

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

We're just two lost souls, Swimming in a fish bowl, year after year.

Running over the same old ground, and how we found, the same old fears.

– Pink Floyd (wish you were here)

In the very beginning of this book I mentioned sitting down at a table with fishbowls. We only show the other person what we want them to see in the bowl. I love the quote above because that is us in a fishbowl. It's a tragedy that we spend most of our years trying to stay in safe places. We try and repeat past glories. For some of us, we avoid losses and tragic endings. Masking ourselves so that everything is just fine. A good mask can keep you hiding in a manicured fishbowl.

The end of that quote says “the same old fears.” I have found that we replay life to capture the same old fears. I fear success. I fear failure. I fear loneliness. I fear death. We all have fears. I fear we are two lost souls swimming in fishbowls. Do we fabricate masks to hide? Do we manicure fishbowls to look ok? Who are you really? Is life just a yearly déjà vu?

I find that as I get older I fear that time has been lost. I think it feels like time wasted. I could have done so much more. In the movie, Schindler's List, Oscar Schindler broke down as he realized he could have saved so many more Jewish people in the holocaust. Our lives are like a suitcase full of fears, regrets, and missed opportunities. We keep packing and repacking to get more in as time goes by. The same old fears.

I want to unpack your suitcase. It's time to collect happy moments. Let's stuff successes, victories, and gained experiences into that empty case. So, as we travel from this moment forward, let's make our suitcase feel lighter rather than bogged down and heavy. To do this we need to take a quick look back at our last nine chapters (quickly). In our suitcase is many feelings

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

of being dirty in the presence of others. There are those masks we have forged. We’ve collected shots to the heart. Who called us crazy? Do you desire to be normal? Is your heart becoming hard harboring those same old fears? Where are the safe places? We are just souls living in the shadows of expectations. Do we love, or are we loved? There is a lot of life experiences jammed in and our case is pretty full.

“Like everything in life, I just had to decide what to do with what I was given.”- Carlyle in the book Twilight.

Ok, for the sake of an experiment let’s pretend that we have emptied our suitcase. Just dump it on the bed. Let’s say that for the rest of your life we are going to repack that suitcase How should we begin to do that? What do you put in it? What do you keep (if anything)? What might you throw away? Do we need a bigger case or smaller one? Emptying our past takes time. It also needs care. This is not something to be taken lightly.

You have been given life. It does not take a rocket scientist to notice that most people are different. If every fingerprint is different, then that in itself, is a miracle. Is that the same way for your talents? Is that the same way with your character? Come on, admit it, people are unique for very different reasons. Madonna, Donald Trump, and Jesus are very different people. Why?

Is it the character of those mentioned above different? Is it their talents, thought process, or voices? If you were blind in a room what would give you a reason to recognize them. Is it the voice of Madonna? Is it the presence of Trump? How about the words of Jesus? How could you know who those people are? It could be an impostor? It’s astounding to me when I hear stories of movie stars being barred from entering a movie set. The security says they did not recognize

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

them. Could you miss Dr. Phil or Ellen? Maybe, but if they spoke it might give it away. Why are people different?

What is it about people that is noticeable? Certainly, Johnny Depp and Humphry Bogart would be noticeable in public. I just believe that we are all different in many ways. Possibly it's their traits that come out in their character. Traits are unique to you. Certainly, Bogart's face and Depp's manner would stand out. In the Christian world, it is said that God made you individually for a purpose. That means that you have something to offer. What is that? That, is the first thing we are going to put in your empty suitcase: you.

So often we regret the things we have done. In some instances, it's the things we have done to ourselves. So, we tend to build walls to fortify our heart. We build masks. We build fishbowls. In *Pink Floyd, The Wall*, there is a man being taken down one bad experience at a time. He is building a wall brick by brick. In the end, his wall comes crashing down. What we are left with is him. For our purposes, this is you. Take off the masks. Put down the fishbowl. Only you can fit in this case. We not going to pile a ton of bricks in there too.

