

Braving the Wilderness Reading Guide

Week 1: Introduction and Chapter 1

- **Read:** Everywhere and Nowhere
- **Reflection/Discussion Questions:**
 1. What does true belonging mean to you?
 2. Discuss a time when you felt like you truly belonged.
 3. When have you experienced challenge, suffering, or disappointment from which you thought you'd never recover, but through which you eventually made it and started to live life again?
 - a. What was it like to move on and see life from this new perspective? In what ways did this reorder of your world surprise you?
 4. If you had to write yourself a permission slip to have your true self show up, what would it say?
 - a. How would the person who showed up be different?
 - b. What identities have you constructed that protect you from showing vulnerability or fear or shame to yourself and others? Reflect for a moment on the energy you expend to maintain these identities.

Week 2: Chapter 2

- **Read:** The Quest for True Belonging

- **Reflection/Discussion Questions:**
 1. How do you typically handle discomfort in social situations?
 2. Can you think of a time when standing alone felt more like a strength than a weakness?
 3. Of the seven elements of trust – BRAVING – which are hardest for you? (These are found on page 38-39)
 4. If someone were to violate one of the seven, which one would bother you the most? Which ones do you feel are most key?
 - a. How can you work on developing those elements within your closest relationships?
 - b. Which of these seven are the hardest in your relationship with yourself?

Week 3: Chapter 3

- **Read:** High Lonesome: A Spiritual Crisis
- **Reflection/Discussion Questions:**
 1. How does loneliness affect our sense of belonging?
 2. Discuss how connecting with others has helped you overcome feelings of loneliness.
 3. If 61% of Americans regularly report being lonely – do you? How has your social circle changed over the past twenty years?
 4. Brown says that “When we're suffering, many of us are better at causing pain than feeling it. We spread hurt rather than let it inside.” We need to feel hurt, rather than spread it. What hurt do you need to feel? Have you been spreading it unintentionally?

Week 4: Chapter 4

- **Read:** People Are Hard to Hate Close Up. Move In.
- **Reflection/Discussion Questions:**
 1. Why is it harder to hate someone when we know their story?
 2. Share an experience where getting to know someone better changed your initial perception of them.
 3. Do you form your opinions of people based on your actual, in-person experiences? Or do you fall into the trap of hating/disparaging large groups of strangers, because the members of those groups who we happen to know and like are the rare exceptions?
 4. Dr. Michelle Buck uses the term ‘conflict transformation’ saying that it’s about ‘creating deeper understanding’ that requires ‘perspective taking.’
 - Is there a place in your life you could use ‘conflict transformation’? A relationship? What could emerge if you did?
 - a. What about at church? Work?

Week 5: Chapter 5

- **Read:** Speak Truth to Bullshit. Be Civil.

- **Reflection/Discussion Questions:**
 1. How do you balance honesty with civility in difficult conversations?
 2. Share a time when you had to call out dishonesty. How did you handle it?
 3. Christine Porath’s research and other studies “...show how implementing civility standards and enforcing them leads to higher-performing and better-functioning teams.” She writes, “Incivility can fracture a team, destroying collaboration, splintering members’ sense of psychological safety, and hampering team effectiveness.”
 - a. Have you seen incivility break down a team, a project or a group or church? How and when?
 - b. Have you ever seen civility help a team be more effective? Work through a difficult subject or issue?
 - c. How are we doing with this at church?
 4. What kind of boundary setting is important in our conversations around important or highly charged topics? How do we hold ourselves to those standards, even in less structured/formal settings?

Week 6: Chapter 6

- **Read:** Hold Hands. With Strangers.

- **Reflection/Discussion Questions:**
 1. How does the act of creating together build connections?
 2. Share a memorable experience of working with strangers towards a common goal.
 3. Are there ways you can show up more regularly for others? What about all of us together as a church?
 4. “Social media are great for developing community, but for true belonging, real connection and real empathy require meeting people in real time.”
 - a. As the work world changes and more people work remotely, and more of us move further from our families, what practices help us stay connected in meaningful ways?
 - b. What about as we retire?

Week 7: Chapter 7

- **Read:** Strong Back. Soft Front. Wild Heart.

- **Reflection/Discussion Questions:**
 1. How do you balance being strong and remaining open/vulnerable?
 2. What does having a 'wild heart' mean to you in the context of belonging?
 3. How can embracing discomfort lead to a deeper sense of belonging?
 4. In what ways can you practice authenticity in your daily interactions, even when it's challenging?
 5. How do you navigate feelings of loneliness while striving to be your true self?