

THE  
SPECTRUM  
MINDSET



# THE SPECTRUM MINDSET

Lead Your Family and Life  
To Infinite Possibilities  
By Transforming  
The Way You Think

TONY FREZZA

The Spectrum Mindset: Lead Your Family and Life To Infinite Possibilities

By Transforming The Way You Think

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## DEDICATION

For God, thank you for everything.

For Shannon, my wife, thank you for loving and supporting me in ways I can't describe in words. It's amazing what you can do when you have one person telling you they believe in you day after day.

For my kids, Dylan and Arielle, thank you for changing my life. You've made my dreams of fatherhood come true, and continue to do so every day.



## INTRODUCTION

**F**irst and foremost, I have to express my sincere gratitude that you picked up this book. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

If you have this book in your hand, it is because you value growth. Or, someone who really cares about you gave you the gift of growth—a gift which, I believe, is one of the most valuable gifts you can give.

This is why the roles of parent, mentor, and leader are the most important roles you'll get to play in this lifetime. These are not jobs to be taken lightly, and it's why learning from others is so important. Great leaders help make more great leaders.

Over 10 years ago, before I had children or owned a gym, I was blissfully unaware of how poor my leadership skills were and how detrimental my finite mindset was. I didn't know what I didn't know.

I wish I could go back in time and give myself this book before I stepped into those two big endeavors. While I can't change the past, I am so grateful I have this insight now for what is to come. Admittedly, I am still a progressing parent and an eternal student of life. I don't have all the answers, and still have a very long way to go and grow. But—as you may soon agree—I believe that is a good thing.

My biggest source of growth came from learning to parent my son, Dylan, who was born on the autism spectrum. Being a part of his miraculous transformation across the spectrum has, in turn, transformed me.

Dylan has expanded my mind beyond anything I could have ever imagined. I now realize the tremendous power that mindset has over shaping the lives we live. It's my mission to give this mindset to you.

Now that you are stepping onto this path of growth with me, I encourage you to open your mind before opening this book any further.

If personal growth and mindset books are familiar to you, you won't have a problem absorbing this material. On the other hand, if you pride yourself on being a skeptic, it's going to take a little more work and effort. But what you'll soon realize is that effort is everything. It's a constant work in progress to embody a spectrum mindset, and it will be a relentless tug-of-war to fight off the urges of our finite, black-and-white brain. It's still a battle I face every single day. But believe me: it is worth it.

As your coach through this book, I ask you to resist turning into a critic too early, because the critic is the antagonist to the spectrum mindset. Choosing to embody the student, rather than the critic, will work wonders for your mindset success. Even if that critic says, "This is the best book ever," I ask you to stay curious, open, playful, creative, and listening throughout this book's entirety.

I promise this is not some kind of mind trick to get you to rate my book highly. This is for you to get the most out of this

book, because this book is useless without your internal desire to grow. If you were gifted this book, it's because someone wants to help you grow. They can't force this desire onto you. I can't force a desire to grow onto you. That desire has to come from within.

Before diving in, ask yourself:

- What do I want to get out of this book?
- What limitations in my life do I feel constricted by?
- Where in my life would an expanded mindset help me most?
- Who is relying on me to be a great leader?

You may not yet know the answers fully to the questions above, and that's OK. You don't need to have all the answers right now, because here's the secret: we *never* have all the answers. That's why a spectrum mindset is so important. We will stay forever curious, forever students of life.

While this book talks about my journey, make it about you. Constantly reflect on how you can apply a spectrum mindset to your life. You are the star of your show. I'm simply a guide, speaking from my own experience.

I encourage you to start a journal and make the reading of this book an interactive event. Begin by writing down your answers to the questions above. You can also access chapter reflection questions at [spectrummindset.com](http://spectrummindset.com). Recruit a friend or book club to go through the book and questions together.

There are no right or wrong answers when it comes to journaling. Make it your own and start one today.

I'm excited for you and the transformation that awaits. Make your personal growth a practice and refer to this book often. Remember, this book doesn't work unless you do.

Once your mind is ready to be opened and grow...it's time to open this book.

Thank you again for taking this journey.

-Tony Frezza  
SpectrumMindset.com

## CHAPTER 1

# Finite Mindset vs. Spectrum Mindset

**A**t age 12, I remember sobbing in my bathroom when I didn't make my Little League Baseball All-Star Team. But my tears weren't falling because I didn't make that team; I wept because I knew my dream of playing for the New York Yankees was dead.

This would be a really cool book if I got to play for the New York Yankees! But I'm sorry, this is not that book.

Rather, this is a transformational story about my mindset. Much of my life was spent trapped by a finite mindset. Chances are you've been held captive by one too, and are unaware of how much it's been holding you back. I knew next to nothing about mindset until my thirties, when my son was born.

No one fully prepares you for parenting, especially parenting a son on the autism spectrum. Pair this with creating another "baby" at the same time—a fitness facility, and you have enough stress to either break you or build you. I refused to break, so my mind was forced to transform from my limited, black-and-white perspective to one of boundless progress and potential.

While I didn't achieve my goal of becoming a Yankee, I accomplished even bigger goals in fatherhood and business leadership. My son has had a miraculous transformation almost off of the autism spectrum, and my gym became a million-dollar company—something virtually unheard of for a family-run fitness facility.

It's been a messy decade of growing my mind, son, and gym. I've had a great support system which I will talk about later, but I wish I had a mindset manual like this one. It is my mission to help you upgrade your mindset, so that you too can transform your life.

If you're ready to change your mind, I'm ready to change your life.

This is a limitless transformation that awaits you, one that I feared you wouldn't be able to access if you thought this book only applied to people affected by autism. This is why I had to edit the original title, *Spectrum Mindset: How a Son on the Autism Spectrum Led to a Mind on One*. While having a son born with autism plays an important part in my story, it is far from the whole story.

Also, you don't have to be a parent to learn from the lessons in this book. Even if you're not a parent—and possibly never plan on being one—I can guarantee you were once a kid. Much of our mindset was shaped in our youth, and many of our unconscious thoughts and actions in the present are a product of our childhood. While this book can help you create a greater future, I know it can also help you heal and grow from an unpleasant past.

This book is about seeing your entire life as a spectrum and getting out of the black-and-white worldview that has limited you for so long. No matter what age or stage you're at in life, a life without limits is what the spectrum mindset is all about.

It's time to start living your life without limits. How does a limitless life sound to you?

A life without limits starts in your mind. Your life is only going to fulfill the visions your mind gives it. I'm a firm believer that our life changes only when our mindset does first. We can change the way we're living, all by changing the way we're thinking.

Unfortunately, we tend to only dream about the things we've already seen. When we pull up past memories to create future dreams, we end up in a monotonous, finite cycle of unexciting lives that we've manifested for ourselves.

The spectrum mindset is about breaking this cycle and surpassing all the finite things that are limiting our lives.

Think back to when you were a child. You had a vast imagination because you had hardly any past to build your future dreams from. Instead, you were like a sponge, gathering inspiration from television shows, movies, and everything else going on in the big world around you.

As you grew up and got bigger, your world got smaller. You got familiar with the world you were in and got used to hearing—and later, saying—things like, “That’s just the way it is,” or, “That’s how it’s always been done.” You began to see how A equaled B, and how this school meant that job, which led to this house and that lifestyle, and so on.

We begin to live very limited lives as we age because we begin to only envision the things we've already experienced. Additionally, we model our parents who are already imprisoned by the finite mindset. This is why you see so many of your peers settle for the same careers and lives their parents had.

I'm going to push my kids to be anything they want to be, not everything I want them to be. It's my job as a parent to provide the platform for their dreams to take off from. I want to provide their plane with jet fuel, not extra baggage.

If you've had parenting or mentorship that confined your mindset, it's time to break those thoughts. You may have to let go of a troubled past to design a phenomenal future. Not just for you, but for everyone you're going to influence, especially your own children.

Dr. Joe Dispenza champions creating a new mind in his book, *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself: How to Lose Your Mind and Create a New One*. He writes, "You have to break the habit of being yourself and reinvent a new self; lose your mind and create a new one; prune synaptic connections and nurture new ones; un-memorize past emotions and recondition the body to a new mind and emotions; and let go of the past and create a new future." Dr. Dispenza also adds, "We can't create a new future while we're living in our past. It's simply impossible."<sup>1</sup>

If you're not careful, this world will further shape you into a black-and-white thinker who lives with limited possibilities. If this has become you in even the slightest, it's time to "lose your mind," as Dr. Dispenza says, or at least "lose your mindset," as I'll help you do.

It's time to recondition a new mindset.

The spectrum mindset goes against our “natural” or “primal” way of thinking. It's not instinctual to use the higher level of your brain. It's instinctual to find ways to survive, protect what we have, and reproduce. We can appreciate this lower level of our brain, because it keeps us alive! But we need other parts of our brain when it's time to thrive!

Thriving in our lives versus simply surviving comes from a plan to do so. This book is for people who want to create their own future, and not just react to the one they're given. We need greater intention and deeper intelligence to overcome our instinctual ways in order to live our most fulfilling lives.

## **Parenting On The Spectrum**

My wife Shannon and I have two kids. Our son Dylan is ten, and our daughter Arielle is seven. It has always been my main goal as a parent to provide a life for my kids that is better than the one I had. I don't want my kids to just survive in this world. I want them to thrive.

My son Dylan was three years old when he was labeled with autism spectrum disorder. At that moment, we realized a life of thriving would be a lot harder for him. There were a lot of moments that hurt, and were hard, but we never gave up hope that someday we could be where we are today.

I should describe what “the spectrum” means when it comes to being born on it, but before I do, a quick disclaimer: I'm far from an expert on autism. I'm simply a dad who cares deeply about helping his son. Please seek help from licensed profes-

sionals for your family members who may be on the autism spectrum.

Here is a definition of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) I pulled from The Mayo Clinic's website<sup>2</sup>, since they can better describe this condition:

Autism spectrum disorder is a condition related to brain development that impacts how a person perceives and socializes with others, causing problems in social interaction and communication. The disorder also includes limited and repetitive patterns of behavior. The term "spectrum" in autism spectrum disorder refers to the wide range of symptoms and severity.

Autism spectrum disorder includes conditions that were previously considered separate — autism, Asperger's syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder and an unspecified form of pervasive developmental disorder. Some people still use the term "Asperger's syndrome," which is generally thought to be at the mild end of autism spectrum disorder.

Autism spectrum disorder begins in early childhood and eventually causes problems functioning in society — socially, in school and at work, for example. Often children show symptoms of autism within the first year. A small number of children appear to develop normally in the first year, and then go through a period of regression between 18 and 24 months of age when they develop autism symptoms.

While there is no cure for autism spectrum disorder, intensive, early treatment can make a big difference in the lives of many children.

One of the things I've realized by raising a son with this condition is that it's simply that: a condition, for this point in time. By definition, a condition is *conditional*, and not permanent. It can be changed, and will be changed with work. That work begins in our minds.

When you have kids, you're reminded of the imagination and dreams you used to have when you were little. Also, as I witness the crazy contrast between two kids who came from the same parents, I'm reminded of our infinite uniqueness and individual gifts we are all given.

We are all born on many different parts of an endless amount of spectrums. Our dials are all set differently for our physical attributes, cognitive abilities, and emotional regulation. Personality traits like creativity, humor, empathy, loyalty, confidence, and adventure vary widely. We are also born into different socioeconomic statuses, geographical locations, and support systems further affecting the *nurture* side of the *nature and nurture* equation. When you see the world in this way, having just one "spectrum" to place people on seems grossly inadequate.

## **How a Black-and-White Mindset Limits Us**

For sake of simplicity, I try to refer to our contrasting mindsets as *finite* and *spectrum*. You'll also hear me associate *finite* with a *fixed* or *black-and-white* mindset.

Black-and-white helps illustrate how we can tend to think in very binary terms. When my black-and-white mindset was its strongest, I could not escape the "if this, then that" mindset. As I said earlier, *IF* I made my Little League All-Star team, *THEN* I

could have made the New York Yankees. Later in life, I thought *IF* I earned a certain amount of money, *THEN* I would be freed of financial stress. And *IFI* had that new piece of workout equipment, *THEN* I'd have the body I'd always dreamed of.

These binary options are not only confining, but also false. They are often constructs that we create in our head as comforts to ensure we're making a good decision. Advertisements and marketers love to condition us to use our black-and-white minds to make decisions. If you want *this*, then you must order *that*. Buy product A, to receive outcome B.

In reality, there is a whole alphabet of options and outcomes to look forward to. Accessing them starts with action. This is one of the main themes of this book: You will uncover a spectrum of possibility only when you start moving. While most are stuck at the starting line of their true potential, you will progress forward and be able to take others along for the ride.

In order to do this, we have to allow our thoughts to be challenged. Being rigid in our thinking will keep us stuck in our ways. The *IffThen* mentality is an inflexible way of thinking. It leaves little room for the spectrum mindset elements introduced below.

Distancing yourself from *IffThen* thinking will allow you to be slower to judgment and cast off premature assumptions. It will allow you to get so much more out of this book, and every book you read.

## The 10 Elements of a Spectrum Mindset

In my 10 years of honing my roles as a father and business owner, I recognized there were 10 key elements to a spectrum mindset.

1. Growth
2. Intention
3. Acceptance
4. Love
5. Patience
6. Presence
7. Curiosity
8. Abundance
9. Adaptability
10. Persistence

In the pages ahead, you'll read a chapter dedicated to each element (and a bonus chapter for our first element, growth). This book will then conclude with two chapters that will inspire you to put the spectrum mindset into practice. With each element comes personal stories from my life.

You don't need to be a parent or know anyone with autism to appreciate these stories. It's my hope that anyone, no matter what season of life they're in, can gain the gift of a spectrum mindset. It's never too early or late in life to start thinking in infinite ways.

I hope this book transforms you and gives you greater possibilities in your life. I hope it helps you become the most incredible parent or grandparent. I hope it transforms your professional life and you become a boss everybody wants to work for, or a co-worker everyone wants to work with. I hope the people

around you can see a notable difference in you once you've read this book.

Above all, I hope this book gives you hope.

We were in a very challenging place when our son's condition was at its worst and our gym was in its baby stages. The growing pains seemed like they would never end. I see that struggle now in fellow parents. Many have reached out to me for help, ultimately inspiring me to write this book. Hopefully, I can be a voice of hope to say, "Hard times are not forever, and things will get better." You will move across these spectrums of life to better days ahead.

This book will help you unlock a life of fewer limits and more possibilities. If you read this book, where you are now is not where you'll be a year from now. I promise you that.

You'll start creating a mind that is unobstructed by the everyday stresses of the world. You'll begin to see life in bold, beautiful colors.

It's time to leave behind the thoughts of your past for the dreams of your future.

## CHAPTER 2

# Kicked Out of School

*September, 2017. Our son Dylan is three years old.*

**M**y wife Shannon, visibly distraught, hastily makes her way through our front door and into our kitchen, “I think they are kicking Dylan out of school.”

The look on my face said, “Is that even possible?!” But my words said, “How...how do you know?”

“Dylan’s teacher called and wants to have a meeting with us and one of the school’s directors. She says she’s no longer able to handle him and wants to talk about alternative schooling.”

We took a moment of pause to try to figure out what this meant. *How do you kick a three-year-old boy out of preschool?* I thought.

We knew Dylan had his difficulties learning and keeping up with his peers, but we had no idea removal from class was even on the table. He was a very late crawler and walker. He was still trying to understand simple things like speaking, let alone speaking with others.

As the class progressed, Dylan was distant, often in his own world. The teachers questioned if it was possible that he was having mini-seizures the way his stare went blank and his arms shot out in a locked position. He also flapped his hands for no apparent reason. This action, which we later recognized as *stimming*, was not what his teachers were used to dealing with.

The preschool had already held Dylan back in a class with younger students in hopes he would not negatively affect the learning of other kids his age. Now, we were barely a month into the new school year and we were faced with another challenge—and, potentially, with bringing our son back home entirely.

Shannon, being the incredible, concerned mother she is, had now opened the floodgates of tears. “He’s just the sweetest boy. How could anyone not think he’s just the sweetest boy?”

I put my arm around her and let her know everything would be OK. “Let’s just figure out a time to have this meeting. That’s the only thing we can do right now.”

Sure enough, the meeting with his teacher and administrator confirmed our suspicions. They asked for Dylan to leave their school. In our meeting, the preschool administrator recommended we contact a child development service through the public school system that specializes in helping kids with special needs, called ChildFind.<sup>3</sup>

I walked away from that meeting frustrated and unsure of where Dylan would be next. I had tried my best to be the soother of the situation, but my emotions came out in the car ride home. “But helping children is *their job!*” I exclaimed into

the world. “Where is their compassion for him? How do you just give up on him? He is the nicest kid!”