In a room, there are people. You recognize each one for different reasons. My wife asks me all the time *you remember them, right?* Most of the time it is an event or something they said that triggers my memory. Occasionally I remember a face or a name. Certainly, I recognize songs by the sound or voice. Those are the things that define you. We are just putting the unique “you” in this suitcase. That includes your voice. We can add your looks or your way about you too if you want. We can certainly add your laugh. What is it about you that makes you the person I would recognize?

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

There are people who say they are invisible. Nobody ever notices them. Really? Someone saw you and turned the other way. What did they see? I have heard a voice and said “oh boy let’s hurry out of here before they see us.” People are unique and you are too. You are different than anybody else. Sorry, but there is no vanilla in the human race. We are all a different flavor. If we put “you” in the suitcase, then we are defiantly putting someone different in the box. That is, you. Let’s add your uniqueness in the case too.

I called this chapter *Talent*. Why? It’s because you are talented. Do you have no talents? I beg to differ. I listen well: it’s a talent. I love to write: it’s a talent. I bowl: it’s a talent. The problem is most of the time were caught measuring talents. We think we have none because someone else does it better. I am not a professional bowler but I love bowling. I am not Ernest Hemingway but I love writing. My current pastor is an extremely talented speaker, yet I love public speaking. I have talents regardless of the degree. You are a sum of those talents? The answer is yes and no.

Yes, you have talents that define you. I knew a kid who could draw amazing pictures. He was just a kid, yet he clearly had artistic talent. I knew another boy who made it his mission to stand out. He had to be different. I think he wanted to be noticed. Talented? Sure, he had some talent, but he did not stand alone with the talent he had. Still, he wanted to be an individual. Both boys are not the sum of their talents. Their character certainly played a role in how we looked at them. It a combination that defines them. That combination also defines you too.

I have managers at my job. They sit in the chair where the manager sits. They are in the office where the manager should be. Their name is on the door. This is the manager’s office. Yet, are they a good manager? In reality that does not matter. I know it does matter, but hear me out.

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

They are managing. They were hired to do that job because someone saw the talent. It’s like a hockey team. There are four lines. The top line are usually the best players. The fourth line are the least. They are all hired to play hockey, yet they are not all the same. Some appear to have more talent. In a pack of hockey cards we would find all of them because they are hockey players in the eyes of most.

There is this thing called talent. We all have some. We tend to discount talents because of the degree to which we have them. I can shoot a basketball better than my wife but certainly not as good as Jordan. I will say it again: you have talent. We are going to put that talent in the suitcase. So, in the case right now we have three things so far: you, a uniqueness about you, and your talents. I want to pause there a minute because it’s your talents that are the key. We need to make sure you love those talents. There is no point in you taking them with you if you despise or hate them.

This is your fork in the road. To feel less dirty in the presence of others it must become a choice. It’s the choice to believe the doubters or believe you. The problem half the time is you. Do you believe in you? Do you love your character, talents, and way about you? If not, then why? I heard a funny man say once that if you are here then there you are. He was funny because people always wish they were somewhere else. Yet, he kept repeating, you are here and can’t be somewhere else. The same can be said of people. You are you. There is zero chance of you being someone else. Carlyle said in *Twilight* “*Like everything in life, I just had to decide what to do with what I was given.*”

It is critical to know you. It is critical to love you. If “you” are all you have then what will you do with this person? I am so irritated by people leaving relationships. I do understand that

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

some people were not meant to be together, yet there is this nagging thought in my head. In the beginning you thought it was a good idea to be with someone. You might have said you loved them. We make vows and commitments to our spouse. Somewhere along the way it appears you miss-judged it. You were wrong. Were you?

When you first laid eyes on that special person you loved their way. You desired their laugh and funny traits. It could be said you were totally into them and their uniqueness. Then down the road you begin to lose that loving feeling. They become less interesting. There is a feeling that it's time to move on. I feel we never fall out of love but we quit trying. We quit changing. There are fears that creep in. If we change and grow, then they might not love us. If I change then they might find me uninteresting all of a sudden. I feel it has to do with a desire to discover your talents. Dismissing a desire to expand and grow is like throwing a blanket over our fears.

