



## Reckless Love, week five: Value the Vulnerable

*In this chapter of Reckless Love, titled Value the Vulnerable, Berlin discusses the root of all conflict as the question of who's in, and who's out? We find it difficult not to judge, but Jesus teaches us to redeem ourselves by loving the vulnerable. The pathway Berlin lays out includes this checklist—be curious, engage, have expectations, and be kind.*

*Rev. Cindy Gregorson, who serves as the director of connectional ministries for the Minnesota Conference, and Rev. Roger Spahr, Southeast District superintendent for the Dakotas Conference, share the impact of this chapter through personal introspection.*

Rev. Roger Spahr: Chapter five, Value the Vulnerable, is a very challenging chapter for me. It starts with a quote, Booker T. Washington says, “I think I began learning that those who are happiest are those who do the most for others. This lesson I’ve tried to carry with me ever since.” (p. 93)

I am reminded that it is an intentional decision to value the vulnerable. It is not something that is human nature. We tend to make circles around us and value the things that we can control.

Several years ago, my family decided that we were going to be involved in sponsoring a refugee from Ethiopia. We didn’t understand how difficult that was going to be until he showed up on Halloween. He had flown in and didn’t speak any English. He had been in a civil war and been wounded. If he returned to his country, he wasn’t going to live.

We took that young man into our family. It was one of the greatest learning experiences for our kids. They gained an understanding of how do you value people whose life is living on the edge? We are so comfortable, and others are not. It expanded the circle in our life. To understand what it means to offer the love of Jesus for a wider group of people.

I discovered that given our interests, typically the circle of who we extend our love to shrinks. It happens in the church. It happens in our families. Over time our world gets smaller and smaller, rather than larger.

Rev. Cindy Gregorson: When I was a local church pastor, we were receiving a refugee family. I remember taking them out to a restaurant and pointing at things on a menu. It made me realize the barriers that people had to overcome just to get settled in the United States. It is the same story of expanding the circle and stretching yourself.

As I was reading the chapter, I was thinking about, what are the challenges to valuing the vulnerable? I live in a large metropolitan area, Minneapolis-St. Paul. Every day there is someone on the corner asking money. Every day your walking by somebody who wants to stop you and talk to you and have a conversation. Sometimes you are busy.

You are just trying to get on with your life. You have things to do and places to go. If I stop, it might be a longer conversation than I want. It is going to be messy. I can't necessarily fix or resource what might be needed. Your strategy tends just to go on and walk on by.

One of the commitments that I have been trying to full fill is how can I just see people? At least acknowledge and see they are there. I want to commit to looking at that person in the eye and not ignore them when I am sitting at the car at the stoplight. I try to keep some dollar bills in my car and just hand them a dollar. I know that it doesn't solve all of their problems. But at least it is an act of kindness. That is one way I am trying to value the vulnerable.

It can be overwhelming when you think about all the needs of people in the world and how we are called to respond to those needs.

Have you seen the hashtag from the General Board of Discipleship, #seeallthepeople? It leads me to think about how can you see people? How can you strike up a conversation with people?

Rev. Roger Spahr: As a district superintendent, I have thought a lot about that. I go and visit a lot of churches. You walk into a church, and sometimes no one talks to you. I think every church thinks they are very friendly.

What I have found is that most churches have one or two people who are willing to step across their comfort level to come and talk to you. When you run into a church when there isn't anybody like that, you are standing by yourself. You do feel vulnerable.

To experience that myself helps me understand that I am the one that has to cross over that circle. Instead, it is in a church setting or a community setting. Some of us are more comfortable with that than others. But that is where you are stretching the circle of God's love in your life.

Berlin is saying if you shrink your circle of who you connect with or are willing to connect with, it is a lot easier to love. The bigger the circle, the more you stretch, the more difficult it is to share God's love. That is where we need the grace of God to enter and fill that void in us and experience that.

Rev. Cindy Gregorson: I have found that when you open the circle, there is beauty in connection.

My brother and sister-in-law had gone through some really challenging things with their kids. One who went through addiction several times. One who some health issues and challenges with her own children.

At first they didn't want to go public with it, they didn't want to be vulnerable. They thought how does this reflect on us? How do we look to others? Once they started their story, so many other people said, "Oh I am not alone. That is my story too."

In my own journey, in the past year, telling my story of going through kidney cancer, having chronic tinnitus, when I share my story people open up. People say, "I have been there. I know that story. This is what happened to me."

I was moved in the chapter, when the young woman put her health struggles out there, people started reaching out to her. They surrounded her with prayer and surrounding her in love. That has been my experience, people really want to reach out and care.

Sometimes we think we have to keep all inside to stay safe. Really, when we put it out, we are so loved and supported. We become stronger than we thought when we keep it all to ourselves.

Rev. Roger Spahr: So in other words, by becoming vulnerable, it is a way to reach out to the vulnerable. That is so true.

One of the things we tried to do as parents, as we our children were growing up, we intentionally wanted them to experience vulnerable people. We wanted them to have those experiences so that they developed compassion for others.

For example, doing a ministry at a nursing home. We would take our kids along. They would see the interaction. We set a goal that everyone of our kids we would take on a mission trip to a third world country. We had some wonderful experiences. Our kids opened up to things they would have never seen.

Rev. Cindy Gregerson: I think there is something about travelling the world, going to new people, new places. Your eyes are open up to new perspectives.

I was with a friend in Rochester. We were wandering through Mayo Clinic. There were 50 people in the waiting room. All of them were holding their own file folders. I thought, you should walk through this waiting room everyday. You see people going through suffering, hard times in life. It makes you aware of the care and compassion that people need when they are going through a difficult time in life.

I am with you, the more we can expand our experiences the more we will open up to others. Rather than it is going to someone next door, or across the world, the more we learn and find out about people, what they need, the more compassionate we will be.

At the heart we are people with a desire for love, acceptance, belonging, and hope. That is at the root of everything. A simple touch can make a difference. A simple conversation can make a difference.

Rev. Roger Spahr: As I read the chapter, I was reminded of Jesus' attitude toward people around him. He walks slowly and saw people. He took time for people. Even when the disciples told him, "when need to move on and don't bother. This person is a Gentile. You shouldn't be talking to a woman." All of these things were barriers that Jesus broke through the barriers to the vulnerable people around him.

What a challenge it is to us as Christians to be able to live out the life and love of God.

Rev. Cindy Gregorson: Jesus saw them. He loved them. He showed them that God's love is for you. Jesus was not in the business of judging people. He was in the business of helping them see the potential and possibility.

One thing that struck me in this chapter is that it does not take much to be kind to someone, to say hello, to smile, and then just ask a simple question. You can start a conversation and something good can happen.

So that would be my challenge for us, how can today, see someone, and ask a simply question, and see someone?