While Dylan didn’t interact much at school, you knew he had a special spirit the way our two dogs gravitated towards him. We’d watch *Wheel of Fortune* almost every night and Dylan would give the biggest belly laugh each time the colorful wheel spun. His laugh often awoke whichever dog was snuggling up to him.

Dylan was also the sweetest big brother to his little sister. One time, when Arielle was napping on our living room couch, Dylan pulled up a chair and started reading a book to her. He was far from being able to read, but he made up his own story based on what he remembered from us reading the book to him.

In that car ride I was mad, but at the same time, I was inspired. Inspired to make a happy ending out of this. For everything his preschool teacher wasn’t able to give him, I was ready to give him multiplied by a million.

Shannon was quick to get the ChildFind process going. We went through several interviews and meetings to help decide Dylan’s next move. They interviewed his prior teachers, too. The professionals at ChildFind determined that Dylan showed lots of qualities that placed him on the autism spectrum. They recommended he enter a special preschool class for kids with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

This was the first time a professional educator brought up autism to us. Our entire family, grandparents and all, started researching autism and the spectrum. We wanted to know everything we could so we could learn how to help Dylan.

We spent the remainder of the fall semester paying for private classes and going to see teachers at a local center for kids with special needs, the Els Center for Excellence in Jupiter, Florida. This center was started by the professional golfer Ernie Els, who also has a son on the spectrum.<sup>4</sup>

Shannon and I joined Dylan in many “mommy and me” classes that involved a lot of sensory play and socialization with other kids, both of which were recommended for children on the spectrum. It should have felt awkward to be the only dad in those classes, but I didn’t care. I was so focused on helping Dylan that I was willing to do whatever he needed.

By the start of the spring semester in January, just after Dylan’s fourth birthday, he was placed in a preschool program for children with special needs at a public elementary school.

Long story short, he would not get kicked out of this class. In fact, he made it through *three* semesters. He had a team of three amazing teachers who specialized in ASD and were finally able to provide Dylan with the support he needed. The amount of growth Dylan had in those 1.5 years was borderline miraculous.

Instead of explosive emotional outbursts, Dylan learned to communicate his needs and put words to the discomforts he was feeling. He was not a whiny child who threw tantrums when he didn’t get his way. His emotions came to an eruption when he couldn’t figure out how to regulate them. Now he had the ability to recognize runaway emotions and self-regulate. A trait many of us take for granted.

We got weekly reports from Dylan's teachers that we reviewed with him. We talked through the hard times, and watched those reports get better and better. He was now finishing his school work and proud to show off what he accomplished during the day.

At his previous school, Dylan barely knew the names of his other classmates. Now he was telling me all about his friends on our car rides home. He radiated joy at the end of his school day, rather than looking defeated from another emotional rollercoaster ride.

As Dylan's preschool career was coming to a close, it was time for another meeting with his teachers and administrators in preparation for kindergarten. This meeting was designed to set up an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). A child's IEP gives recommendations for the further placement and special teaching needed for the child.

Knowing how far Dylan had come in those three semesters, we went into the meeting with a positive attitude. Like any parent, a part of us was ready to petition for whatever we thought would be best for our child.

"We recommend that your son Dylan join a regular kindergarten class," they told us.

When I heard those words, you would have thought we were learning our child had invented the cure for cancer. My eyes welled up with tears and I smiled as wide as I could, hoping to keep the tears from falling down my cheek. "Proud" was a significant understatement!

My son could be considered "regular" or "normal," like the other kids once again! But it wasn't this achievement that

brought tears to my eyes; it was the pride I felt in watching Dylan work so hard over the past year and a half.

We watched him work hard for it every day. At times, we even questioned how hard he was made to work. Was this too much to put a four-year-old through? He was putting in the same hours the elementary school students were—and he had homework, too. Each day we drove him there and back, over 20 minutes each way. That was six hours in school and at least 45 minutes in the car each day, on top of his nightly homework. That's not easy to do at that age.

And we knew in that IEP meeting that the road ahead wouldn't be easy, either. But the words, "We recommend your son enters a regular kindergarten class, with regular weekly meetings two to three times per week with a special language teacher," sounded so much better than "We can no longer help your son at this school."

## **A Son Transformed To A Mind Transformed**

I don't share this story to tell you about my son's transformation. This is not the book about how to connect with people on the spectrum, nor is it the book explaining how to help your loved one who is on the spectrum.

I share this story to tell you about the effect Dylan has had on the people who have known him—specifically, me. Knowing Dylan for the ten years of his life has completely changed my own life. The gift my son gave me was spectrum lenses to see the world through. Seeing the world in a different way changed

my perspective, which changed my thoughts, which changed my life.

This is the book that enlightens you to see life as a spectrum.

When you begin to see life as a spectrum, you can then move upon it to your best life possible.

You can experience all that life has to offer and stop limiting yourself, once and for all.

I used to see the world with what's been labeled as a "finite," "fixed," or "black-and-white" mindset. I had a very binary mentality—things were either right or wrong. I thought what was, will always be, and only so much change is allotted to everything that is. I constantly categorized and compared the world I saw.

It's a common mindset you see in today's world, especially after the global pandemic in 2020. Many people also lost something in 2020—some people lost loved ones, others lost their jobs, and many lost personal freedoms they used to enjoy. When we start to lose things or even fear losing things, we close off and fall into further unhealthy patterns. The pandemic showed us how fear and uncertainty can strengthen this binary mindset—and it did so, in multitudes.

When we have a limited mindset, we confide in our echo chambers of comfort to assure ourselves everything will be OK. We stop opening ourselves up to new information and new perspectives. Our scarcity mindset thoughts get louder while our thoughts of abundance are reduced to whispers. We look to protect ourselves and what we have left. Our vision narrows, our minds shrink, and our hearts get hard.

This is no way to live.

In contrast, when our eyes, minds, and hearts live on a spectrum, we can see, think, love, and experience so much more in this life. There truly are limitless parts of our mind that can see beyond the binary forks in the road we think we have to take.

I believe God gave me a son on the spectrum so that I could receive this gift of spectrum seeing and living, and break my finite mindset. He gave this gift to me so I could give it to you.

My mind has been transformed and renewed, and this renewal is here for you too.

In the Bible (NIV version), Romans 12:2 reads, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”<sup>5</sup>

We are always conforming or transforming in terms of our mindset and the lenses we see the world with. Conforming is what the outside world wants for us, and transforming comes from within us. If we want to transform on our terms, in line with our ideals, it takes an intention to do so. This transformation starts in our minds, playing defense against the ways of the world but also playing offense, such as reading growth books like this one.

You don’t have to be a reader of the Bible or a believer in God to experience the transformation of the mind I will guide you through. Your mind can be renewed without a new revelation of faith. If your mind is open enough to read through a book with some scripture in it, your mind is open enough for the transformation I’m offering here.

For better or worse, our minds have been shaped by the environments we've put them in. They've been shaped by our parents, family, teachers, and the friends we've surrounded ourselves with. They've been shaped by mainstream, social, and sensationalist media.

There are also reptilian and mammalian parts of our brains that have been programmed for survival and reproduction since birth. They were created to work for us so that we could survive, but often they work against us when we attempt to thrive.

If we want to have a mind that works for us and not against us, we have to cultivate thoughts that help us adopt the mindset we want. It's constant, never-ending work. You are going to have tens of thousands of thoughts today. Don't you want those thoughts to work for you, not against you?

I believe there's no greater work you can do for personal development than the work you do on your mind. You probably won't be expelled from preschool anytime soon, but you're going to face your own type of adversity. How you see and perceive the world will make all the difference in how you handle challenging situations.

Before we begin, you must understand: this is a process, and it will last for your whole life. You won't receive a spectrum mindset certificate at the end of this book, and your growth in spectrum thinking will be far from over when the last page turns. This is a good thing, and essential to the journey. When you have a spectrum mindset, your daily objective is simply to move in the direction toward your goals and your best self. You do this

every day, fully knowing that you will never reach an endpoint.  
There is no retirement from a spectrum mindset.

We're two chapters in and your mind has already begun moving. Let's keep going.

## CHAPTER 3

# Growth (Part I) - Fixed vs. Growth Mindset

*“In a growth mindset, challenges are exciting rather than threatening.  
So rather than thinking, oh, I’m going to reveal my weaknesses,  
you say, wow, here’s a chance to grow.”*

*-Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D., Author Mindset: The New Psychology of  
Success: How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential*

Since Dylan was born, I’ve read over 250 books. A small percentage of those were focused on autism, many were about business, and most were about personal growth.

One of my favorite books of all time, and is my most gifted book to others, is *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success: How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential* By Carol S. Dweck Ph.D. Had I not read that book, I would not be writing this book to you now.<sup>6</sup>

Reading that book combined with the practice of parenting was a never-ending feedback loop. I was constantly learning new things, trying them out with my son, and diving deeper into the

research to see how I could get better. It was a lot of work, and it was far from the original parenthood dream I had pictured.

My original dream was that I would naturally be the best dad, raising the most perfect kids. I had some pretty amazing parents and I was ready to improve upon the few things I thought they could have done better. When I wasn't given a perfectly healthy son, it threw me off of my plan.

In hindsight, my plan for my family wasn't inspiring—it was limiting. It was built on the blocks of certainty, as most finite-minded plans are. It was a perfectly planned life, but a very finite one.

Throughout her book, Dr. Dweck answers frequently asked questions. One of those questions reads, “What if I like my fixed mindset? If I know what my abilities and talents are, I know where I stand, and I know what to expect. Why should I give that up?”

Here is Dr. Dweck's response:

“If you like it, by all means keep it. This book shows people they have a choice by spelling out the two mindsets and the worlds they create. The point is that people can choose which world they want to inhabit. The fixed mindset creates the feeling that you can really know the permanent truth about yourself. And this can be comforting.”

When Shannon was pregnant with Dylan, I pictured the perfect world we would have when he was born. How healthy he would be and how I could help him using all of my knowledge of fitness and nutrition. How great he would be at sports and how I would coach him like my dad coached me. Just as

Dr. Dweck pointed out, I was creating a truth for myself that was comforting. I created a truth that was perfect and effortless. She also says in her book, “people with a fixed mindset prefer effortless success.”

When we realized Dylan was on the autism spectrum, we could have let the finite mind take over once again. “This is what he is and this is what he’ll always be,” we could have rationalized to ourselves. We could have sat back and watched our son struggle and just gotten used to struggling with him.

Instead, we chose action and effort. We chose to do everything we possibly could in order for our son to grow each day. You’ll see in the coming chapters how Dylan’s journey has been nothing short of spectacular. We worked hard and prayed hard for Dylan. We dealt with feelings of regret, guilt, and sadness over our situation, but ultimately knew those feelings had no place in switching to a growth mindset.

As I read Dr. Dweck’s material about a Fixed vs. Growth Mindset, I felt like the labels of “fixed” and “growth” didn’t fully encapsulate how finite and infinite these mindsets can be. When you say someone has a “fixed mindset,” you could interpret it as a good thing. A person can be fixed or fixated on their goals. I was tied to my goals of having the perfect family. Once I had my family, I realized how finite those ideals were. I realized how limited our life would be if I didn’t change my mindset.

Our perfect parenting life got uncomfortable quickly with Dylan. And I’m so glad it did, because Dylan gave us a reason to think *beyond* our finiteness. If something or someone forces

you to get uncomfortable, embrace it. It's there to help you grow as you were meant to.

Black-and-white minds get comforted in thinking about how star athletes and bestselling authors have special talents that aren't accessible to everyday people. The idea that you just weren't born good enough and that there's nothing you can do, takes the responsibility to try to improve off your shoulders.

The spectrum mindset has taught me that this is a lie.

I've learned that people who have reached levels others will never reach have likely been through discomforts others will never know. It's vital to seek out discomfort and growth. Your infiniteness resides in the discomfort you've been avoiding.

## **Turning The Dial Towards a Spectrum Mindset**

Raising Dylan led me to wisdom like this, but my new mindset didn't flip on like a light switch. It was a slow process, one I'm still working on today. When you finish this book it will be the same for you. Thinking opportunistically will be a practice you have to work on every day.

Forget any notion that you'll get to flip on the switch of a spectrum mindset, and think more like you're carrying your overflowing laundry basket of clothes upstairs. As you walk, you need to be aware that you don't trip and fall. You can't see where you're going and you have to blindly trust that your foot will touch the next step. Most likely your dog is going to run under your feet on your way, and you'll probably drop a few socks and underwear, which the dog will be sure to grab and chew on. But eventually, after what seemed like a much harder trip than

it should have been, you'll reach the upstairs. You'll reach a new mindset. But then you realize the upstairs is just a new level and there's an infinite amount of stairs ahead. You also realize you dropped some socks that you have to go back for. This is where the finite mindset gives up because of the overwhelm of never-ending work. But that's exactly what the spectrum mindset is about. It's about always being a work in progress, and making mindset work a practice, not a goal.

You've probably witnessed the person who loses their composure every time a sock drops. Maybe that person is you. You'll know because the smallest problems bring out the largest expletives, and every minor adversity becomes a major focus. We have to learn to face the trials of our life, accept them for what they are, and let them grow us.

You need testing grounds to try your mindset out on. There need to be conflicts in your life where you are actively choosing a spectrum mindset over a finite one. It was the struggle that our family went through with Dylan that helped fortify the spectrum mindset in us over the years. We embody it because we lived it.

To clearly illustrate the contrast between a finite mindset and a spectrum mindset, I created a chart below. Yes, I realize the irony in providing a two-column chart when I'm advising you to stop living in a two-column world, but these examples will illustrate a much clearer picture for you.

Note that this chart does not work in absolutes. Even when you choose the path of the spectrum mindset, you have many paths within that choice to choose from. Don't think of it as

leaving one side of the chart completely for the other. These situations are two different ends of a spectrum and you're just trying to direct your dial toward the more desired one.

You may feel like you bounce back and forth from column to column. Or you may feel like you're stuck in the middle. That's OK. It's all OK. Even in our toughest times and worst mindsets, we can always strive for awareness. When we're in the finite column, we just have to know there are other possibilities out there.

Even when you live with a spectrum mindset, you fall into finite mindset patterns from time to time. Being able to recognize when you are in these patterns and steer yourself more toward a spectrum mindset is what this work is all about. Life is all about making small course corrections over time.

Take your time reading through this table and spend some time with each mindset contrast. Think about times in your life where these mindsets have appeared and how you can move toward one from the other.

## Finite Mindset & Spectrum Mindset Contrast Table:

Finite Mindset	Spectrum Mindset
Believes most choices are between choice “a” and choice “b.” Struggles to see the wider array of paths to take.	Thinks beyond the choices given to them and asks better questions to find better answers. Realizes they always have a choice to make.
Doesn't believe in different mindsets. Thinks “this” is just how the brain thinks. Doesn't realize the power their brain has to reframe their reality.	Is aware enough to recognize different mindsets within themselves at different times. Knows it's still possible to have finite mindset thoughts while having a spectrum mindset.
Thinks that their past equals their future.	Knows that their future can be limitless.
Has the urge to judge and rate things.	Approaches with humility and curiosity.
Needs to categorize in order to understand.	Recognizes and uses categorization but is not beholden to it.
Works in extremes. Often all-in or all-out.	Works in small, attainable increments.
Has large swings of emotional ups and downs. Lets emotions overcome them and sometimes paralyze them.	Is aware of their emotions yet remains centered. Acknowledges emotions for what they are and makes small course corrections to move toward more desired feelings.
Constantly judges where they are in comparison to others.	Constantly seeks out “better” in comparison to where they are today.

The Spectrum Mindset

Outcome focused. Needs an outcome to look back and judge the experience.	Effort focused. Appreciates the journey just as much, and if not more, than the outcome.
Needs quick and constant validation, and overvalues the opinions of others. Is often offended by criticism and tunes it out.	Is open to taking feedback and constantly learning to get better. Respects, but doesn't always agree with the opinions of others.
Has a tough time delaying gratification when it comes to unknown duration and ending times.	Can put off short term pleasure for long term gain. Always has an eye on the bigger picture and recognizes how far they have come.
Strives to be perfect.	Strives to progress.
Wants to be an overnight success. Would like to have the accolades without the effort.	Values what they do every day regardless of the outcome. Is fulfilled by the effort they give.
Can see relationships as transactional, and will quickly give up on one that isn't paying off.	Knows that relationships are a two-way street and that they take constant work. Is willing to put in the work to improve relationships.
Thinks the resources available to them are fixed in amount and are scarce. Their excuses are not scarce, however.	Sees a world of endless resources. When they are limited in resources they are still optimistic in using everything they have to their advantage.
Are comforted by knowing their potential.	Are comforted by making progress and challenging their possibility.
Thinks they should know everything and hesitates to ask questions.	Knows they don't know everything and stays curious, always asking questions.