When we meet people, they present their fishbowl. We only see what they want us to see. What happens if they don't know themselves very well? Sometime down the road they discover new habits, hobbies, and careers. It is exhilarating to them. You on the other hand like who they were, and not so much who they are becoming. Their discovered talents become threatening. It happens the other way around too. We refuse to explore ourselves because of fear of losing a relationship. The same old fears play a factor with our talents. A fear of discovering them, or worse, sharing them.

There are two scenarios. One is that we work on knowing ourselves before relationships. Knowing yourself well is like gold. Bringing that person into a relationship helps it start off on the right foot. They can see you completely. That is worth a lot. Bringing the best “you” into a

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

union is like adding reliable tires to a new car. You trust the product. You also want the car to be better than it was. It's safer and smarter.

The second scenario is to accept growth in the other person as well as yourself. What defines my marriage is accepting change. We are two individuals that are growing, discovering, and changing. We love each other regardless of those factors. It's hard to accept change but I'd rather see her change than lose her altogether. I'm happier knowing she accepts my discovery of myself through time. We are really spectators watching two people in a relationship evolve. It's a scary and fun way to co-exist. This second scenario is riskier and tougher, but it can be an enjoyable way to experience life with someone.

Next year I'm going to write a book on relationships. It is my pet peeve. Divorce will do that. In the meantime, I am looking you straight in the face. Look into my eyes, I'm being serious. Pick a person to live with that you want to see develop and grow. Pick a person who is interested in seeing you develop. Be interested in people who know themselves well. Both of you pick someone who wants to explore their talents and embrace yours. Crushed relationships come from stagnant lives. It comes from unfed talents. Your existence will become a restless unfed tiger. Why would you both put yourselves in that type of situation? It comes down to respecting many things about yourself and those you live with.

You make money during the season but you make a reputation during the playoffs – Ottawa Senators coach Guy Boucher

Our search, discovery, and use of our talents is what drives us. The question seems to be: what will we do next. Every year holds new challenges and different twists on our talents. The trouble begins when we treat our talents without respect. Some people say they have none.

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

Others pursue them with reckless abandon disregarding loved ones. Talents are our passion but ignoring them is fatal. Treating them as your god is fatal too. There must be balance in who you are and how you use your talents. Hollywood is a great example. These are clearly talented people. It seems they are successful. Yet, at times, we hear stories of reckless lives. They have terrible relationships: treating themselves and others horribly. Talents are so much like a tiger. Treat them with reverence.

To me, to ignore our talents is like holding that tiger by the tail. We want to hold on but it's ridiculously dangerous. We are consumed with what we're good at so much that we ignore the danger. We see that in Hollywood and in sports. The Hollywood scene has its share of breakdowns. Sports stars leave their sport with broken bodies. In many cases, they die prematurely because they went too far earlier in life. The thrill of our talents is fun and exciting. The problem is not respecting the power of the tiger. Eventually you have to let go of that tail. Just ask washed up actors and sports celebrities what happens when talent is not enough anymore. It becomes a reckless tiger backed into a corner.

There is another side that I want you to explore before we put talents in your suitcase. It's about feeding the tiger. When you know your talents then something changes inside you. I know people who became consumed with a certain ability. There was a man who died after a thousand airplane jumps. Obviously he knew how to dive from a plane. Yet, it was one too many. I don't blame him for his death. However, he needed to feed the tiger. There was always, another jump and that drove him. Was the thrill eventually overshadowing care for his jumpsuit? I know criminals that got caught after they said this was their last crime. Are these people consumed with their talents? Are they holding a tiger by the tail? In a way, I feel they began it right by

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

feeding the tiger. Yes, the criminal did it the wrong way. Yet, I feel they knew what they were good at. Misdirected talents I suppose. Still, they felt the need to feed the tiger.

