



SISTERS OF THE  
**Good Samaritan**  
of the Order of St Benedict

## We become the stories we tell ourselves



Sister Patty Fawkner SGS. Image: Sisters of the Good Samaritan.

**I cannot control what others think about me or their expectations of me, but I can control my attitude and how I choose to be, writes Congregational Leader Patty Fawkner.**

Have you ever had the experience of having to 'perform', then receiving lots of feedback, all of it positive except for one negative voice? The affirmation slips off you like silk and the sole critique sticks like tar.

Have you ever sung along with Kasey Chambers' *Not Pretty Enough* and wondered how come she was singing your song?

Have you ever tried to convince yourself and others that being 'so busy' was indicative of your importance and worth?

Yes. Yes. And yes. This is why I found an [ABC Radio interview](#) with Ben Crowe, a member of Ash Barty's support team, so engrossing. The co-presenter of *Conversations*, Sarah Kanowski, interviewed 'Crowie', as Ash Barty fondly refers to him, during the early rounds of this year's Wimbledon tennis tournament, which Barty went on to win.

After a setback at Wimbledon three years earlier, and a serendipitous crossing of paths, Barty engaged Ben Crowe to work with her as her 'mindset coach'.

It has proven to be a most fruitful partnership, Barty crediting Crowe as making her a better player and, more significantly, a better person.

Ben Crowe believes that all of us are too hard on ourselves and that we excel at telling ourselves shame stories. I'm not smart enough, successful enough, skinny enough or

loved enough. I'm not the best mother, student, writer or boss. I determine my worth by my achievements, or lack thereof.

We become the stories we tell ourselves, Crowe says, and many of those stories arise from the expectations we or others have of ourselves. We do ourselves the greatest disservice, he says, when we try to fit into others' expectations. Expectations, Crowe believes, can thwart, rather than release, the natural creative capacities within us.

Endorsing the insights in [Man's Search for Meaning](#) by Viktor Frankl, psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, who said that the only freedom that cannot be taken away from us is to choose one's attitude in any situation, Ben Crowe says that we can't let the conditions around us determine our attitude and self-worth.

The definition of anxiety and stress, he claims, is trying to control what you can't control. This is worth pondering. I cannot control what others think about me or their expectations of me, in the same way, I cannot control when the coronavirus pandemic will end. I cannot control the government's lockdown restrictions, but I can control my attitude and how I choose to be in lockdown. Decisions need to trump conditions, Crowe says. What will contribute to a personal sense of wellbeing will depend more on how I choose to be, rather than external condition of expectation and outcome.

Embracing one's vulnerability is a central component of the Crowe philosophy.

**Allowing myself to be vulnerable rather than donning the armour of excuse-making, defensiveness, or other face-saving masks enables me to be compassionate to myself and to others.**

I need, Crowe would counsel, to give myself permission to be imperfect but also unconditionally worthy.

Raised Catholic and now describing himself as 'spiritual' rather than 'religious', Ben Crowe espouses the best of Christian orthodoxy, the true Christian mindset. We are flawed human beings, totally accepted and loved by God.

In the wake of the Tokyo Olympics with its glorious mix of athleticism and skill, exhilaration and heartache, fulfilled dreams and dashed hopes, it occurs to me that all competitors and coaches, winners and losers alike, actually all of us, would do well to imbibe a good dose of Ben Crowe's philosophy. It could help us 'get a grip' by gaining a better mindset about competition and life.

Some aspects of the Olympic media coverage seemed obsessed with medals, especially the golden ones, and medal tallies. I watched the men's 100 metres freestyle race and, like all Australians, was cheering on Kyle Chalmers. Chalmers was pipped by American superstar, Caeleb Dressel, by six one-hundredths of a second.

The camera switched to the reaction of students from Chalmers' old school. Like me, their disappointment was palpable. The body language showed acute regret, bordering on despair, at Chalmers' 'failure', focusing on what he didn't achieve rather than what

he did. It seemed that there was a pool length between the silver and gold medal rather than six one-hundredths of a second!

Kyle Chalmers gave of his best in that swim and in the years of training but could neither control the outcome of that swimming race nor the expectations of the students from his alma mater. What he could control was his attitude to that outcome; he was superbly gracious and philosophical in his post-match interview.

On that same day, swimmer Cate Campbell said in an interview, "I'm a person first and a swimmer second", a line that could have come straight out of the Ben Crowe playbook. Crowe believes that it's important for each of us, not only sportspeople, to separate who we are from what we do, that my worth as a human person is completely independent of the results of a test, a race or tennis match.

Each of us is a human being rather than a human doing and we don't have to achieve something in order to be someone.

This sounds common sense, but in the same way that common sense isn't always so common, we all are inclined to assess our worth by outcomes. This reminds me of St Therese of Lisieux who tells me that God loves me best when I'm sleeping, when I am not doing anything to prove I'm worthy of God's love.

Back to Ash Barty who was vulnerability and courage personified when she shared publicly prior to the Wimbledon tournament her specific dream of winning at that hallowed venue. If she didn't win, would she and others see her as a 'loser'? We've seen enough of Barty to be reassured that, win or lose, she is a person who is happy in her own skin. On the court, we love her fierce competitive spirit as she fights to win until the last point is decided. Off the court, we know that she will be equally gracious in victory and in defeat, commending her opponent and always saluting her team, including Ben Crowe.

Have you ever had the experience of having to perform, then receiving lots of feedback, all of it positive except for the one negative voice? If I become my own mindset coach I will neither let the affirmation nor the critique determine my self-worth, knowing I am unconditionally worthy and unconditionally loved.

## Patty Fawkner



Good Samaritan Sister Patty Fawkner is the Congregational Leader of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan. She is an adult educator, writer and facilitator with formal tertiary qualifications in arts, education, theology and spirituality. Patty is interested in exploring what wisdom the Christian tradition has for contemporary issues. She has an abiding interest in questions of justice and spirituality.

This article was first published in the August 2021 edition of The Good Oil, the e-magazine of the Good Samaritan Sisters [www.goodsams.org.au](http://www.goodsams.org.au)