Is quick to make assumptions and often lets one thing mean several other things.	Is quick to channel their awareness and ask questions about the situation which challenge their assumptions.
Turns everything into a finite game, trying to win now at the cost of sacrificing long term health or relationships.	Plays the infinite game, knowing that the true victory is extending the game and making a “win” for all players involved.
Thinks they don’t need to read another book about mindset. They already know all they need to know.	Looks forward to reading mindset books to further their personal development and growth as a human being.

Moving more toward a spectrum mindset can help you in so many different areas of your life. The move toward a spectrum way of thinking has improved my relationships with my wife and family. I run a better business and have better friendships with my gym family at FitTown. And best of all, it has made me a better dad.

Chances are you “do pretty well” in one area of your life but lack in another. You give so much to your work, you wish you could give more to your family. Or you feel like you spend so much energy on your kids, you don’t have enough left for your spouse. Different relationships and different situations bring out different mindsets—you can be infinite with one relationship and finite with another, or infinite one day and finite the next. It’s also very common that you take one mindset from a part of your day and apply it to another. It’s possible you bring the stress of work home with you, and you don’t even realize how much it happens. You may think you leave your work at work,

but then you're overly defensive, impatient, and stubborn with your family.

I know because I've been there. And I also know that new mindsets are a practice. I deliberately have to practice my mindset every morning. I focus on channeling the 10 elements of a spectrum mindset. I pray every morning and openly ask God to help me access them. Some days call for more patience, while others call for more intention. I encourage you to set aside 15-30 minutes every morning to journal and create awareness around these elements. *Remember to visit [spectrummindset.com](http://spectrummindset.com) to access journal prompts and reflection questions.*

## **It's All About Awareness**

Creating *awareness* around your mindset is the biggest takeaway I can offer you in this book. Many of us don't know we have mindsets that need fixing until we can fully see the contrast between healthy and unhealthy ones.

When I was 25 years old, I had an 8-pack, could bench press over 300 pounds, and thought I was in impeccable health. "What more could you want?" I thought back then.

Yet at the same time, I took chronic heartburn pills every other day. I had serious irritable bowel issues, crazy mood swings, bouts with anxiety, and my energy was way below my potential.

It wasn't until I flipped my diet to a real food approach and cut out things like artificial chemicals, sugar, dairy, and gluten that I completely transformed my health. I reached a whole new level of health and energy I didn't know existed.

I didn't know how bad I felt until I experienced how good I could feel.

This transformation in my health gave me perspective of what's possible when we have an open mind. My newfound awareness around the ability to change gave me a whole new spark and inspiration toward my workouts and nutrition. I was feeling "superhuman," and a lot of that feeling came from the new possibilities I was uncovering.

This is what I hope you'll experience through reading this book—and many other books on mindset and growth. You won't realize how finite your mindset was before, until you experience a whole new level of thinking. You'll see that a simple perspective shift gives you endless possibilities for future growth.

A snapshot of my health now doesn't tell you a whole lot. I'm 39 and co-own a gym that I started over 11 years ago, so strong arms and abs should be a given in my profession. But when I contrast my health now to where it was, or look at where it could have been, I value the transformation that occurred.

The same thing applies to Dylan, who is now ten years old. He's a pretty average kid in a snapshot of today's life, but when you contrast today to where he's been, it's a world of difference. It's a real-life miracle.

I would never be able to see how far Dylan has come without remembering where he has been. I'm grateful that in the times that were the hardest for Dylan, I journaled honestly about our struggles. You'll read one of those journal entries in the next chapter.

You might wonder why I would write about a hard time, but those are the most important times to get out your pen and paper. The spectrum mindset tells us that hard times won't last forever, and they don't. The act of journaling can be therapeutic. Being able to accurately reflect on how far you've come can be inspiring toward a greater future.

Our lives need the hard times to appreciate the good ones. We need work in order to value vacation. We need loneliness so that we can cherish love. Sometimes we need to lose something, or someone, in order to learn how much they really meant to us.

The spectrum mindset is all about understanding these contrasts, and not being confined by them.

Now that you can see how contrasts can work for you, and not against you, it's time to take you to a very tough time in our lives, when Dylan's condition was at its worst.

## CHAPTER 4

# Growth (Part II) - Hitting Rock Bottom

*“Rock bottom became the solid foundation on which I rebuilt my life.”  
- J.K. Rowling, author of the “Harry Potter” novel series<sup>7</sup>*

The thing about “rock bottom” on a spectrum mindset is that there is technically no limit to the distance you can fall. If the great things in life can’t be limited in their upside, it’s only fair that the hard things get their own limitlessness, too.

Usually, you only know where the bottom was after time has passed and you can analyze your memories. There isn’t always a clear catalyst that pivots your descent, at least not one that is recognizable while in the moment.

However, I remember clearly the night I felt like Dylan’s behavior hit “rock bottom.”

When I originally journaled about this time back in 2017, Dylan was about three and a half years old. This was just two months before he was kicked out of preschool. It was a really hard time for us. I copy and pasted my entire journal entry from this day so you can see where we were back then. As I’ve said and

will continue to say, where you are now only gains significance when you see how far you've come.

*Journal Entry: July 2017*

*This past week has been one of the toughest we've experienced with Dylan so far. We are exhausted and I don't know what to do. I do know that I need to stop focusing on "what" Dylan is and just "who" he is. He's my son. The only son I will ever have in this lifetime. He is my whole entire world. I love him more than anything I have loved, or will ever love.*

*I've been meaning to start writing about this process for a few months now. Writing has always helped me relieve stress in tougher times and these past couple months have been pretty tough. Although, I still keep it in perspective and know other families have it much harder than us.*

*It's really tough though when you pour all of your love and patience you feel like you physically have toward someone and they continue to scream in your face, often over 1000 times a day. I wish that was an exaggeration. I've thought about keeping a counter to see how much Dylan screams and see if a thousand or so would qualify as a problem. I realize measuring how much he screams or trying to track his "instances of autistic behaviors" really does nothing for me. If I were his doctor or teacher then maybe, but I'm not, I'm his dad. I need to be his dad above all other things.*

*I just finished the book Uniquely Human: A Different Way of Seeing Autism and it has taught me so much about parenting in general. My biggest takeaway was that we often try to conform our kids to society and limit their behaviors to only what we know as socially acceptable. We think it's our job to control, control, and control some more. When really it's our job to understand. All we need to do is understand*

*and communicate. I think this book by Dr. Prizant could benefit all parents, not just ones with children with autistic tendencies.<sup>8</sup>*

*This book has helped me get through the tough times. The nights where the screaming does not stop. I remind myself to breathe and to resist any urge to scream back.*

*I think it's in our nature as parents to feel challenged when our kids scream at us. I picture a family of lions roaring at each other on the pridelands. It's in our primal nature to fight resistance with more resistance. Both Shannon and I have screamed inches away from Dylan's face at times when he has pushed us past our limits. It's hard to scream at your kid who you love so much, but as we've learned, it's even harder to stay silent.*

*A week ago, as we were settling back home from our trip to Orlando and Chicago, Dylan still had some leftover frustration from traveling. He was in a pretty good screaming mode for the few days in Orlando, driving back to Jupiter, and a few days here at home. One night he was laying in bed after a fun day of doing all this stuff for him and he just started throwing a screaming tantrum out of nowhere. Part of me wanted to say, "What the heck is wrong with you? You had an amazing day and have nothing to be mad about!"*

*But then the other part of me said, "He had a long day and is probably over-tired. Let me calmly move his hands over his heart, a sign I want him to use his words to convey his emotions." In a matter of 10 seconds he went from screaming at the top of his lungs, to calmly saying "Words, words." He often comes out of these screaming fits like a soldier suffering from PTSD. It's like he's not even there with me and I have to bring him back to the present with my calming voice and touch. It's really hard to watch your child have this almost*

*out-of-body experience.*

*The hand over the heart is a signal I've created with Dylan to let him know that I understand his emotions and I'd like for him to use his words instead of screaming. I motion my fist over my heart and softly pound my chest a few times and say "Words." He repeats "Words" to me and calms his demeanor.*

*I can't remember the first time someone told me he had autistic tendencies. It might have been one of our moms—neither of them hold back an inch in saying what they think. But someone told us that his waving of his hands when he was a baby was a sign that he could be autistic. To us, it was the cutest thing ever, like everything else he ever did.*

*What's tough for me lately is thinking that all these things we think are cute, the baby stuff, is going to continue into years four, five, six, and further. I know I shouldn't stress about the future, but it's tough not to think about it. What was once "cute" or "smart" at age two is looked at totally differently when you are eight, uncontrollably waving your hands.*

*He repeats everything and has been a parrot these past few months. In Chicago, everybody cracked up at how much he remembered, and we joked that he was going to pick up Uncle Joe's curse words. So far he has not, which is great. He repeats everyone's name he met on our trip, everyone from Uncle Joe and Jan to the people he spent only a few moments with, like Sunday and Theo.*

*Dylan has one of the most amazing memories for a kid his age. He practically has a whole book, The Pirate Ship Book, memorized. He also recites full paragraphs out of Goodnight Goodnight, Construction Site and I Love My Pirate Papa.*

*Dylan has been repeating words from what he hears for a*

*long time. At first it was, "This kid is a genius;" now it's, "I hope he stops repeating sometime soon." If all he can do in kindergarten is repeat what he hears, they probably won't let him into first grade. I always knew Dylan was smart—you can see his brain working, and he's always watching. He just lacks certain skills, like the skill of communication.*

*The waving of hands, the lining up of toys, the carrying of an object in each hand whenever he goes somewhere, the repeating of words, the screaming (voluntary and involuntary like a twitch)...these are all things he still does, and we don't see an end in sight. He's almost four. At this point I'm getting a little worried I'm not doing enough to help him, to teach him.*

*I've always just assumed I would be blessed with a perfectly healthy kid. Even when we learned Dylan would be on the spectrum, I figured he would be the highest performing kid on the spectrum. I guess I'm starting to deal with the fact that nothing is guaranteed anymore. Dylan is going to land where he's going to land. Can I help him with that? Can I help him with diet and communication skills? Sure I can, and I will.*

*But I can't measure day to day where he is on his journey. I can't stress about where he falls on the spectrum at age five or at age eight. I just need to do what I think is right in each and every moment with him. Like I've learned in the field of physical fitness, focusing on the end result will only leave you unsatisfied. You have to enjoy the process.*

*Each day I remind myself to enjoy every moment with Dylan and to stop analyzing the past, present, and future with him. I love this boy more than anything in this world, and will never stop loving him.*

\*\*\*

Can you tell how cathartic my journaling and writing was?

Through this one journal entry, I go from max frustration to max appreciation. It's as if that digital document looks back at my frustrated face and says, "Words, words." My words helped me in this moment, and they really help me now, over six years later.

Looking back on this rock bottom moment gives me so much perspective in how far we've come. It was clear back then that I was looking for a catalyst to change our trajectory. I wanted a teacher, or a change in diet, to be that *one* thing that completely transforms my son.

But the catalyst didn't come from the outside. The catalyst for Dylan's change was a shift within *me*. It was when *my* mindset changed from a finite mind to one on the spectrum that I was truly able to help him.

The hand gesture that I created for Dylan—to move his fist over his heart to calm his emotions and center himself—became the space I needed to bring myself into the right mindset. I got way more out of that hand gesture than he did. And not only did I use that with Dylan, but I used it throughout my life—placing my own hand on my own heart when I needed to center myself.

How often does somebody provoke us to react in an emotional way that we wouldn't be proud of in the future? If only we could remind ourselves to breathe, to not send that text or email reply, and not jump to conclusions too quickly. We all could use a gesture or reminder that creates space so we can bring the right mindset into our lives and choose better words and actions.

Sometimes all the mind needs is a little space and perspective to start a massive transformation. It was that summer in 2017,

this journal entry, that my mindset shift really took hold. I'm grateful it did because that autumn, just two months later, was when Dylan got kicked out of preschool. You might assume the preschool experience was our bottom moment from reading about it prior, but that event was an external one. External events will never measure up to the internal trouble or change that's going on inside of you. It's only when you lack on the inside that you let external events destroy you from the outside.

The dismissal from preschool wasn't our bottom moment. In fact, it was just another gift given to us to help us move our son along the spectrum. Without it, we would have never found the Individualized Education Program (IEP) that helped change his life. We are grateful he got kicked out of preschool.

It's possible you are going through a tough season right now. When you're going through difficult times it's easy to wonder "will this ever end?" and it's easy to think it never will.

When I wrote this following paragraph in my journal, my finite mindset would not let me see a malleable future. I thought because this was the way my son was now, this would be the way he would always be:

*What's tough for me lately is thinking that all these things we think are cute, the baby stuff, is going to continue into years four, five, six, and further. I know I shouldn't stress about the future but it's tough not to think about it. What was once "cute" or "smart" at age two is looked at totally differently when you are eight and uncontrollably waving your hands.*

It's been over six years since I wrote this, and guess what? The future changed. It wasn't stuck, and it wasn't set in stone. My son has come so much further in these six years than I could have

ever imagined. He still does some things that aren't "normal," like waving his hands in front of his face when he's excited, but now he has the awareness to say, "I do that when I get really excited. I was thinking about my funny cousin Liam, and that made me excited." I know that this action is just a part of who Dylan is right now in this snapshot of life, and I no longer stress about what that action might look like in front of his friends five years from now.

Since coming public with Dylan's condition, which I will talk more about in the next chapter, I've had many friends confess their fears when they learned a loved one was diagnosed as being on the spectrum. I assure them that it's completely normal to feel fear, guilt, worry, and sadness. Some will even go through the five stages of grief: *Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance*.

It's common to have similar feelings over other health diagnoses. When people learn a loved one has cancer, it can be devastating. Our minds flood with fear and worst case scenarios. It's not necessarily the cancer we fear, but the uncertainty it brings. Will I get to walk my daughter down the aisle at her wedding? Will I ever get to meet my grandkids? These are tough questions to have to ponder.

One thing we can be certain about is that there is going to be a lot of uncertainty in our lives. We can also be certain that a diagnosis is not always a death sentence. Not everyone beats the odds, but many do. In every probability given, there is always possibility available.

There are plenty of stories of people walking again after they were told they'd never be able to. Many cancer patients have been cured. Countless diseases have been defeated. Miracles are always possible.

Getting a diagnosis of being on the autism spectrum is anything but black-and-white. The name of it alone, "spectrum," tells you how much variance there is to it.

It makes you wonder why more medical conditions aren't referred to as "spectrums" to give patients a better understanding of their paths forward. We have stages in cancer readings, but even then we look at them in very binary terms, saying "*This* stage means *that* chance to live." We need to assess to what degree we have a disease, or to what degree that disease has us. There are always degrees in every situation that can't be discounted, and these degrees are on a spectrum, not a black-or-white switch.

Every family has a story of the health hardships they've had to face. Cherish what you do have with your health and move to improve everything that you have control over. Our family's story has surely had its ups and downs. Tough places got easier, and easy places got tough. It's the ebbs and flows of life, and the slides across life's spectrums.

This is what makes life beautiful. There are no guarantees or fixed things in life. The only fixed things are the ones we perceive to be so. Everything is always changing. The only certainty is uncertainty.

Since this world is always changing, we should never stop moving ourselves towards our desired direction. Do whatever

you can right now with what you have. Stop waiting for conditions to be perfect and just start moving. One of my favorite quotes of all time comes from Martin Luther King Jr.: “If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.”<sup>9</sup>

This quote sums up the spectrum mindset eloquently. It’s *all* about progress and tiny wins.

There are still things to this day I wonder about with Dylan. I wonder about middle school, high school, dating, and all the fun stuff that comes with being a teenager. I wonder, but—thanks in part to journaling—I no longer worry. I find peace in knowing we will just keep moving. Today, tomorrow, and the next day, we will just keep progressing together.

Journaling can be an incredible tool to help acknowledge and track all of your little victories. Some victories you only recognize when you’re able to zoom out and see how far you’ve come. It can also be incredibly insightful and therapeutic to put your thoughts on paper.

The finite mindset will resist journaling because they have *nothing* to write about. There are many times where I stare at that empty sheet of paper, and have no idea what I’m going to write, but I just start writing. Stop looking for a *reason* to write, and stop searching for the *magic pill* that solves all of your problems. Just start moving, any way you can.

Your growth is going to begin with you and the many little choices you make. Setting an intention for each day and starting your day on your terms is vital. Now that we understand what it means to prioritize growth, let's learn *how to prioritize* by using our intention.



## CHAPTER 5

# Intention

*“Don’t wait for the right opportunity: create it.”*

*-George Bernard Shaw*

**A**t the end of 2017, Dylan was almost four years old. Just a few months prior, he was kicked out of preschool. To be fair to the administrators at that school, there were places I wanted to kick Dylan out of when his behavior wasn’t the best.

Whenever Dylan attended a birthday party, something almost always set him off. It was most often the singing of *Happy Birthday* that would incite his loudest screams. The song would stop cold and everyone would wonder if their singing was really that bad.