Coming back to relationships, I believe we leave more often because we never fed the tiger. We seem to become restless and unsatisfied in the spouse. What is in each of us that is unsatisfied? It could be our own fault. We did not try and feed the tiger. I have heard countless people say they got out of a relationship because they felt unfulfilled. Others say they found themselves after the breakup. I've equally heard people state they were stifled in a relationship. Within all these people, they did not feed the tiger in the first place. Crazy as it sounds, many of those people expected someone else to feed their tiger. Hence, the relationship is not half the problem, we are.

This is what I know. In my previous marriage, I thought I knew me. On the outside of that relationship I quickly realize I knew very little about me. I began five years of discovery. I am certainly still on that path today fifteen years later. I had little to no interest in discovering me in my first marriage. The same old was comfortable. I equally did not care to discover who my Ex was. In so many ways, after twelve years of marriage, I hardly knew her. It was stunning really. We spent all that time ignoring each other's talents. I bet we even stifled them from growing for fear of ruining the relationship. Yet, something was clearly wrong in both of us. We ignored the talents we had.

People say they grow apart over time. I take the opposite approach. I think people avoid change, growth, and discovery. The mundane sustains the relationship. We try and hold together the original things that attracted us to them. The problem is people don't work that way. Human history has been about discovery, advancement, and growth. Our relationships are a microcosm

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

of that history. We are human people. To stifle or ignore growth in a relationship is bad. To fear the tiger and refuse to feed it is even worse. In the end, we have unsatisfied relationships with a spouse and with ourselves. People tend to leave and go on an adventure of discovery. It’s sad to me because they could have done that within a relationship. Our partner could have helped the other feed the tiger.

Earlier I said it’s a choice to believe those who call you dirty. It is also a choice to feed your talents: to succeed or be stagnant. I say stay in your relationship. Discovering you could be the best thing for your marriage. A happy “you” is good for the soul. If it’s not then, yes, you might be in a wrong relationship. Only you can choose to discover who you are. I have a book called *Reset*. You can reset your life and discover yourself within a relationship. My book *Reset* can help you discover the real you.

This book is not about discovering your talents. I am going to assume you know something about who you are. Like I said, read my other book to gain knowledge of yourself and your talents. In our suitcase is our talents, uniqueness, and “you.” The fourth thing I’d like to place in this case is understanding. My talents are special. They are mine. Yes, others have them, but only I use them my way. That is the trick. Do you believe that who you are is good enough? Are your talents uniquely useful? If you doubt that then read on.

Do you believe those who discount you? There are many people who disbelieve you. I know because I have encountered a ton of people who have discounted me. In reality, I have been stunned by how many people have tried to stop me from being me. I have experienced that in a former marriage, family life, university, and work. I can’t believe how often I have experienced

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

doubters. The words *you can't, you'll fail, and you won't succeed* are engrained in me. Yet, my talents want to be fed, not starved. They need to be fed because they are an angry tiger.

It begins with my brain. Descartes says *I think therefore I am*. Is that true? So, I believe I exist. In a way that is nuts. How do you self-exist? Yet, I think he was thinking in a slightly different way. *If I am here, then I am able to live*. I bet there are a million ways to say the same thing. In the Movie Contact, the Jody Foster character says *“I'll tell you one thing about the universe, though. The universe is a pretty big place. It's bigger than anything anyone has ever dreamed of before. So, if it's just us... seems like an awful waste of space.”* I feel that way about out talents. If we have them and don't use them, then it seems like an awful waste.

I read several articles on talent. The writers gave me several points of view on the difference between born with talent and learned talent. It became the chicken and the egg scenario. Either way the answer remains the same. It's clear that we have talents. I suppose there are degrees of talent. However, we have talent therefore they exist. If we ignore them then it seems like it's a pretty big waste of something we call talents.

Imagine getting a new vinyl record hot off the press. You keep it in the package because you fear ruining it. It boasts on the cover that it's in full digital recording. The best sound ever. The artist has won Grammy's and entertainer of the year. Yet, you never open it. Never listen to it. You keep it closed up to preserve what might be. Yet, here sits talent unheard, unused, and unappreciated. Talents were meant to be opened and displayed for what they are.

