

Connection Begins Where Defensiveness Ends

On safety, vulnerability and the human need for connection

Human beings are born into relationship.

Long before we learn to speak.

Long before we develop beliefs or opinions.

Long before we understand ourselves.

We are shaped through contact.

Through touch.

Through presence.

Through the experience of being received by another human being.

Connection is not something we learn to desire.

It is something we are born needing.

We do not survive alone

From the moment we enter the world, our survival depends upon others.

A newborn cannot survive independently.

Safety, nourishment and protection all arrive through relationship.

Our nervous system develops in relationship.

Our sense of self develops in relationship.

Even our capacity to regulate stress develops in relationship.

Perhaps this is why loneliness hurts so deeply.

It is not merely an emotional experience.

It touches something fundamental.

A deeply human need.

The search for safety

Much of human behaviour can be understood as a search for safety.

Sometimes we seek safety through achievement.

Sometimes through control.

Sometimes through perfectionism.

Sometimes through pleasing others.

Sometimes through withdrawing from them.

Different strategies.

The same underlying need.

To feel safe.

To belong.

To matter.

The cost of protection

The strategies that help us survive are often the same strategies that later limit connection.

We hide vulnerability.

We avoid disappointment.

We protect ourselves against rejection.

We learn not to depend on others.

We learn not to ask for help.

We learn not to show too much.

Not because these strategies are wrong.

But because they once served a purpose.

Many of them developed in response to real experiences.

They helped us adapt.

They helped us survive.

Yet what protects us from pain can also protect us from intimacy.

Defensiveness and connection

Connection requires openness.

Defensiveness requires protection.

Both are human.

Both have their place.

But they move us in different directions.

When we feel threatened, we naturally become more defensive.

Our attention narrows.

We protect ourselves.

We prepare for danger.

When we feel safe, something else becomes possible.

Curiosity.

Trust.

Openness.

Connection.

In that sense, connection begins where defensiveness ends.

Not because defensiveness is wrong.

But because true connection requires enough safety to lower our guard.

The courage to be seen

Many people believe vulnerability is weakness.

Yet vulnerability may be one of the greatest expressions of courage.

To be seen.

To be known.

To reveal what is true.

Without certainty about how it will be received.

Every meaningful relationship asks something of us.

Not perfection.

Not performance.

But authenticity.

The willingness to be present as we are.

Connection and performance

Even performance is deeply relational.

Athletes perform better when they feel supported.

Children learn better when they feel safe.

Employees flourish when they feel valued.

People generally function at their best when they experience belonging.

Connection is not separate from performance.

It is often one of its foundations.

The illusion of independence

Modern culture often celebrates independence.

Self-sufficiency.

Individual success.

Personal achievement.

These qualities certainly have value.

Yet no human being becomes fully human alone.

We influence one another constantly.

We affect one another constantly.

Whether we realise it or not.

The question is not whether we need others.

The question is whether we acknowledge how much we do.

Love and loss

Connection carries a risk.

The deeper the connection, the more painful loss will feel.

This is unavoidable.

To love is to become vulnerable to grief.

To connect is to become vulnerable to disappointment.

Yet most people would not choose a life without connection simply to avoid pain.

Because what hurts us most deeply often reveals what mattered most deeply.

Grief is not the opposite of love.

It is one of its consequences.

The Art of Being Human

Perhaps connection is not something we create.

Perhaps it is something we uncover.

Something that becomes visible when fear, protection and defensiveness soften.

Human beings do not merely need food, shelter and security.

We need to feel seen.

To feel welcomed.

To feel that we belong.

Not because connection is a luxury.

But because connection is part of what makes us human.

Perhaps the quality of our lives is shaped less by what we achieve and more by the depth of our connection.

To ourselves.

To others.

And to life itself.

Because in the end, the art of being human is never a solitary act.

Roel Klaassen, Juni 2026