I couldn’t help but wonder what people thought of my son. I also worried they thought I was a bad parent. My people-pleaser-pride wanted to hide him. My apologies always felt insufficient. And overall I felt too inexperienced with autism to try and explain it to anyone.

It was at that time that I felt most insecure with Dylan’s condition. It also happened to be the time where our gym, named *CrossFit Palm Beach* in 2017, was performing a workout called

“Luke” as part of the “Lift Up Autism” movement in CrossFit. It was common for CrossFit gyms to do workouts to raise awareness for different causes throughout the year like breast cancer or veteran suicide.

As I was coaching the class through this workout, I struggled with how much information about Dylan I would actually divulge. I wavered on what I would say, and in the end, I said absolutely nothing. Throughout the day my chest was tight, there was a pit in my stomach, and the words for the workout descriptions came out messy because of it.

I knew when it came time to write the next weekly email for the gym, I couldn't keep putting myself through this feeling. I needed to say something, even if it was just saying, “Yes, I am affected too.”

This next thought hit me like a high-speed train: “How the heck are you going to lift up autism awareness without even standing up for your own kid?” That switch from burying Dylan's backstory to vividly lifting it up and celebrating it was everything I needed to come public with our situation. It was also a visualization that would change the course of our lives.

In all of my inner turmoil, I forgot to consult my wife Shannon before hitting the *send* button.

“I'm surprised you said that,” Shannon said to me after the newsletter was sent out. “I didn't know you were open to telling people...especially our whole gym.”

Feeling really bad that I didn't ask her before sending out the email, I replied, “Are you mad at me?”

“No, not at all. I was just surprised.” She took a breath before finding the right words. “You’ve always said how you didn’t want Dylan to be labeled by others.”

She was right. I had said that. But my mindset was already starting to change around labels. I explained my case further, “I care a lot less about what other people say in regards to him, and I’m only concerned with what we say about him. We can choose to only speak positively about his condition on the spectrum. It never has to be a negative thing, at least not from us.”

While Shannon still had hesitations about the time and place of the announcement, she was ready to join forces to only speak positively about Dylan’s condition. She and I were already a team before, but this public proclamation really bonded us together in helping Dylan. It was like we were saying to the world, “Yes, this is where we are, and this is what we’re going to do about it!” It brought intention to the forefront of our parenting.

Once our “secret” was out about Dylan, the support came pouring in. Before this, even some of our closest friends didn’t know what we were going through with Dylan. I believe part of our secrecy was a projection of the perfect family we wanted to display.

I learned a huge lesson from this time of our lives; There is never a reason to struggle alone. Someone out there has the knowledge, experience, or the listening ear that you need. People want to help you and pray for you. Never underestimate the power of prayer. And never let your pride hide a condition or diagnosis for fear of what others might think.

## **Beating Doubt and Distraction**

Just as I believe there is a God who loves you and can speak life into you, I believe there are opposing spiritual forces in this world that will cause you to doubt yourself. There are darker forces that like to feed on the black-and-white mindset and tell them they are not good enough.

The dark forces of the world want to keep you in the dark, and keep you isolated. That way they will always have a clear line of communication to you. Break these lines of communication by surrounding yourself with others who will lift you up and out of that isolation.

Planting doubt is one of the greatest tools these dark forces have to use against you. The other primary tool they use is distraction.

There is one way you can beat both doubt and distraction, and that is through intention.

As Dylan's dad, I was constantly distracted by my thoughts of what others might think. Instead of thinking about what was best for Dylan, I became distracted by having to pacify the feelings of others who were around us. I stood on the sidelines of Dylan's interactions, wondering when I had to jump in and save him, or formulate an excuse for him.

All this distraction was taking away from my ability to serve my son the best I could.

We do this a lot in our lives. We let the possible negative thoughts of what might happen distract us from our true purpose. I've heard the lies from the dark side not to publish this book. All the fears are there, but I refuse to feed them.

When I asked Shannon about what I should include in this book, she had one simple answer. “We didn’t do anything by accident with Dylan. Everything always had our best intentions.”

We joke in our house that Shannon has a chronic planning problem. She has our holiday plans made by every September. Well at least that’s when they’re made public to me. She’s probably already making them as we take last year’s decorations down. Luckily, these planning skills come in handy with Dylan.

One of the things that Dylan needed us to do was build a visual calendar of his day, every day. Unknown situations gave him uncontrollable anxiety and led to fierce tantrums.

Shannon headed this project and created a big poster board in our playroom with laminated photos of every possible activity. Even the smallest things like brushing his teeth made the chart. Each morning, he set his intentions for the day by attaching the photos to the chart in the order he wanted to do them. Allowing Dylan to format his day with our guidance empowered him in creating our plans together, and also empowered him to take control of his runaway emotions.

Dylan taught me how powerful the words we choose are. I tried my hardest to formulate the best possible responses and reactions I could for Dylan. Every interaction we had was a chance for me to make a deposit into his growth, or make a withdrawal. I wasn’t perfect, but my intention was to make as many deposits as possible.

This mindfulness in communication carried over to how I communicated with my wife, my employees, and members

at my gym. It even influenced the words I started to speak to myself. I learned to stop wasting my words on useless expletives.

Your words can inspire greatness in others or tear them down. Your words will do the same when you speak them to yourself. You're the writer of your story, so choose your words wisely. Start speaking words of life into yourself and others.

If you're around others who openly speak negativity toward you, address the situation with them directly. If it's healthier for you to leave the situation, then do it. But don't escape to your echo chamber only to hear things you agree with. A lot can be learned from listening, even if its content we don't want to hear.

## **Intentional Listening**

An important attribute of a spectrum mindset is always having an open ear, no matter who the speaker is. "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak," said the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus. This may be the best piece of advice a leader or parent can receive.<sup>10</sup>

Too many times, we fail to learn from others because we put up walls based on our perceived subordination of another. We may think of someone as lesser because of their age, position at our company, background, political views, etc.

You may think a person has no credibility speaking to you, or maybe they're too young to possibly offer you anything of value, but we *always* have something to learn from *everyone*. There are learning opportunities everywhere. No place or person is off-limits to learn from. It was famous philosopher Ralph

Waldo Emerson who said, “In my walks, every man I meet is my superior in some way, and in that I learn from him.”<sup>11</sup>

When Dylan was celebrating his fifth birthday, a friend taught me an important lesson through a simple social media message. I had just posted about Dylan’s birthday and wrote in the caption, “He’s not perfect, hell none of us are, but God gave him the biggest heart possible. I will forever be grateful he is ours.”

This friend told me I needed to rethink my words, because our kids were made just the way God intended them to be. They are perfect because of their imperfections. They are perfect because they were purposely made to be unique humans, just like you, me, and all of us.

I immediately regretted the words I had written. I cried. How could I call my own son “imperfect?” Even though he didn’t hear it, this was *not* speaking life into my son. For years, I worked on editing every single word I said to my son’s face to help limit his negative reactions, and I felt like I failed him in a single social media post. That hurt. I wondered where my *intention* was.

Like the other elements of the spectrum mindset, you can get it right 99 times out of 100, but the one time that you miss, it can feel like a massive failure. You were doing so great with your patience until you lost it. Your presence was there with your kids until a work emergency happened and they needed you to come in on a Saturday. Your positive intention was there, but a single sentence spoke negativity to someone you love.

We're not always going to get it right, and neither will the people around us. That's why we give grace to ourselves and others. That's why we listen to others and adjust, when needed.

My kids get a ton of grace from us. A ton. But it's also worth mentioning that grace shouldn't be confused with unbridled permission. In our next chapter, we're going to talk about *acceptance* and how it can lie far from passivity on the spectrum. Accepting something doesn't mean you are forced to approve of it or live with it. You are always allowed to have a response and make a choice.

Grace is very similar to acceptance. You can give massive amounts of grace, but give it with some guideposts. We are not limiting the grace we give, but we are using it as a teaching moment. We are using it as an opportunity to bring intention back into the picture. Grace without guidance is negligence.

Intention gives a framework to the fluidity of a spectrum mindset. Frameworks are needed everywhere in life—even the massive oceans of the world follow a framework of tides. Billion dollar companies develop core values and mission statements to help set their intention for what their business will be. The stronger the employees embody the core values, the more autonomy and responsibility they are trusted with.

We want our children to trust us, so we must put our trust in them as well. Trust is a two-way street no matter what age you are. It's important that we empower our kids to make choices. The caveat to this is that we are still the adults of the relationship. We have decades of mistakes to teach our children. It's still our job to be the leaders and guides to their lives.

## **Intention Shows Importance**

If you have kids, do they know your core values? Have you developed a family mission statement? Does your calendar reflect how special your family is to you?

If someone asked your kids, “What is most important to your mom and dad?” What would they say? Would they say “work?” Or maybe “wine?”

Would they say “me?”

The important things in your life have to know they are important. We show things their importance by giving them our intention. I’m not perfect and there are times where my kids would say “the gym” is most important to daddy. I never want them to wonder how much I love them, or question my intention to be the best possible dad to them.

It’s common for our professional careers to get the bulk of our attention. While we must be providers and protectors of our families, we cannot do it at the expense of leaving them with our daily leftovers. Our families deserve more than just the energy we have left after a hard day at work. It’s your *intention* as a parent that makes all the difference for your kids. You must *intend* to value them above all else.

Finding the sweet spot on the spectrum of being a parent who is kind and listens, but also disciplines and guides at the same time, is not easy. I haven’t even experienced their teenage years yet. That story will have to become this book’s sequel... coming out in about 10 years.

Don’t wait until your kid is facing teenage trials or your company is on financial life support to give them the intention

they deserve. Your finances, your health, and your relationships all need your routine intention in order to keep them from sliding to the undesired side of the spectrum.

I'm reminded of US President John F. Kennedy's quote, "The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining." Don't wait until your life starts leaking to try and patch it. Give your intention to the good things, as well as the things that need work.<sup>12</sup>

Take honest inventory of where you allocate your time each week. I track the time I spend on my phone and set limits for certain apps. I set similar time requirements with my kids, but instead of limits, I set minimums.

I can't say that my kids are my whole world and then a time inventory shows I spend forty hours on my business, and only four on my kids. Yes, we have to provide for our family, but how much could you provide them with when it comes to your presence?

Great families, great companies, and great organizations don't just happen by chance. Throughout my life, there's never been a shortage of older people complaining about the next generation. Now that I'm older, I fight this urge to complain and instead force myself into playing the game. The inadequacies of the next generation are not on them. Their shortfalls are on us! We must own the direction our families, businesses, and communities are heading.

Say yes to playing catch with your son in the front yard. Dance with your daughter in the family room. Have the whole family volunteer with a local church or nonprofit. Start a con-

versation with someone from a different generation. Sit still and listen in someone else's hard time.

This is your call to intentional action. Luck doesn't create greatness. Greatness creates luck. You have to create your own greatness if you want to move across any spectrum.

If something is important to you, show it so with your intention.



## CHAPTER 6

# Acceptance

*“We can never obtain peace in the outer world  
until we make peace with ourselves.”*

*-Dalai Lama*

I looked down at Dylan, and his eyes connected with mine as if it was the first time I really looked at him all week.

It was January 2020, and we were at our gym FitTown Jupiter. In the fitness industry, the beginning of the year is always a busy time. Not only do we have new clients coming in to start the year, but we also host a nutrition challenge for our existing members. I had been working on the challenge resources all week long and I had just finished giving an hour-long seminar.

Shannon dropped off Dylan, who had recently turned six, to spend some time with me. I kept Dylan waiting for another hour as I answered questions and finalized the challenge materials.

“I’m sorry buddy. You’ve been so good. Where do you want to go today? Anywhere you want. You pick the place,” I said to him.

“Competition Park!” he said excitedly. He meant Constitution Park, our local park about a mile away from the gym.

“We can do that,” I said with a big smile. I grabbed two water bottles from the gym fridge and off we went.

As we were walking up to the playground, there were two moms walking up with their two little boys, who were just about the same age as Dylan. A boy on the playground spotted the other boys and ran right up to them. He gave them both giant hugs, lifting them up off the ground.

I stepped off to the side and watched this ridiculously cute moment.

Instead of moving to the side, Dylan stepped right up to the three boys, and in the most joyful voice said, “Hey guys! I’m here, too!”

Leave it to Dylan to make a cute moment even cuter.

The “awww” of the onlooking moms got louder, and one asked her son to ask for Dylan’s name. They exchanged names, and exchanged hugs too.

The boys ran quickly up to the top of the playground together. Not as adventurous, Dylan opted for the swings. He was beaming with a huge smile from meeting his brand new friends.

Dad’s smile was even bigger.

I was amazed at how my own son could walk up to a group of strangers without hesitation or judgment. Even more impressive, he wasn’t fearful of being judged himself.

For most of my life, I struggled with bad social anxiety. First days of anything made me so sick that I searched for excuses to get out of them. First days of school, camps, and sports all tied my insides into painful knots.

Unlike Dylan, I was never one to say hi to someone I didn't know. Instead, I'd be hoping they didn't see me. If they couldn't see me, then they couldn't judge me. And if they couldn't judge me, they couldn't hurt me. I lived too much of my life in fear of this pain.

Later that night, I told Dylan's "I'm here, too" story to Shannon. It didn't take long for me to contaminate this beautiful, pride-filled moment with my concerns about his future.

"What if he acts this way in the future and they don't talk to him? What if they call him names? What if they push him for coming up to them? What if they pretend to be his friend only to play a mean trick on him later? I don't see this going the same way when he goes to middle school. I hated middle school. Kids were so mean," I said.

"I hated middle school too," Shannon agreed.

"He won't even know when kids are making fun of him," I added.

Before I could even finish that sentence I felt a switch go off in my brain. It was like my brain—or more likely, God—was saying, "Don't say it like it's a bad thing. It is a gift."

"What if that isn't such a bad thing?" Shannon replied. She was already one step ahead, or had gotten the same divine message at that moment.

It was then that I realized how much I needed to get out of the way. I needed to get out of the way of my kids' lives, and I needed to get out of the way of my own life.

Some might see Dylan's lack of social skills and social awareness from being born on the autism spectrum as a hindrance.

But at the park, I was wishing I had that type of freedom in my life. I lived most of my life with a social awareness meter that was set way too high to fully enjoy life. I wish I had gotten out of my own way earlier. Why would I want Dylan to feel the same anxiety?

My son gave me a gift in that moment. He gave me a gift of freedom from anxiety. He let me know that it was not only OK, but good to be seen by others—and it was even better to let others know they've been seen. For most of my life, I avoided being recognized, yet I never realized how hurtful that can be to not recognize others.

When we first opened our gym in 2012, a member wrote me an email after attending classes for a few months. He told us how much he loved the gym, but then told me that he felt like I acted “too good for others.” Little did he know, I felt the opposite. I felt like I wasn't good enough for others.

I fought imposter syndrome daily. Teaching classes and speaking in front of a group of 20 to 30 people was so beyond my comfort zone that I no longer could see the zone. I rarely initiated conversation because of years of conditioning that I needed to stay quiet to protect myself.

I looked strong on the outside, but my years of physical strength were built on a shaky foundation of insecurity. As insecure as I was through my teenage years was how physically strong I had become through my college years. I worked out relentlessly in the gym to get away from the boy who got picked on and made fun of.

While I had “over-developed” on the outside, I was very much “under-developed” on the inside. I still had a lot of work to do on my mindset, emotions, and everything else that went on behind the scenes.

At first I wondered how the gym member could assume I was vain, but in hindsight, I now realize that it was I who was wrongly assuming. I assumed that no one wanted to talk to me. I assumed I had nothing to offer in a conversation. I assumed they were having a great day everyday, and that interacting with me would somehow make it worse.

Watch your assumptions, because they will keep you from connecting with others. Never assume you know the intentions behind someone’s actions, or assume you know what they’re going through. You have something to offer to every person, even if it’s just a listening ear. Never assume otherwise.

Because of what I’ve learned from Dylan, I now interact with people, inside the gym and out, a lot differently. My inward lacks have turned into outward love. I get genuinely excited to see others and learn about their lives.

I see every intimidated face that walks into our gym doors like it’s Dylan walking in and saying “I’m here, too!” I know it’s up to my staff, my members, and me, to make sure that each person feels recognized and welcomed. If everyone on Earth lived in fear of being recognized, then there would be no one to do the recognizing of others.

The African Zulu tribe greet each other with the word “Sawubona.” It means, “I see you.” More than just a pleasantry, it is about recognizing the worth and dignity of each person. It

means you accept them as they are, with their virtues, nuances, and flaws.<sup>13</sup>

So, when we picture someone coming in and saying “I’m here, too,” it’s only right to reply with, “I see you.” Maybe not exactly in words, but fully in our manners and actions.

We all want to be accepted by others. It’s a primal human need to be a part of the tribe. The spectrum of what we’re willing to do to gain that approval into the tribe certainly should have its limits. Too many times, we place the most pressure for approval with the people who matter the least in our lives. I did this a lot in my life, and I hope to warn my kids about following this same path.