The Bible says *train a child in the way they are bent, and when they are old they will not depart from it*. That is one cool statement. I love the bent part. We have talents. I believe they can shape us. If we are artists, then paint. If we can tinker, then be a builder. If we are public

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

people, then public speak. Within all those talents is a way of looking at you. That is the way we look at Madonna, Donald Trump, and Jesus. Their talents made us see them in a certain light.

I love the Bible and ministry work of God. I went to school to refine my talents. I also went to strengthen them. A Olympic athlete loves to run or compete. They train to win. Just to win? No, they train to be the best at their talent. Can we learn a talent? Sure, but the most successful people love what they do. The passion to succeed comes from taking what you love and excelling at it. I could paint, but I doubt that I could ever be a Picasso. It's not me. Is that pessimistic or reality. I think it's understanding your talents.

One thought on being born with talent. There is no doubt that we tend to gravitate towards certain traits. Why? God only knows. Are we affected by our parent's talents? Someone said that when they were born their parents gave them a gift of all the good and bad in their lives. We are changed forever by the influence of a parent's life. Yet, little Tommy and Susie grow up and become different. Sometimes it's a lot and other times it's a little. It comes back to deciding what do with what we have been given.

Can we learn new talents? Sure, we can. I have a sinking suspicion that they were there all along. Some can sing. They become talented singers. Others recognize good singers and spend their time discovering and training singers. Both can sing but use their talents in different ways. A great example is Donald Trump and Gwen Stefani. Both have been on programs to discover talent in their chosen field. It's because they love doing what they do. They want to find those who love it too. Gwen Stefani probably will not be a better business woman than she is a singer. There is no doubt Donald loves business things more than singing. You are who you are, exploit it.

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

Over and over I hear athletes on a team talk about being in a position to succeed. We work better with the right partner. We work better in the right role. I think our bent straightens when we are feeding the tiger rather than holding on for dear life. Equally, I feel our bent needs to be crooked. A little edge never hurt anybody. In the end, recognizing our talents and playing with them is the key. We are the sum of our parts. There is you and there is your talents.

Understanding that you have some and the role they play is so important.

Years ago, I took a Spiritual gifts test. The point was to see how God has made me through my desires and passions. I believe intertwined in this is our talents. Once I knew what (at-least) the main three of them were, all hell broke loose. I was so excited to see me on paper. I knew the results but needed to see my talents at work. The best part is the process. Other people filled out the questions about me. What did six people see in me. The common results are then tabulated and there I am. It was me in a nut shell. I was so relieved and excited.

Over the years, I have tried fervently to be those gifts. To feed the tiger. I have been shocked at all the people who hated what I am. They wanted me to cool it, slow down, and quit all together. Why? It's because once you feed your talent tiger you become intimidating. They want peace. They want normal. They want to remain the same. Knowing who you were meant to be is intoxicating. Once your eyes and heart are open to “you” then you want it. I love feeding me. This tiger of talent has become my best friend. I have become my best friend. Stagnant normal people can't stand that.

I'd like to throw a few good words in your suitcase. Just to inspire you. Let's end with a word study. The word aptitude in the dictionary means: *capability; ability; innate or acquired capacity for something; talent*. There is that word talent. Aptitude tests discover who you are.

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

There are several out there like Meyers-Brigs. The spiritual gifts training covers the same ground. You are something. These tests reveal the real you to the heart and eye. It's normal to think you know you, but to have a revelation about your talents is altogether different. My Son married a young girl who did not really know herself. He invited her to workout with him. She discovered that she loves lifting weights. So, much that she is considering an Olympic dream. That is not dumb luck. That is discovery. That is feeding the tiger.

