we've been through, but in the process, we create a narrative that tells us that we are meant to suffer and that our suffering will only continue. When we rumble, however, we begin to identify the conspiracies and confabulations, or lies, that we have told ourselves our entire lives.

So how can you begin the rumble of your own life? An effective way to begin is by writing down your "first stories." These first stories can be rough drafts that are uncensored and emotionally-driven and can be written in rough, short spurts. These drafts are surprisingly easy to write and you can even use a fill-in-the-blank style list to tell your first story. For instance, you can use something like this:

The story I'm making up is...

My emotions are...

My thinking is...

My body seems...

My beliefs are...

My actions are...

You might write, for instance, “I’m so peeved. I feel like I’m having a heat stroke. She thinks I’m incapable. I want to hurl a stapler.” This exercise will allow you to create some distance from your story and reflect upon the people in it, and yourself, from a different perspective. Soon enough, you’ll be able to identify the lies and false narratives that you’ve been telling yourself and look at them in a new light.

Rising Strong In Action

So now that you know the ins and outs of the reckoning and the rumble, it's time to take a closer look at this process in action. Brown reflects on a time in which she was asked to speak at a conference. Upon agreeing, Brown was informed that she would have to share a hotel room with another speaker. While sharing a room with a total stranger may be uncomfortable and awkward for anyone, Brown buried her feelings about her discomfort because she wanted to make a good impression and not come off as too demanding.

The situation could've gone one of two ways, of course, Brown's situation took a turn for the worse when her roommate stained the hotel's couch with her dirty boots, she even got the two of them in trouble by ignoring the no-smoking policy at the hotel. Now, Brown's feeling of discomfort was turning into anger and resentment toward the organizers for putting her in this situation. It wasn't until her flight home that Brown began to reckon with her emotions. She noticed she was hateful and judgemental towards almost everyone around her at the airport and decided to take a closer look into why she was feeling such negative emotions.

Next, she began the rumble. She wrote down a rough draft detailing the story about the conference. She acknowledged her feelings, telling herself that she was both easy and flexible, even if it was against her will. She failed to appreciate the opportunity and felt that the event organizers took advantage of her. In the end, she believed she was good and they were bad. It wasn't fair and she didn't deserve it. Through this experience, Brown made a few realizations. She realized that she is the only person responsible for her emotions, and instead of blaming others, she needs to establish and maintain boundaries to avoid future frustration and resentment.

Dealing With Expectations and Forgiveness

Life, of course, can be filled with disappointment, expectations, and resentment. For instance, Brown shares the story of Claudia and Anna who visit their younger sister, Amy, who has struggled with sobriety for the better part of a decade. Upon arriving at Amy's "house," an abandoned store with broken windows and a rotting door, Claudia and Anna see a person they no longer recognize. Amy, now dirty and disheveled with dark circles under her eyes, Claudia feels overwhelmed by the pain at the sight of Amy and her suffering.

Immediately, Anna confronts her alcoholic sister, telling her to "pull herself together" and promptly grabs a cab home, unable to deal with the disappointment in her sister. On the other hand, Claudia decides to stay and talk with Amy. As Amy opens up about how miserable she is, Claudia is overcome with grief and guilt - grief for her sister and guilt for thinking, "How long do I have to stay here listening to this? When can I leave? How soon can I get back to the life I've worked so hard to build in Chicago?" She feels even more guilty after Amy asks to go back to Chicago with her to have a stable life. Claudia refused and left, she didn't even talk to anyone about what happened that day, wanting to forget the pain and trauma.

The next day, Claudia was on a train to the airport when a fight broke out between two large men. As people yelled at them, the two men continued their brawl and were still fighting when the train finally reached the next station. Chaos ensued as people pushed their way out of the train and called for police to break them up. This fight became Claudia's reckoning. This was her "facedown in the arena" moment. She states, "The story I made-up starts with, *Why can't I just go home and have a normal visit? Is it too much to ask to just spend time with my sisters over the Thanksgiving holiday?*" Each year she becomes disappointed and resents that it's always so hard to see her family over the holidays.

Claudia realized that to deal with expectations, she must be straightforward and ask herself why she's expecting such things. Brown defines *stealth expectations* as those you didn't know you had but only realize you had when things don't go as planned. This is why it's important to explore your expectations and discuss them with the people you expect things from. For instance, Brown and her husband discuss their expectations for weekends, vacations, and busy work weeks to avoid disappointment and resentment.

Lastly, expectations are important when it comes to forgiveness. Claudia had to realize that forgiveness isn't just simply forgetting what her sister had put her family through, but was about letting her expectations die. Perhaps it's time to let go of conflict in relationships by being real with your expectations and recognize that the people around you are imperfect people who make mistakes.

Rumblings with Courage and Accountability

At a fundraising event to support the homeless, Brown heard something that would stick with her and change her perspective. Her pastor stated, “When you look away from a homeless person, you diminish their humanity.” These words had a profound effect on Brown, forcing her to look in the mirror and reflect on why she felt so uncomfortable by the pastor’s words. She began to reckon with herself and realized that she is one of those people who look away from homeless people on the street.

It was time to start the rumbling process, so Brown took pen to paper and wrote, “I’m not helping other people enough. I feel shame about how much I have and how little I do, so I can’t look the folk I should be helping in the eye. DO MORE!!!” Brown began to recognize her privilege and realized that she’d always associated asking for help as a sign of weakness. In fact, she looked down on the homeless, but she realized that asking for help wasn’t a weakness at all, it was courage. This is why asking for help is an important part of the rising-strong process. It takes courage to rise up, but it takes even more courage to ask someone for help!

While Brown was rumbling with privilege and courage, a man named Andrew was rumbling with accountability. As a senior leader at a successful advertising agency, Andrew was looked up to and people respected his opinion. One colleague even stated, “Andrew is the reason it all works. His word is gold and everyone trusts him.” However, Andrew didn’t always feel this way. In fact, he once made a big mistake that led to the failure of a project that his team worked so hard on. He failed to communicate the risk of the project, and that minor detail shook the trust between Andrew and his colleagues.

To rise strong, Andrew had to rumble with accountability. This means apologizing to those who deserve an apology and making amends with those he failed. Of course, both of these acts take courage and Andrew displayed that courage when he stood up in front of his team and admitted

that he screwed up. He was sorry. By admitting his mistake, his colleagues also saw firsthand that Andrew was willing to be honest and upfront with them. This honesty created a domino effect around the workplace, leading to a work environment where people were honest, respected, and transparent about their feelings. So what's the revolution? Simply put, when we dare to own up to our mistakes, we begin to prepare ourselves for growth and development.

Final Summary

Rising strong is a process with three steps: the reckoning, the rumble, and the revolution. During the reckoning, we must recognize our emotions and become curious about them. Ask yourself questions like, “Why am I feeling this way?” or “Where is this emotion coming from?” In the next step, rumbling, we must then question the stories that we tell ourselves to learn more about them and change our perspective. Remember that you can begin the rumbling experience by writing a quick rough draft analyzing your feelings, thoughts, and actions. Finally, the last step is the revolution. This is when we rise up and experience a change within ourselves. We become more in tune with our emotions and actions, which allows us to lead a more courageous and confident life.



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