## **The Approval and Acceptance Spectrum**

We think of this world of approval in very binary terms. We judge every action that we perform like it’s a credit card transaction that either gets approved or declined. We let our emotions ride this rollercoaster of approval and wonder why we can’t find peace. We can’t find peace because someone else is controlling our ride.

But approval is not binary—it’s just one big spectrum. There will be people who love you, there will be people who loathe you, and the vast majority of people will be in between. You’re never going to get a 100 percent approval rating from the world around you.

We shouldn’t hold back the gifts God has given us just so we can fit in. We should take risks in life and business without the approval of others factoring in so heavily.

Someone else's piece of approval shouldn't be your approval for peace.

By looking for approval less, we'll be more accepting of ourselves. When we're more accepting of ourselves, we are more accepting of others.

The world can be a tough place when "hurt people hurt people." I pray for those who hurt. I hope for inner healing of their hurt so they can put an end to the chain reaction of pain they cause toward others.

Finite minds will also avoid accepting someone or something because they see it as a threat to their way of life. What the finite mind doesn't understand is that "acceptance" and "approval" are different points upon the same spectrum. Acceptance of others doesn't mean you approve of their way of life. You can accept people without approving their actions. You can accept someone's apology without approving of their transgressions against you.

Acceptance simply means you're able to acknowledge everything that is, before you put your opinions upon it. It doesn't mean you approve of it, but it means you don't resist or fight things you can't control.

The spectrum mindset doesn't spend hours stressing about traffic, the weather, or macroeconomic conditions. You can complain, scream, and post to social media all you want, but that won't move you any closer to your destination. Disapprove of it all you want, but accept it you must if you want to move forward.

## **A Dream of Acceptance**

Acceptance does not mean rolling over and letting the world happen to you. There's a healthy amount of activism when it comes to current events and things you want to fight for in your life. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is one of my heroes and his fight for what he believed in will forever serve as an inspiration in my life.

Navigating emotions like sadness, frustration, and anger will only cloud our ability to think with a spectrum mindset toward the mutual goals we share. When asked about anger, Dr. King said, "You expel a lower vice by concentrating on a higher virtue. A destructive passion is harnessed by directing that same passion into constructive channels."<sup>14</sup>

Dr. King knew the benefits of a spectrum mindset and used it to bring people from the fringes, closer back to the middle. He faced tremendous opposition from people on his own side. That kind of internal fight would have brought forth crippling stress that would have stopped most in their tracks, but Dr. King had a stronger internal compass, one rooted in faith, and one that kept the spectrum in mind. He always kept his accepting mind open and faced the tough conversations instead of letting anger close himself off.<sup>15</sup>

Another quote from Dr. King shows how balanced and thought out his speeches were. When he was only 26 years old, Rosa Parks took a stand by taking a seat on the front of a Montgomery Alabama bus. Dr. King was a local preacher in Montgomery and knew he had to send the right message to his congregation. He reflected that this task was not easy. He

later said about that speech, “What could I say to keep them courageous and prepared for positive action, and yet devoid of hate and resentment? Could the militant and the moderate be combined in a single speech?”<sup>16</sup>

Dr. King knew the importance of operating on a spectrum to reach more minds with his words. He took on the daunting task of making black-and-white issues not so black and white. He brought forth the humanity of the issues at hand, and every caring human with a heart was compelled to listen.

Today’s world needs to listen to Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. If I could add my spectrum mindset views to King’s speech, I’d add this; “I have a dream that people will one day leave their echo chambers of ‘news’ to openly listen to what everyone has to say. I have a dream that political party lines are obliterated and minds are expanded to fill the middle. I have a dream that we can live in a world free of bias and full of acceptance of all others, without pressures of approval or fear of judgment. I have a dream that people will all truly listen to one another, and will be able to say ‘I see you’ and ‘I hear you’ to their fellow humans.”

There’s plenty more dreams I could wish for this world, but I want to wish just one more for you...I have a dream that you can live a life fully accepting the person you are.

I told you earlier in this chapter about my anxiety that often kept me from trying new things and meeting new people. I had anxiety because I didn’t accept the person I was, and I was petrified that others wouldn’t accept me either. Anxiety enters

when we have a gap between how we see ourselves, and how we think we should be.

The black-and-white mind only accepts themselves once they've been accepted into *this* school, get *that* job, or are included into a certain circle of friends. Conditional acceptance is not acceptance at all.

Like true happiness and true love, true acceptance can't be conditional. So many people spend much of their lives in search of these things, only to find that these external objects were really internal decisions. They were there for you to have all along, and you didn't have to go looking through outside sources for them.

It's likely you've heard of the "serenity prayer" commonly used by the group, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). It says, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."<sup>17</sup>

AA's *The Big Book*, which was first published in 1939 by William G. "Bill W." Wilson, has a page that further dives into acceptance and how we should adopt it in our lives:

And acceptance is the answer to all my problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing or situation—some fact of my life—unacceptable to me. I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens in God's world by mistake. Until I could accept my alcoholism, I could not stay sober; unless I accept life completely on life's terms, I cannot be happy. I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to be

changed in the world as on what needs to be changed in me and my attitudes.<sup>18</sup>

When we choose acceptance for ourselves and others, we realize our worth and crowd out anxiety. There can still be things you want to change about yourself, and there can still be things you want to change in the world, but it all starts with realizing that imperfections are somehow perfect in their own way. It's up to us to accept where we are and accept the imperfections that come with the here and now.

This movement of outward acceptance is truly an inward beginning. If you know you need to work on slowing down and accepting the things around you, try this simple action: first, find yourself a mirror or pull up your phone's selfie camera. Take a minute to look at the person you see. Notice not just how your hair looks or if your makeup is on point, but look past the surface to see the honesty in your eyes. See the wrinkles you've earned on your face, and notice the scars that lie below the skin. Once you're ready, say to yourself, "I see you." Mean it with all your heart, and say it again: "I see you."

Say it to yourself every morning when you wake up. Again, don't rush this. Staring at yourself for 100 seconds can feel like 100 days, because it's so foreign to us. We hardly ever stop to really see ourselves, and that leads into lives of never truly stopping to see others.

Once you've done this, go into the world and show someone that you see them, too. Seeing the worth in yourself will help you go into the world and see the worth in others.

Every single morning, I make sure I hug and kiss my wife and kids like I haven't seen them in months. Every. Single. Morning. It doesn't matter what time it is or what I've got going on that day—I act like it's a big deal to see them every morning because it is. No amount of days waking up with them will ever make it too monotonous to be excited to see them. This mindset sets up my day to be excited for everyone I see.

## **Acceptance Through Appreciation**

While life is best lived on a spectrum, the time you'll be living here on Earth is very finite. No matter how infinite our mindset is, our lives will, one day, come to an end. You can disapprove of death all you want, but you have to accept the fact that we all die someday.

This finite-ness to our lives helps me appreciate life itself, and all the characters that have been dropped into my life's story. Through my appreciation, I have greater acceptance. If you're struggling to accept yourself, think first about what you appreciate about yourself. Same thing goes for someone else you struggle to accept—what do you appreciate about them?

Practice appreciating even the people who play the smallest roles in your life. No human being is too small to appreciate, and no one is unacceptable.

Appreciation should extend beyond people to circumstances. If you're frustrated with where you are in life, take note of the serenity needed to move along a spectrum mindset. You have to first come from a place of appreciation to achieve acceptance, and you need to reach acceptance in order to move from where

you are onto a new place. Accept where you are, then decide where you want to go. As the book from AA said, “I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment.”

We all have heard the quote “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade,” first coined by writer Elbert Hubbard in 1915. While it’s a great quote about optimism and making the best out of bad situations, the spectrum mindset is not about unconditional optimism. It’s about having the choice to decide how much a given event will affect you. Bad things will happen, and life will hand you lemons, but, “When life gives you lemons, say ‘thank you.’ Then, give them back, if that’s not what you want.”

I wish I could give proper attribution to this updated lemon quote, but that’s not always easy when running through the rabbit holes of the internet. Regardless, this quote means that just because you accept something, doesn’t mean you have to live with it. Remember: acceptance is not the same as passivity.

While we chose to accept a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder with our son, we were not passive or hopeless. We decided we would do everything in our power to help move him along the spectrum.

Those with a spectrum mindset don’t walk with a blind optimism, but rather an observant awareness. A spectrum mindset is not naive to the things going on around them. They are armed with curiosity and patience, and aren’t as inexperienced as the casual onlooker may think.

Wake up each day and walk with acceptance, yet have a healthy agitation for more in your life. Even though you accept

the present moment, carry an obsession to be better, always. You may never be the best at anything, but you can always be better at everything.

Be captivated by this concept of getting better every single day, in every single way. Refuse to accept limiting beliefs or a lesser life—that you or someone else has put upon you. When you live every day in this way, there are no more black-and-white days, and every day is full of vibrant color and possibilities.

## CHAPTER 7

# Love

*“Where there is love there is life.”*

*-Mahatma Gandhi*

**I**t was March 29th, 2013, and my life was filled with love. I had been married to my dream girl for the past three years. We had a house we loved with two perky pups running around. And our family had just opened our gym 4 months earlier. To top it all off, it was my 29th birthday.

I had so much to be thankful for, and so much to love about my life. But I had one special birthday wish as I turned 29 on the 29th: a wish for a child. Shannon and I had been attempting to get pregnant for over a year and a half by this point. We had one false alarm among waves of hope, prayers, and deep frustration. We looked into fertility doctors, researched treatments, and let our minds run wild with “what if” scenarios.

So on this night, as a glowing cake sat in front of me, I only had one wish. It wasn't for a boy or a girl, a pro-athlete or star musician. I let go of any notion for what our baby could be, and simply prayed for a baby we could love.

Fast forward to just two days short of exactly nine months from that day, and our son Dylan was born into this world. He arrived two weeks early and had a rather rough landing on Earth. What was supposed to be a scene from the movies with sentimental music playing in the background was an intense, rushed birth performed by one of the calmest, coolest doctors I think there is.

Instead of a ceremonial cutting of the umbilical cord, the doctor spun and flipped Dylan in her arms to free the cord from around his neck. His face was all shades of purple, his nose completely crooked and bruised on its bridge. The doctor's calmness calmed us, but Dylan did not look OK.

After some tests and time with the doctors, we were able to lay Dylan on our warm, shirtless bodies. Seeing that little banged-up fighter on my chest was the most amazing sight my eyes had ever seen. He glued his ear to my heart, his little body rising with every breath I inhaled. I massaged his tiny feet and rubbed his back. He had the smoothest skin I'd ever felt.

At 5:55 p.m. on December 27th, 2013, my life forever changed. It's a cliché to say, but it's so true: "you think you know what it's like to love, but wait until you have your own children." When you have your own children, it's a love that you've never experienced before. Loving your own creation is beyond anything you've ever loved before.

Like most parents, I thought I knew the love that awaited me—but I had no idea. Once again, our finite minds think they know our limits, but they have no idea how much we can love.

There is *no* limit to love. Even when you think you can't possibly love something more, you do.

I'll admit that I like love stories just a little bit more than most guys. I'm a sensitive soul and will cry at most movies that move me. Out of all the plots out there, I don't think there is any greater love story this world has ever seen than that of Jesus Christ.

Before I continue...I apologize if I make you uncomfortable by talking about God. If you are from a different religion or faith background and can still read this book with an open mind, I thank and commend you. It shows how much of a spectrum mindset you already embody when you can read thoughts that might clash with what you think—without shutting off in the process. I feared including faith in this book, because I thought it might stop this book from getting to someone who truly needs it, but in the end I decided that God has played way too big of a role in my story to cut Him out of it. Thank you for keeping an open mind and for putting the traits of a spectrum mindset to work, right here, right now.

My faith was deeply strengthened when I had my son. Before kids, I only went to church as much as I "had to." I remembered hearing in church that God loves me like a father loves his son. I finally understood those words once I had a son of my own to love. With Dylan in my arms, I felt God's love wash over me like a tidal wave. It filled my heart to know that I was so deeply loved. I would never again question loving myself as I had once done when my anxiety was at its worst.

When it comes to acceptance, you can only truly accept others when you accept yourself first. The same applies to love. You can only truly love others when you love yourself first.

The finite mind will tell you it's selfish to love yourself first. The spectrum mindset disagrees. You have to fill yourself with love, in order to freely give and accept love. You have to develop love within you like a water spring that never runs dry.

## **Love Conquers All Walls**

One of the most popular Bible verses is John 3:16 (NIV): “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son.” Not only was the act of Jesus coming into our world an act of love, but He was the largest proponent of love while He was here. Jesus never fathered a son here on Earth, but instead showed this parental type of love to all humans.<sup>20</sup>

In Matthew 22:36 (NIV), Jesus is asked, “Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” This question was asked by a Pharisee to trip Jesus up so that he would say one law was more important than the others. This, in the Pharisee's mind, would be an admittance that the “other” laws were not as important, therefore disqualifying Jesus as an authority.

Finite mindsets love to point out contradictions that they formulate in their minds. By pitting love vs. hate, good vs. bad, red vs. blue, believer vs. non-believer, they can win games of their own creation. This is where spectrum mindsets have to be the bigger person and give the broader answer. Jesus replied to the Pharisee, in Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV), “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with

all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."<sup>21</sup>

It's hard to argue with love being the greatest commandment. Love really does conquer all. It breaks down all walls between us, and breaks down any limits the finite mind puts upon us.

If there's something or someone you dislike, try asking yourself this question: "What do I love about them?" I'm not guaranteeing you'll start to love them and I'm not saying you should love them, but it will bring you closer. It's easy to put up walls with people who we feel far apart from. But it gets really hard to hate someone when we truly see them up close. Everyone has something worth loving, if we're willing to get close enough to see it.

In the previous chapter, we talked about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his fight for equality and acceptance. Had Dr. King not been a huge proponent of love like Jesus was, I don't believe he would have pulled together the movement that he did.

This message of love didn't jive with all of his fellow civil rights activists, especially the Black Panthers, but Dr. King's message never wavered. If they were to march side-by-side it was under his condition that "Not one hair of one head of one person should be harmed."<sup>22</sup>

Dr. King famously said, "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." He knew that love

and hate lived on a spectrum and it was possible for both to multiply indefinitely. There is a place for deeper darkness, and a place for lighter light.

Dr. King also said, “Hatred paralyzes life; Love releases it. Hatred confuses life; Love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; Love illuminates it.” Move towards light and love as it is life giving. Without the light of the sun rising every day, everything in our world would cease to exist. Love lights up the paths we can take in our life.

## Choosing Love

Each day, the thousands of choices we make move us along the different spectrums we’re on.

Your workout moves you along your physical spectrum.

Your prayer time moves you along your spiritual spectrum.

Your reading of this book moves you along your mental spectrum.

When you choose to be open, accepting, curious, and loving, you’re ready to move on *every* spectrum. It’s much harder to move when you’re in a place of fear, hate, and jealousy.

Love is a choice in itself. Choosing love doesn’t mean you have to go around hugging everyone you meet. When you choose love it simply means you choose understanding. You start to see others for their full worth. You see their true value of being another human being and you acknowledge how much they matter.

There have been several times in our gym where a disgruntled employee or member doesn’t have the nicest things to say.

It's impossible to please everyone, but it's not impossible to love everyone. There are enough weights to lift in our gym; the weight of bitterness or anger doesn't have to be held onto.

Holding onto hate or refusing to forgive someone can be a greater punishment to the user than the transgressor. I've heard it said that forgiving someone who hurt you is for your benefit, not for theirs. From my experience, I know this to be true.

Love lifts a weight off of you that you didn't need to carry. If you feel stuck as many finite mindsets can, it may be time to let love help you move.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:43-45, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."<sup>23</sup>

Even as Jesus took his final breaths on Earth, he had room for love and forgiveness for those who crucified him. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do," Luke 23:24.<sup>24</sup>

I needed this kind of love to get through my toughest times of parenting and leading. When I just wanted to roar with anger and prowess like the lion, I had to humble myself and love, like the lowly lamb.

Even in tough times, never let your love be transactional or conditional. Never make your kids or coworkers work for your love. Love was not meant to be used as blackmail or bribery. Give it freely and let it flow from you.

The finite mindset would make you believe that you have to choose to be all-in or all-out. With every new topic, current

event, or conflict, you have to choose a side. Do you champion it or do you cancel it? Do you love it or do you loathe it?

I've learned that this lie of choosing sides is a favorite of the finite mindset. In contrast, the spectrum mindset says it's possible to be a loving lion. It's possible to have love for both sides. It's also possible to have hate for injustice or fear for unsafe circumstances—and both be healthy types of thinking.

There are a lot of influential forces in this world that are missing this element of love. Our government makes life-changing laws that lack love in their formation. Our media outlets tell stories with the intention to divide, scare, and spread fear. They fail to share love and the story of its capabilities. Be careful who you follow on social media. Examine if your influencers truly lead with love.