To be an Olympian means you need to practice. Not just anyone stands on an Olympic podium. There are people who say that the athletes are handpicked and that it's political. I also have heard stories of athletes pushing their way on the team because of their will to win. I say that wherever you are and however you got there, know who you are and practice winning with your God given talents. In that world, there is no room for *I wish, I might, or I could*. Give your talents the capacity to thrive. Yes, throw aptitude in your case.

Another good word is persistence: *firm or obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition*. Let's change Descartes's saying. *I know I have talents therefore I do*. Will you feed your tiger? Will you discover who you are? The best you is the person who exploits who they were meant to be. I have always written stories. Therefore, I write. I have always been a risk taker. Therefore, I take risks. I always wanted to be married. When I became divorced I was devastated. Yet, I refused to quit. I slept with two pillows on my bed. I hung out with married couples. I believe I am married again because it's part because of who I am. I am I'm hopelessly romantic. So, I lived with the desire to be romantic. I never gave up.

Persistent means winning. It does not just mean trying or participating. They say elderly people die after they retire because they slow down and stop trying. I am getting there so well

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

see what will happen. Yet, I believe in persistence. I am working on body, soul, and mind. I want to retire healthy inside and out. I will continue to nurture my talents. I will pursue new avenues to explore. Maybe there is still more about me to know at 51. It's certainly persistence in your suitcase now.

That brings me to the word mindset: *people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent*. On page 9, I said *it begins with my brain*. That mindset comes from discovery. To know you have talent is one thing. To use them is astounding. This is me! I thought that in university they would change me. I never thought in a million years that they would hone in and mold the person I already was. This university wanted to exploit, refine, encourage, and train me to be a better, more complete, version of me. I thought that becoming a Christian meant I would submit to God and the church. I was stunned that God wanted to exploit, refine, encourage, and train the person he made. I became a better version of me. My mindset has changed. My heart towards myself and others has changed too.

I have seen it in the eyes of winners. They don't have eyes that are surprised. They have a mindset, persistence, and an aptitude for success. Years ago, a young man fell while running a race. The man got up and tried to finish under extreme pain. His father came down and helped him cross the line. Finishing well needs our talents. Finishing well needs our mindset. Crossing the line is the most important thing. He may not have literally won that race. Yet, in his mind he won. He won with aptitude, talent, persistence, uniqueness, and that he alone had the ability to cross the line.

With all this in mind, our suitcase is now light and manageable. The real you is far lighter without a heavy mask on. Be who you are and nothing more. Talents are within you so they

“Dirty”

Chapter Ten: Talent

don't weigh a thing. Not using them or feeding them will only add a burden which is always heavy. Matthew 11:30 has Jesus saying **“For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”** This brought me to Proverbs 3. I'm not going to quote it but I hope you will read it on your own. The gist of it is that we need to relax and take what is given. Understanding of who you are and what your capable of will free you from the weights of anxiety, despair, and stress.

Finally, what should we do with our talents? Of course, I say exploit them. I say feed them. Recently I have been on a new kick. I am trying to nurture three things about me that I mentioned a few paragraphs before. I am trying to workout, eat right, and sleep well. I'm all about the body, mind, and soul. First of all, I need to take care of my body. As if you did not know, but “you” is trapped in your body. So, you need to keep it well. The second is to exercise my mind. I need to exploit my talents and do what I was meant to do. Hence the writing and other stuff. I also read a ton. They say that older people who worked their mind have one to work with in later years. Thirdly, it's about the soul. To be in that happy place is to know God and also know who God made you to be. They both work well together. There is less stress when you work on the soul. Having a healthy body, mind, and soul is food for the tiger.

I feel really good these days. I still feel the pangs of being dirty among others. I suppose it will always linger. With that said, there is work to do. To feel good about yourself comes from working on the real you. However, there is another extremely important aspect to your life. It's what we call friendships. Those who call you disheveled or dirty are not your friends. Those who beat you and berate you are not your friends. I told you in the first chapter that I was a horrible friend to some. I hope that has changed. To know “you” is to share that person with others. We also need to protect ourselves from bad relationships. Let's take a good long look at friendships.