No matter what your interests are in this world, you're going to come into contact with people who love to disagree with you. Arguing and debating has become a very popular public profession in everything from sports to politics. Dilemmas, debates, and exaggerated dichotomies are being created every day in attempts to grab your valuable attention. When we're constantly being bombarded by polarization in the news and media, it's hard to not let that messaging affect your head. Even worse is when it affects your heart.

I believe there's a difference between thinking something in your head and knowing something in your heart. When skepticism goes beyond your thinking and becomes a part of your feeling, this can be a dangerous place. I know because I've been there. I've been emotionally hurt so bad that my distrust and

skepticism spread to everyone and everything I knew. It took time for my heart to heal, and to find a guiding truth I could fall back on.

I want to encourage you to discover your heart truth. This could be a religion as I've found in Christianity, or it could be the moral code you live by.

If there's truth and love in your heart, you don't have to worry about skepticism ever going further than your head. Even though your mind questions, you still intuitively know what paths (and social media profiles) to follow. You'll be able to disagree with the words of a friend without losing your love for them.

The spectrum mindset will ask you to critically think a lot, and question the things that have always been. Because of these questions, it's easy to let distrust take over. You should question your questions. Ask what underlying motives make you question this information? Becoming aware of where your skepticism is coming from is a powerful realization.

If you've been hurt and find distrust takes over, don't look for the light switch to trust again. Seek out the spectrum way to simply move closer to trusting, loving, and understanding. Don't forget the power of forgiveness—even if it means forgiving yourself.

## **Do Everything With Love**

Sorry for all the scripture, but there's one more passage that I hope will encourage you to lead with love, even in your hardest of conflicts. In 1 Corinthians 16:13-14, the apostle Paul writes,

“Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong. And do everything with love.”<sup>25</sup>

When you love each day you live, you start to see opportunities over limits. You start to realize who can help you rather than fear who can hurt you. Let love break down those reptilian, instinctual barriers we put up to protect ourselves.

A son kicked out of preschool can magnify your fears of being an inadequate parent. But the love you have for your child must move you away from that fear.

Speaking in front of a large group can paralyze you with fear. Or you can remember how much you love helping people. You can channel your love for coaching others to pull you out of that fear.

Fear can keep you from becoming the incredible parent, painter, pastor, writer, speaker, actor, athlete, musician, etc. that you were made to be. Love for your craft and love for others can move you away from fear and more toward fulfillment.

Having children gave me a love I never knew I had. If you’ve come close to dying, you find a love for life you didn’t know you had. While these life-altering experiences are valuable, they are not required to uncover the love you already have within you.

It’s a choice you can make today to have love like you’ve never had before. Let’s let love break down all the walls a finite mindset tries to put up.

Life is too short to live without loving life and loving others

## CHAPTER 8

# Patience

*“I am not saying this because I am in need,  
for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”*

*-Philippians 4:11 (NIV)<sup>26</sup>*

*June 2013. Two months after my birthday wish for our first child.*

I awaken to the sound of crying. Blinking my eyes, I discover Shannon’s empty space in our bed. As my senses sharpen, I realize the sobs are coming from her.

“Babe!” she yells.

I hear her coming toward me in the darkness. I sit up as fast as I can, trying to act awake and ready for whatever I need to do. She hits the light, and as soon as I’m upright, a white stick is pushed in front of my face.

She tries to steady her hand in her excitement but it takes both of my hands to help hold the stick stable. I focus my eyes to see the word “pregnant.”

Instantly my eye waterfalls turn on, too. I pull her into a big hug. We hold each other tight as we empty our tanks of happy tears.

“I didn’t even know you were—”

“I just felt it. I knew I needed to take this test.”

The number of failed tests she had taken were well into the double digits. In fact, I had recently attempted to talk her out of taking more tests—to save us some money, but more so to save her the stress of yet another let down.

We had shared many tears after prior pregnancy tests, but these tears were special. These were tears over 500 days in the making. We could finally cry our tears of joy.

I wish I could say we were patient in this process, but we weren’t. We were frustrated. We got down on ourselves. We sought medical help and advice from health professionals about in vitro fertilization (IVF) and other possible solutions. We prayed to God, but we didn’t fully trust Him.

God tried to teach us patience in this pregnancy, and He continued His lesson when Dylan came into our lives. Having children will teach parents patience. But having children on the autism spectrum will make their parents earn a Ph.D in patience.

I’m very empathetic to the fact that so many families wait longer to have kids or can never have them. I also feel for the families whose children are on a tougher place on the autism spectrum. We were definitely blessed, even in our lesser burdens. The extra patience required was not a burden in hindsight; it was a blessing. Dylan was a Godsend that we are grateful for. All of our children are in this world. Let us never take a single one for granted.

More and more children are being born on the autism spectrum every day. Many are also being diagnosed later in life. These

are both happening because advancements in understanding autism are occurring. In March 2023, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released new data from the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network (ADDM) reporting about 1 in 36 children were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).<sup>27</sup>

This rise in Autism prevalence has been steadily increasing over the last two decades. In 2004, the CDC reported 1 in 166 children were identified as being on the spectrum. Just two years ago when I started writing this book, that statistic was 1 in 44 children. Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disorder, and MIT scientist Stephanie Seneff predicts half of the children born in 2025 will be autistic. Because these statistics are looking at past data, it's possible that we're closer to that estimation than we think. Since sharing my story about my son several years ago, I've come into contact with a lot of great families with kids on the spectrum, and I believe it's much more prevalent than anyone knows.

What we have to remember when speaking about children on the spectrum is that it's a *spectrum*. Not all kids are struggling with the same things, and many experience different depths of autism. In my son alone, I've seen him go from very much on the spectrum to almost off of it. A lot of people who have recently met Dylan are shocked to hear about his diagnosis, because they know him as such an outgoing and friendly kid.

It hasn't always been this smooth sailing for Dylan, and there were some very tough times in his toddler years. It has taken a lot of work and effort to help get him to where he is today. He's

had nutritional help and recommended supplementation from my stepfather-in-law, Dr. Manuel Faria, who happens to be a naturopathic doctor among his many degrees.<sup>28</sup>

Dr. Faria helped explain the autism spectrum as an inflammation spectrum. He said it's possible that people on the autism spectrum aren't able to process toxins and methylate properly, which is similar to never taking the trash out of your house. Could you imagine how uncomfortable it would be to live in a house full of stinky, disgusting trash? This was the discomfort that was erupting to the surface in Dylan's outbursts.

My patience grew as I realized Dylan wasn't in total control of his outbursts, and as his parents, we were. We were the ones feeding him certain foods and exposing him to environmental toxins. It was up to us to make sure he got all the nutrients and supplements he needed.

When people hear about supplements they think of magic pills, and start asking about the *one thing* that worked for Dylan. I get the same questions working in the fitness field. Many people want to buy the quick fix, rather than invest the time and energy into their nutrition and workouts. I understand their frustration, but so few things in this world worth having operate like the proverbial light switch.

I wouldn't call it a *magic pill*, but I would say patience is somewhat of a superpower. I witnessed incredible patience from Dylan's teachers in his ASD pre-school program and in the mommy-and-me classes. I watch Shannon homeschool our kids as she's done since 2020, and she exhibits a ton of patience with them each day. I've done my best to be a patient coach

on Dylan's sports teams and in our FitKids classes at the gym. Having your kids test your patience at home is a lot different than an outburst when you're trying to corral a whole team of kids.

At the end of every FitKids class, we usually like to finish on a fun note by playing a game. This is also the time where all the parents show up to watch the final ten minutes of class. It's supposed to be a light-hearted way to wrap a bow on an already fun hour. Instead, I found myself preparing for Hurricane Dylan. This was a Category 5 storm that would make landfall as soon as his team started losing.

Like many of Dylan's outbursts, they weren't for show. Knowing other people could see his breakdown only made him feel worse. He was not performing for those on the outside, but rather trying to settle the storm on the inside. I reminded myself of this as I battled with my own feelings of embarrassment and incompetence.

Too many people see unwanted behavior in kids and think, "that child needs to be put in their place." I used to be one of those people...before I had kids. Now instead of trying to "put my son in his place," I know I have to go to that place first and show him where to go. I also have added compassion knowing that his discomfort could stem from the inflammation his body is feeling.

I admit to being someone who faked patience for a large part of my life. The "rock bottom" moment I mentioned earlier was where I finally started to sit with Dylan in his discomfort. I realized his screams were cries to us for help, not attempts to make our lives harder.

Over time, I learned to stop trying to force him out of his discomfort for my comfort. I'd have to sit there and truly be patient once and for all. Privately, publicly, it didn't matter.

Real patience doesn't care where you're being tested. Real patience keeps your long term goals in mind. Real patience is acceptance of an unknown ending. I'm grateful Dylan has taught me real patience.

Dylan has changed my life. He has positively changed who I am as a business owner, coach, father, brother, son, husband, and friend. God knew what He was doing when He let us unsuccessfully attempt pregnancy for over a year and a half. He knew what He was doing when He blessed us with Dylan and all his perfect imperfections. A big piece of this blessing was learning patience.

## **Patience and Completeness**

There's a scripture from the Bible that talks about patience and how it's all you need to be complete: "But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." James 1:4 (NKJV).<sup>29</sup>

It's through that piece of scripture that I came to know that Dylan was given to me so that we could each bring out the patience in each other and let patience have its perfect work.

I mentioned in the chapter about *Acceptance*, how I fought battles with anxiety. Anxiety comes from the space between where we think we are and where we think we should be. Patience tells us not to worry and that it has that space taken care of. It even tells us that that space can be a great thing. Whenever anxiety creeps in, I remind myself that I have patience, and I

lack nothing. I often need to take a moment to switch from a reactive state to a compassionate one.

When you are happy with where you are, patience is doing its perfect work to make you complete. This doesn't mean you are lazy and do nothing all day. There's a big difference between being complacent and feeling complete. You can be fulfilled with the life you are living, while having an insatiable hunger for more. I want you to be inspired to take this life as far as you can among many different spectrums. You can live inspired without living impatiently.

If you need more patience in a given moment, I encourage you to make a move or design an action that places you in a state of greater patience and peace. As I mentioned previously, I placed a fist over my heart and said "words, words." This was a move that I made to calm Dylan, but I also used it to put peace in my own heart. This move can be yours to use too, or you can make up your own.

Our patience can grow as long as we spend some mindful time creating it. As the spectrum mindset implies, everything can grow with cultivation and care.

## **Patience and Happiness**

Through the difficult times with Dylan, it was easy to try to search for a better future. There was a point where all he would eat was macaroni and cheese. I remember thinking, "I'll be happy when this kid starts eating different foods." He also was way behind on potty training, which meant a lot of perfectly good pairs of underwear headed directly into the trash. "I'll be

happy when we don't have to spend so much money on underpants," I'd say to my wife.

These words are small, and we may not think they mean much in front of a toddler, but all of our words matter. We learned over the years that our kids caught so much more than we thought we taught them. We have to be watchful, and wise with our words—not just for our kids, but for ourselves.

The reason why the "I'll be happy when..." mindset is so detrimental to our spectrum way of thinking is because it implies that there is some arbitrary destination that will magically make us happy. But no matter how great these destinations are, you often still feel an emptiness if the journey itself didn't help to fill you up.

You may be hoping for a certain higher income level, a position at your job, an upcoming vacation, a home relocation, retirement from work, a boyfriend or girlfriend, or the arrival of a new baby. These all can be great life changes, but tying our happiness to them is a foolish game the black-or-white mind likes to play. When we do this, we are making a declaration that our internal feelings rely on external events that may or may not happen for us—or at least may not happen on the timeline we expect them to. Correcting this type of language in our everyday conversations—and correcting our thoughts that tell us the same thing—is what the spectrum mindset is all about.

We each have completely different things that make us happy in this world, but we all share the goal of "being happy." Happiness is a unique animal, and to some it seems more like

a mythical unicorn. Some people seem to always have it, while others can't seem to figure out the formula to achieve it.

The biggest difference I see between those who are happy and those who are longing for it is the simple realization that happiness is a choice you choose each day.

Viktor Frankl, the renowned psychiatrist and Nazi death camp survivor who wrote one of the greatest books ever, *Man's Search For Meaning*, says it best, "Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue. One must have a reason to be happy." His message is that happiness occurs when your attitude decides it does. The reason is not the outcome of an event, but rather what is sparked inside of you. When you decide your life has meaning through purposeful work, love, and courage through difficulty, you will live a fulfilled, happy life.<sup>30</sup>

Another favorite book of mine is called *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor. Shawn writes, "Instead of allowing success to determine our happiness, we should first focus our energy on being happy, and success will almost always follow." He adds, "If we look to success to make us happy then we set ourselves up to fail."<sup>31</sup>

Being patient for what we desire and accepting where we are, are not passive acts. We must cultivate a priming for patience in our lives, and recognize the artificial obligations and undue stress we tend to put on ourselves. Every time that I wanted to stress about the finishing of this book, I reminded myself that the ability to write each day was what brought me happiness. While the eventual holding of this hardcover will put a giant

smile on my face, it will not be the light switch that turns on my happiness.

You may not be writing your story like I've done here, but you're writing your family's story each day you live. Find happiness in the blessing of purpose you've been given. Instead of getting discouraged for not reaching a certain level of success you thought you'd achieve, get encouraged by the ability to grow. You won't receive a hand-wrapped happiness present at the finish line anyway. As Shawn Achor also emphasizes in his book, 'Happiness is not the belief that we don't need to change; it is the realization that we can.'"

Let's get excited about the possible positive change in our lives. Get motivated to move along the many spectrums available to us. Get out that journal and write down your mission and ambitions. Also write what you're thankful for each and every day. Make the recording of gratitude a daily practice.

Don't get so caught up in the destination that you miss the trip. Especially if you have fast growing kids like I do. Life is a wild ride that we must purposely slow down each day to take in all that it has to offer. That kind of patience will bring us true happiness.

## CHAPTER 9

# Presence

*“Wherever you are, be there totally.”*

*- Eckhart Tolle*

For the first three years of his life, Dylan was always holding something. It was calming for him to have an object in each hand. When he first learned to crawl it was incredibly hard, because he wouldn't open his hands from the objects that he held. He was almost one when he first crawled, and he did it on the backs of his wrists with two objects in hand.

The objects he held were always changing—Paw Patrol cars, plastic lions, whiteboard markers, lacrosse balls, toy blocks, and lots of action figures like Cookie Monster and Big Bird. I still, to this day, keep a plastic lion on my writing desk to remind me of the times we've had with Dylan.

While many of the objects made sense to hold together, some were quite odd. One of the most interesting “couples” Dylan held was “Lady” and “Ninja Turtle.” They became a two-some around Christmas time when “Lady” came out of storage with our Christmas village. This set was a beautiful ceramic

scene passed down to me from my grandparents. “Lady,” was a bundled up Christmas caroller with a songbook in hand.

I realize I’m speaking a different language at this point, but that’s the language our son spoke. Carrying objects in both hands is what gave him peace. Object holding is common for kids on the spectrum, because they don’t feel comfortable in unknown environments. It’s also common for them to avoid eye contact and new interactions when entering that environment. I mentioned my social anxiety from entering unknown situations in my youth. Dylan used known things like objects in his hands to pacify his anxiety as he entered the unknown.

These objects traveled wherever we went. And if he ever lost one or broke one, a tantrum would ensue. It became a job of ours to make sure he always had his objects, find them when they were lost, and fix them if they ever broke.

Let me tell you about the time we had to perform split-in-half-surgery on Dylan’s beloved “Lady.” We enter this story with Dylan in the middle of a tantrum. He’s throwing his body into our family room couch, screaming into the pillows.

“Dylan, she’s gone!!! You’re just going to have to deal with it. Lady is gone! You broke her. No more Lady!” I exclaimed, hoping to make my point clear.

Dylan looked at me with his purple face that appeared ready to pop. His body flailed around in frustration. Like an infant looking for their pacifier, Dylan didn’t know what to do with himself.

At first, I didn’t know what to do either. Part of me was mad at Dylan for taking a breakable tiny sculpture figure from our Christmas village set and well...breaking it. My finite mindset

was getting frustrated with Dylan's habit of holding stuff. We were busy enough with all we had to do to take care of our kids. To make sure Dylan always had two objects to hold was always just another job on our plate. Maybe, I thought, this would be the end of it.

The other part of me—the spectrum mindset part—knew how important the objects were to Dylan. They didn't mean anything to me, but they meant everything to him. I knew that patience and presence were needed at this moment. I had to join Dylan in his discomfort.

I couldn't take back my finite minded words that “Lady” was gone, so I changed my presence from a scolding dad to a funny fixer of miniature figurines.

“Dylan! Dylan! I have an idea! We can open up a hospital and try to treat ‘Lady.’ What do you think? Do you want to see if we can help her?”

Dylan paused his reckless movement on the couch. He looked over at me in the kitchen, curious about what I would do next. He was bought-in enough, so I kept going.

I laid “Lady” down on the operating table (AKA, our kitchen countertop). I yelled out to Shannon, “Nurse Shannon! We need super glue! Stat!” I got the glue and tried to align the two pieces of her body together. It was close but not connecting. “We need more!” I yelled, reaching my hand out to her like an emergency room surgeon.

She searched through the family junk drawer and pulled out a roll of Scotch Tape. I lifted “Lady” up as Shannon wrapped her body. Mummified, with her eyes barely peeking out over

the tape, “Lady” was finally back in one piece. “She’s alive! She’s alive!” I proclaimed. Dylan smiled and extended his hand to hold her once again.

“Be careful with her,” I said to him. And he was. He continued to hold “Lady” for another six months after that incident. Only one more tape job was needed, until Dylan ultimately decided he didn’t need to hold objects anymore.

## **Change From The Inside**

So many simple things were made harder by Dylan’s carrying of objects. I already mentioned how objects in his hands kept him from crawling and walking. Potty training was also a nightmare. Even things like hygiene and keeping his hands clean was tough. Sometimes he wouldn’t even eat because he didn’t have a free hand to do so.

We started to research how we could help Dylan to not rely so much on objects in his life. How could we get him to be comfortable without always needing to hold something in his hands?

The finite mindset will look for quick fixes and easy answers. “Just take away the objects and let the kid cry it out. They’ll get over it.” That was the finite mindset way. To just rip off the bandaid and deal with the consequences.

But lucky enough for us, there’s a lot of great resources from professionals who help people move along the spectrum. This was another spectrum that Dylan could move along and we had to treat it as such. He wasn’t going to just drop the things that were most important to him; he had to progress to a place of peace where he could live without them.

The spectrum mindset approach to helping Dylan flipped my finite mindset upside down. Instead of seeing how I could take the objects out of Dylan's hands, I looked for ways to hold objects alongside him. Instead of getting frustrated with him always holding things, I got excited by it. Instead of having an end date for Dylan to drop his objects by, I convinced myself that I was fine with Dylan holding objects forever.

Finite minds simply want to stop the action by shouting from the outside. Spectrum minds know that real change comes from the inside. From the outside, that can appear like you're going backward first, and sometimes you are. But the spectrum mindset goal is to simply go somewhere, to always keep moving with intentionality.

To get on the inside of Dylan's problem, I started holding objects too and allowing Dylan to see me hold objects. If he was holding Paw Patrol guys, I would hold Paw Patrol guys. Then I'd find a way to integrate our guys and play with them together. Same thing with the pair of lions. I'd grab a gator and an elephant and see if he had any interest in joining our guys together.

When we started playing with our guys together, his hands released his guys to incorporate mine. Most of all, it was my presence in playing with him that told him it was finally safe to let go.

It was when I started to get more present with Dylan, that he knew he no longer needed to hold onto objects to fulfill a desired peace. He could be freed from the things he was holding onto because he had his parents interacting with him in a new way that they hadn't before. I was showing that I cared about

his interests, and that if he put his things down, he could pick them back up again. He had a real sense of safety thanks to the presence from his parents.

Finite minds will default to attempting to put an abrupt end to the undesired action. The child doesn't want to end said action and then a battle of authority arises. Tantrums ensue on both ends.

Instead, the spectrum mind goes to meet the child where they are at. They don't say, "come over here or else." They say, "walk with me as I join you in this process." There is fluidity in reaching a destination together.

## **Be There Completely**

Parents today are fighting the distractions of a busy world. We take our phones out to take incredibly cute pictures of our kids and then somehow we're mindlessly scrolling through it for another twenty minutes. "What just happened?" we wonder. "I was just present with my kids!"

Think for a moment about what your kid sees when you have your phone in your hand, and they come up to you, asking a question. They can barely see your face past the silhouette of your phone. You are the most important person to them, and all they want is for you to be there with them.

I'm not saying you have to throw out your phone or never use it, but we can't let distractions get in the way of true connection and presence with our children. A lot of the time when our kids throw temper tantrums it's a cry out for connection more than anything.

When I was trying to help Dylan with his obsession of holding objects, I had to examine what I was holding in my hands. I was always holding my phone, ready to answer texts, emails, and notifications for my business. I can almost guarantee I was on my phone at the start of the “Lady Incident.” I was reactive, negative, and quick to anger. It took time to gain a sense of presence with my son at that moment.

Everything changed when I started to put my phone down more often. I began to hide my phone from him, and myself. Without the pull of others asking for my attention, I was able to fully give it to my son.

I also realized how my physical stature affected the way Dylan reacted. When we talk down to someone, we tend to talk down to them. We can belittle them and make them feel less than. Instead of talking down to my son, I got down on his level. I squatted or knelt down to get my eyes even with his. I squared my shoulders up to him and relaxed my arms in an open and understanding fashion.

I moved along the spectrum of what I thought was being a present parent, to truly being present with my kids. If they were in the room, I was going to give them all of my presence. If I was working on something else, I explained why they weren't receiving my full attention and when they would get it.

This is where I believe the focus of being present with Dylan has transformed the way he interacts with others and his environment. It's not just something I've done with him, but he's also gotten it from his mom and his teachers too. Fellow adults

will now tell us that we have one of the most polite and outgoing kids they've ever met.

What? How? Our Dylan?! The kid who was too transfixed on the objects in his hands to be aware of anyone else in the room, now bounces into a new situation excited to meet new people. The "I'm here too" story from the *Acceptance* chapter would have never happened without this transformation in Dylan.

This time in Dylan's life changed me too. I realized how fortunate I was to have a brain that allowed me to be present and empathetic with others. I swore to myself, and my son, that I would never take my gift of awareness for granted, and I would be fully present with him every second that I could.

We humans have a strong sense of imitation. You've heard it described as "monkey see, monkey do." Kids will do what they see, almost at an alarming rate. Dylan's progress from mimicking the presence we gave him was incredible. People who met Dylan at three years old and then didn't see him again until six years old were absolutely shocked. "Is that the same kid?" they would ask us. Yep, same kid. It's amazing what a little presence can do.

## **Give Your Presence, Rather Than Your Presents**

Dylan's first birthday party taught me a big lesson in presence. It was actually Dylan's grandma, my mom, who taught me this lesson.

This was my first kid's first birthday party so I wanted it to be really special. We had family driving in from Orlando and all of our friends were coming over. We were expecting over 25 people to come fill our house for the celebration.

All week long I was doing everything I could to make the house look nice for the party. I was doing everything from painting to powerwashing to landscaping to cleaning. The soon-to-be one-year-old was unimpressed by all of my hard work.

My mom caught me in the middle of my mania, and gently told me to chill out. She gave me these wise words that I'll never forget: "Don't wear yourself out so much preparing for the party that you aren't able to be present at it."

Her words came from a place of experience, as she admitted doing this in her own life. She reminded me that's why we have the party, so we can enjoy the company of the people we care about. My mom helped me realize that the presence we bring to parties should always be greater than the presents we bring. And that ultimately, we don't need a party or special occasion to bring our presence.

When it comes to your family, giving your kids "presence" is a much greater gift than giving your kids "presents."

That same gift of presence that you can give to others needs to be given to yourself first. It's important to have acceptance for yourself, patience with where you are, and presence in the most monotonous of days.

"Most humans are never fully present in the now, because unconsciously they believe that the next moment must be more important than this one. But then you miss your whole life, which is never not now," wrote author Eckhart Tolle.<sup>32</sup>

Don't miss your life because you're always preoccupied by what's next. I barely spent a second with Dylan in that week preparing for *his* party. I could rationalize that it's just a week, but

weeks turn to months and then to years. If we fail to catch ourselves out of presence, we'll be questioning where the time went.

Your most valuable resource in life is time. We are constantly buying, selling, and giving away our time. People will fight for your time, distracting you from what's really important. You have to fight for your own time. It's yours! Create boundaries and protect the things you want to be fully present in.

My family takes a handful of trips to Walt Disney World every year. Some people will ask me why we go to Disney so much. I think about how this time with my kids being young is irreplaceable. It can't be reclaimed no matter how much I want to time travel. I also think about how a vacation like this gives me permission to be present.

When I visit a Disney park with my family, I pretend the outside world doesn't exist. This is exactly what Walt Disney wanted when he first built Disneyland in California. Walt said, "I don't want the public to see the world they live in while they're in Disneyland. I want them to feel they are in another world." Joining your adult world with that of your children is a magical combination where incredible memories can be made.<sup>33</sup>

Disney parks are magical, but you don't need a big vacation there to experience this magic. The real magic comes from being present with your family. You can create this magic anywhere. Wherever you can turn off your world, and join the world of your kids—fully and undistracted—that is where the real magic will be. You have the power to make any moment magical with your family—Mickey Mouse is optional.

Think about it, and journal: Where do you need to set boundaries in order to be fully present with your family? If you had a limited time to live on this Earth, where would you focus your time and presence? Can you schedule a time this week for intentional presence? Remember, in the daily trading of your time, there is no greater investment than time given to your family.

Now that I have you daydreaming about Disney, come back to this book. Get present with this book and the things you're learning here.

So far through our journey, we've learned to: think with a growth mindset, set our intentions, accept where we are and that which is around us, lead with love and let it break down any walls we've put up, and learn to be patient and present through the process.

I appreciate you staying present on this journey, and hope you're curious for what's next.



## CHAPTER 10

# Curiosity

*“I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious.”*

*-Albert Einstein<sup>34</sup>*

As many families did during the 2020 pandemic, we took on several home improvement projects. Closing of “non-essential businesses” and staying at home more often, inspired us to take on a kitchen remodel we had dreamed of doing.

We chose to do as much work ourselves as we could to save money. We only outsourced the things we had to, but that still meant a fair amount of outsourcing. When you’re trying to coordinate different professionals and making sure progress stays on track, you have to do things like paint walls until 9 p.m. at night.

On this August night, Shannon and I were preparing our kitchen for cabinet installation the next day. We were listening to music as we usually do. Just after Shannon retired her paintbrush for the night and hopped into the shower, our son Dylan, six years old at the time, walked in. Without saying a word, he paused my music so he could go upstairs and play the piano in our loft right above where I was working.

“Don’t mind me. I wasn’t listening to that,” I sarcastically said to myself.

Our keyboard piano was an electric Yamaha that my parents got for Dylan the previous Christmas. He didn’t play it a whole lot, probably just a few times each week to keep the dust from building on it.

I was sliding the paintbrush up and down the wall, listening to Dylan’s rhythmic melody. He played a 10-second tune, took a short break, and then repeated it over and over again.

“That’s a pretty catchy tune he’s playing,” I said to myself. I wished Shannon could hear this boy play right now.

Dylan yelled down, “Hey Daddy, do you want to come upstairs and play piano with me because you love it so much?”

I laughed out loud. I’d been unsuccessfully trying to like playing the piano for eight months by that point. It was alright to mess around on, but I had zero musical talent. (I take that back. I had negative musical talent.)

Laughing, I replied, “Of course, I will be right there. I’m almost done.”

I washed my paintbrush and headed upstairs. When I got there, Dylan continued to play the same handful of keys over and over again.

“What are you playing?” I asked.

He gave me a big smile and said, “You know!”

I had no idea.

Dylan then grabbed my phone to show me. He opened the Spotify app I had just been using downstairs and pulled up a music playlist from the sports game he often played on his Xbox.

“It’s that song.” Dylan points to “Starz In Their Eyes” by Just Jack.

We had tried to look up piano playing tutorials and play-alongs for several songs on his sports game playlist before, but we never found this one. If you had played this song for me and asked me to guess the artist or title, I’d have no idea.

I asked him to play the melody again on the piano, then pressed play for the song. My arms were instantly covered in goosebumps as I heard Dylan’s melody line up with the intro of the “Starz In Their Eyes” song.

His smile widened at the shock on my face.

“Dylan!” I exclaim. “How in the world did you do that?”

I called Shannon, who was out of the shower by now, to come see Dylan’s new trick. I told him to play the melody and then I started the song on Spotify alongside his playing. Shannon’s eyes grew wide with amazement. “That’s so awesome Dylan!”

“We’ve never looked up a tutorial for this song or anything,” I told Shannon. “He’s doing this simply from hearing the song.”

Her jaw dropped.

She had previously taught Dylan “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” and “Mary Had a Little Lamb” on the keyboard. It only took him one try of seeing it, remembering it, and then being able to play it on demand. We were amazed when he did that, but this was a whole new level of amazement.

“What other songs have you figured out how to play?” I asked Dylan.

“Blur. Song 2,” he said. “But I don’t know all the chords. I just know these two chords.”

I smile as he refers to the single keys he's playing as chords. I was pretty sure chords required multiple keys, but I'm clearly the lesser musician in the room.

He started at the middle of the piano and pressed the keys one by one, moving to his right. He was testing each key and listening to each sound closely.

He stopped, paused for a moment, then went back a key and struck it a few more times. His face turned toward the keys, signaling he found the one he wanted. He then sought out the next key and found it too.

And then, all at once, he played the intro to the song, *Bum-Bum...Bum-Bum-Bum...Da Da Da Daaaa...Da Da Da*. When the time for the vocals arrived in the song, we let out a big "WOOOOOHOOOOO!"

We gave each other that father-son, sitcom smile. "You amaze me buddy," I told Dylan.

For weeks afterward, I couldn't stop thinking about how my kid was some type of musical genius. If you picture a spectrum of musical ability, I'm way off to the left with all my friends who have trouble clapping to the beat of a whole song. Dylan's skills are miles away from mine. I'm not sure if it's my incompetence, or his competence, that makes this disparity so great.

Because I'm so musically UNinclined, messing around on the piano with Dylan and looking up songs to play from the sports game wasn't always pleasurable. It was starting to feel like a chore at times, but I did my best to stay open and creative for Dylan's sake. I wasn't always sure what he was getting out of

watching me attempt to play, but I knew it meant something to him.

I'm really glad I didn't let my frustration show when Dylan asked to play together or watch me play. I could have easily said, "No, Dylan, it's just not possible for me to play certain songs on the piano." But I didn't. I stayed curious, played the keys as best I could, and kept finding ways to stay on the path of exploration with him.

Even when I was exhausted from a full night of painting, I still agreed to come upstairs and play the piano with him. I didn't know that night would end with a story that would impact me so greatly that I'm telling it to you now. Dylan clearly had a goal to learn this song that he loves, but I had no idea it was happening until it had already happened. Dylan isn't the best at relaying his true intentions and feelings, but he's not alone. Often intellectual adults fall into this same pattern. I'm really glad I didn't let my finite views interrupt his limitless mind.

We may not always know where our stories are going to lead, but why put an arbitrary end to something because you can't see the destination as clearly as someone else might?

## **Assumptions Can Be Killers Of Curiosity**

Assuming too much has been one of the highest personal hurdles I've worked to overcome. I assumed too much, for too long, in my life. Never assume you know the ending to a story you're in or about to enter. You never know where your next small choice could lead you.

Our ego feels comforted by assumptions. It feels in control of the narration of our stories. I used assumptions to pacify my ego and ease my anxiety. It worked for a moment, but the feeling was always fleeting. I've since learned that feeling truly satisfied comes from filling our spirit as opposed to our ego. How I wish I would have gotten a little more uncomfortable sooner in my life to save myself from years of anxiety down the road. If you don't wait to explore with curiosity, you'll open the door much sooner to those things that fill your spirit.

Another attribute of having a black-and-white mindset is believing "what is, will always be." When you lack a spectrum mindset, you lack the ability to see possibilities beyond your own conceptualizing. You think you are dreaming up a new future, but you're only repackaging the events of your past. You get frustrated easily because you fail to see "the point" of more attempts or reps. You think you can be creative, but it's only a matter of time before your curiosity rope runs out.

Remember when you were a kid and you thought the possibilities of life were endless?

You asked "why" a lot more.

You let your mind wander and wonder.

You spent most of your days being a student, and a dreamer.

OK, maybe you didn't *really* believe you'd grow up to be a princess, but at least you imagined yourself in your own type of castle.

But somewhere along the way, the trials of life tempered your expectations and dreams. You traded questions for assumptions. You stopped experiencing growth, and got used to being

stagnant. That inactivity handed you a horizon you started to assume was fixed.

Rather than constantly approaching the horizon and seeing it move every time you came upon it, you watched it from a distance. It got fixed in your vision, which got fixed in your mind.

Having kids is one of the greatest gifts in life we can receive. It's like our ability to wonder is reborn again. We're able to see the world as we once saw it when we were little: enormous, endless, and filled with possibility.

Too many parents attempt to show their kids the way the world is rather than asking, "how do *you* see it?" They also make the mistake of forgetting how they once saw it as kids. We need to break this generational cycle of passing down the limitations of life our parents gave us.

As you age, your hunger to learn more should also expand. The more you know, the more you know how much you don't know. Our black-and-white minds try to convince us we're good to stop here, and not go or grow any further. This is ignorance trying to hide our incompetence. Don't fall for it. Be open about how much you don't know, and you'll be surprised by how much more you'll learn.

## **A Spectrum of Answers**

As we were meeting with different home professionals to help us with our kitchen renovation project, I reminded myself to stay curious. The most intelligent people ask the best questions, rather than having the most answers. When I'm presented with a problem, I always try to ask questions to hopefully gain a better

understanding. I made it my goal to ask as many questions as possible when it came to meeting with specialists and tradesmen.

I wanted to pick the kitchen designer's brain for all it had to offer. I asked the tile salesperson to show me the latest, greatest, and most popular styles they had. I wondered with our woodworker until we thought of some really cool design ideas that worked out phenomenally. I intentionally asked questions that would hopefully spark curiosity that even they hadn't considered before.

We got a finished product that we absolutely love and spend most of our time in. Shannon homeschools Dylan and Arielle at our kitchen island every weekday. Right now, I'm writing this chapter to you from that very same slab of beautiful white quartz.

Our kitchen is a tangible reminder of our curiosity. With a curious brain and a spectrum mindset, there are treasures to uncover way greater than a nice kitchen. There are endless possibilities awaiting you if you are curious enough for them.

Because my kids are currently homeschooled, Shannon and I are able to flex their curiosity in their learning environment. One of my biggest motivations to have them in homeschool was to pull them from a school system that relies too heavily on rote memorization for short-term tests. This cycle of memorize and test, memorize and test, doesn't leave a whole lot of room for curiosity to be explored.

Kids in traditional school systems are typically taught that there's always one right answer they are searching for. However, I've learned—in life and from owning a business—that this could not be further from the truth. There are always a spectrum of different answers to life's problems.

My dad, Buddy, encouraged my brother and me to be life-long students. He said that this principle was passed down from his dad, who encouraged him to become a student of life way before the self-help section was oversaturated in bookstores. Our dad's office was overflowing with books and his car was littered with educational cassette tapes. Yellow highlighters were everywhere throughout his car and our house. He almost always had a book with him, and never wanted a highlighter to be outside of arm's reach.

One of the first "self-help" books my dad gave me was *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* by Robert T. Kiyosaki with Sharon L. Lechter. This book resonated with my dad because it perfectly described what he himself had done building his family's wealth in real estate over the past few decades. Kiyosaki is a big proponent of teaching financial literacy, which is hardly found in today's school systems.<sup>35</sup>

I added another book of Kiyosaki's to my library: *Why 'A' Students Work for 'C' Students and 'B' Students Work for the Government: Rich Dad's Guide to Financial Education for Parents*. In this book he writes, "Too many people leave school seeing the world from a right-or-wrong, black-or-white point of view. Many believe there is only one right answer in the test of life. In reality, life is a multiple-choice test, a test where every choice might be right. Seeing the other side to any issue increases a person's intelligence. People who live in right-or-wrong, black-or-white worlds, may be highly educated, but less intelligent."<sup>36</sup>

Several times throughout the book, he points to this quote by F. Scott Fitzgerald: "The test of a first-rate intelligence is

the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.” This is key to a spectrum mindset—realizing there’s so much more in the middle, and beyond.

Kiyosaki also writes this, “The lesson is: ‘If your mind is open to opposing ideas, your intelligence will go up. If your mind is closed to opposing ideas, your ignorance is in control.’

Intelligence or ignorance? Your ability to keep an open mind and appreciate multiple points of view is a conscious choice. And one that can open your world, and shape your child’s future.”

That brings us back to this point where reading this book not only shapes your mindset, but also shapes your future. By changing your future, you’re changing your children’s future, their children’s future, and so on. You can fundamentally change the trajectory of your family’s lives just by the way you think, and the way you teach them to think.

My wife and I have no idea how long we want to homeschool our kids for. We are simply doing what we feel is best for them at this point in their lives. The spectrum mindset has taught us that we don’t have to figure out their whole educational careers right now—we can move along the spectrum over time.

We want to teach our children to be critical thinkers. We want to teach them how to go deep into subjects they wonder about. We want them to be excited to learn something new each day. We don’t want our kids to be told the answer; instead, we want them to learn how to search for the many possible answers.

When I teach my FitKids classes at the gym, I strive to keep possibility at the forefront of my students’ minds. I want

them to wonder about their abilities and keep an open mind about what they can do. If any of my students use finite-minded statements that involve the word “can’t,” I quickly correct them to say, “can’t yet.”

There is a great power to the word *yet*. It’s a word that keeps us curious and keeps possibility on the table. Dylan and Arielle know *the rule of yet* and will often remind Shannon and I when they catch us saying “can’t.”

This change of language alters the way my kids look at their limits. This practice isn’t just useful for kids, but works for adults too, no matter how old you are.

Kids are born with a crazy amount of curiosity that gets tamped down over time. It’s time to encourage their creativity, rather than stifle it. And, it’s time to get back that gift of curiosity you were given as a kid.

Can you imagine what life could be like with the knowledge you have now as an adult combined with the curiosity you had as a kid?

Seriously, imagine it right now. Isn’t it glorious? Magical? Limitless?

You may think you know all that this life had in store for you, but when you apply childlike curiosity with a spectrum mindset outlook, anything is truly possible.



## CHAPTER 11

# Abundance

*“An infinite mindset embraces abundance whereas a finite mindset operates with a scarcity mentality. In the Infinite Game we accept that ‘being the best’ is a fool’s errand and that multiple players can do well at the same time.”*

*-Simon Sinek, Author of The Infinite Game<sup>37</sup>*

When Dylan was three years old, I wondered if I would ever have the emotional bond most fathers and sons get to share. Dylan never made eye contact and hardly ever initiated a hug. He knew what a hug was and would give you one if you asked, but he wasn’t openly affectionate.

Out of all the anxieties of Dylan not fitting in with his peers or having a “normal” life, that was the hardest thought for me to digest as a parent of a child on the autism spectrum.

Would I get to share the same love and affection with Dylan that I got from my dad? My dad never held back from giving me big squeezes and kisses on my forehead. He would do this until I grew taller than him—which was probably around third grade. (Even in my book, my dad can’t escape the short jokes.)

I love my father as much as anything or anyone in this world. Would Dylan ever get to feel that way?

I can make jokes now, but the years of not feeling loved by Dylan and wondering if he would ever have the ability to express love were devastating. The thought of Dylan lacking emotion and the capacity to love brought me to heavy tears on several occasions.

It's common for kids and adults on the autism spectrum to not think about initiating hugs or kisses to their loved ones, but that doesn't mean they don't love them. As I came to learn, they have the same amount of love any other person could have within them—and possibly more.

When it came to developing emotional awareness and outward affection in our son, we knew it had to start with us. He had to see us model it first, just like we had already done with our patience, presence, and listening. In all instances, it was important we had a mindset of abundance in leading our son.

We couldn't display patience with a limit on it. If Dylan saw us have patience for most of the day and then totally lose it at dinner, he wouldn't understand what true patience was. We knew that in order to help Dylan move across the spectrum we had to go above and beyond, and be overly abundant in the emotions and actions we wanted him to imitate.

When it came to patience, we put the phones away and just sat with him in his hardest times. When it came to presence, we got down to his eye level and faced him fully.

When it came to affection, we took every opportunity to show him signs of love. We also let him openly observe the

closeness between husband and wife, and he saw it with his little sister as well.

If we lived with the finite mindset that these things were in limited supply, Dylan wouldn't have caught on to how important showing love was when interacting with others. Instead, he witnessed an abundance of affection in his family life, and he caught the ability to show affection over time.

Dylan got so good at showing affection there have been times where unexpected hugs have surprised the hug receiver. He has hugged people at the ice cream store after chatting with them for five minutes. He has hugged kids after meeting them at day camp. His newfound abundance of affection now places him completely across the affection spectrum.

He may surprise people with an unexpected hug, but no one is more surprised than dad. It's still hard to fathom such a miraculous move across a spectrum. How did we go from worrying about his ability to love later in life, to an abundance of love like this?

## **Default Mode of Abundance**

By now in this book, you know that worry is from the finite mindset, and it doesn't serve us. So many of my hard times with Dylan were made harder through having a finite mindset and worrying about our future together.

We live in a world of worry, and we spend way too much time wanting to know the outcome of all our life's paths. So much so that we won't even step on the path unless we know

exactly where it's heading. We attempt to plan the unplannable and know the unknowable.

We think we know our limitations when it comes to trying something new, or we think we know how much discipline we can give to a new diet. We think we know how much love resides inside of us or how many hugs we have to divvy out. But just because you give one person a hug, doesn't mean you have one less hug to give to another.

When you have a spectrum mindset, you have a default mode of abundance. You stop thinking things like energy, discipline, and love are going to run out, and realize they can be in endless supply.

Hugs are one thing that can be in endless supply. As I mentioned in the chapter on *Acceptance*, our family believes that no moment is too small to get excited for hugs. It may look like a scene out of a cheesy 90s sitcom, but we don't care—our family hugs and holds each other each morning when we wake up, and several times throughout the day. Sometimes these hugs happen in our gym in front of all of our friends, but we don't care. We have to do it. We get to do it. It's a blessing to love and be loved.

As time passes, we can get used to the people we see each day. Our kids quickly go from little humans we are fascinated by to growing teenagers we always feel the need to discipline and instruct. If we took an honest inventory of how much time we spent in love and how much time we spent in discipline, we'd see why the love was lost between us. This can happen with your kids, spouse, friends, or coworkers.

The abundance of love we once had for someone is likely still there, but hasn't been expressed enough in a really long time. Cultivating love leads to more love. As you'll see with the use of the spectrum elements, the use of these things will not dwindle their supply, but rather increase their abundance.

As I try to display an example of abundant love, I think about how easily dogs can do it—especially puppies. Dogs will get so excited when they see you come home. You could walk outside to the mailbox and your pup is there pawing at your legs when you return. Dogs know an abundance of love like no other. My dogs have taught me what it's like to be endlessly happy to see a human you love. They have inspired me to live with an abundance of love and excitement.

When we lead with abundance, more abundance follows—not just in love, but in everything. From a young age, I've always lived with an abundant gratitude for my life. Maybe it's all the Disney movies I watched which included dying parents or loved ones, and the inspirational stories that taught us to never take a second for granted. Every morning, during my silent time and prayer, I set my intention of the day to live from a place of abundant gratitude. This starts first from the gratefulness I have from being created by God and being able to breathe another day on Earth. Then my gratitude turns to all He has blessed me with, and I ask Him how I can be a blessing to others today.

## **The Power of Abundant Praise**

I've already shared plenty of stories Dylan may find embarrassing when he's older, so hopefully he won't mind one more. Here's

a story that shows how we used praise to create another breakthrough with Dylan.

Like many kids on the autism spectrum, Dylan took longer than most kids to understand potty training. Let's just say many pairs of underwear went right into the trash can (not the trash can in our house, but the one out by the street). The mess of potty training, pun intended, was very frustrating.

The finite mindset gets angry at their kids for not grasping concepts they perceive to be simple. "Just do it," is more than a Nike slogan to finite-minded parents—it's a way to order your kids to do anything. And "because I said so" is every finite-minded parent's favorite follow-up.

There were times where my own finite mind got frustrated and I became mad at Dylan. This got to the point where Dylan would only go to Shannon when he had pooped himself, because he knew I wouldn't be as kind in the cleanup process.

When I noticed he was doing this, I realized I must have been going about it wrong. Just as we had experienced previously with his tantrums, nothing changed when we got emotional and ordered him to change. Instead, we had to show him we were on his team and praise the tiniest wins.

One day after this realization, I joined Dylan in the bathroom at our home and told him how great it was that he made it to the potty without going in his pants first. "Way to go Dylan! I'm so proud of you buddy!"

Then I heard two-year-old Arielle cheerleading from the living room. I quickly got out my phone and hit record as Arielle

ran into the bathroom. What followed was the funniest video I think I will ever capture in my lifetime.

Arielle announced with a wide smile of disbelief and hands up in the air,

“I’m so proud of you! You don’t poopy in your pants again?” She then looked into the phone, as if announcing it to an audience,

“He’s a big booooooy!” Then she turned back to Dylan. “Are you a big boy?”

“Yeah!” Dylan replies.

“There’s lots of poops in there?” she asked as she looked down at the toilet. “I’m gonna get a wipe.”

It was because Shannon and I were leading with an abundance of praise that Arielle caught the praise bug too. She was modeling what she had seen from her parents. As the great neighbor Mr. Rogers once said, “Attitudes are caught, not taught.” Arielle had clearly caught our attitude of abundant praise.

When you’re a coach, having the ability to praise infinitely is a job requirement. You can’t view one piece of praise, as one less that you have to give to another person.

Some of my days are completely packed with coaching. I first need the ability to coach three classes in a row and shower all of my clients with the praise and encouragement they need to improve. Then I’ll do a few personal training sessions and shower those clients with praise, too. Then I do my best to shower my coworkers with praise for all the work they do. Then I go coach my kid’s sports team and shower all the players with praise. Then I go home and spend time with my family, showering praise over the most important people in my life. And

hopefully by day's end I've physically showered a few times. Pro-tip: for a healthy marriage, find something to praise your husband or wife for every single day.

It's not easy to make sure I'm properly praising everyone in my life. There are many times when I miss. But I would never say that it was because I've run out of praise. Instead, I think it's a very powerful thought to think of praise multiplying as you display it.

Another powerful thought is that this teaching can be multi-generational. It excites me to know that parents can change their mindsets, modify the ways they raise their children, and alter the trajectory of generations to come after them. I had created an environment where my son was too afraid to ask me for help, but then I changed into someone who not only praised him (which led to his completed potty training) but inspired my other child to learn the power of abundant praise.

## **Is Willpower or Discipline Finite?**

But what if you don't have a parent to model a spectrum mindset, abundant praise, or unconditional love for you? Is it possible to learn these things without someone displaying them firsthand for you?

Well, yes! Jocko Willink influenced my mindset greatly over the past handful of years, and he is definitely not my dad. John Gretton "Jocko" Willink is a retired US Navy SEAL who has gained a huge fanbase after he co-wrote the books *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy Seals Lead and Win* and *The Dichotomy of Leadership: Balancing the Challenges of Extreme*

*Ownership to Lead and Win* with fellow US Navy SEAL Leif Babin. Jocko has a wife and four kids of his own to influence.

Jocko is the go-to guy when it comes to learning about leadership, accountability, and discipline. Jocko's motto, "Discipline Equals Freedom," is one of my favorite sayings. Most finite-minds believe you have to make a choice between discipline and freedom, but Jocko says doing one gives you more of the other.

On his podcast, aptly named "The Jocko Podcast," Jocko talks a lot about discipline and how you can grow it. In one notable podcast episode, Jocko and his co-host Echo Charles read a listener's letter who was accusing Jocko of not understanding what it's like to have been raised by very undisciplined parents. Wrote the listener, "You seem to be blind to this struggle, like a father who would ignore their child's struggle and offer only the words 'man up.'" (Sidenote: My spectrum mindset students who have been paying attention will notice the finite-mindedness behind this question.)

Jocko replied to the concern, "You don't get it [discipline] from your parents. You don't get discipline from an external source. You get it from you. There's people from every possible background—from no parents to crazy parents, to drug-addicted parents, to super-squared away parents, and everywhere in between on that spectrum—that are completely disciplined people. More disciplined than anyone I know. It doesn't come from your parents. You don't inherit it."

Jocko went further to say that you have to have ownership over your situation. You can't keep looking to others for disci-

pline, or blaming your circumstances on other people. You have to own your journey.

The spectrum mindset is the same way. You have to 100 percent own your journey, while having compassion to let others live their journeys as they wish. You can't control the world, but you must have complete control over yourself. You can't decide all the things that happen to you in your life, but you can choose your reactions to them.

Jocko's books were pivotal motivators for me to write this book. I saw how impactful and applicable his battlefield stories were to help make better leaders. His books transformed me and inspired me to take the stories from my battlefield of parenting to the world. More recently, Dylan and I have enjoyed reading his "The Way of the Warrior Kid" book series.

It was Jocko's thoughts on discipline that solidified his spot in this book. He fundamentally changed the way I thought about discipline and willpower.

Like most people, I had grown up thinking discipline and willpower were in finite supply, at least on a daily or weekly basis. I always felt like the more I used them, the less I had of them. Diets, for example, only lasted as long as my willpower supply could.

I also thought some people were born with larger supply tanks for these things. The star athletes and Navy SEALs who people admired for their hard work must have been naturally gifted with massive stockpiles of discipline and willpower, right? Jocko helped me learn how much our own perspectives are in charge of deciding how much discipline and willpower we have.

Writes Jocko in *Discipline Equals Freedom: Field Manual*, “Some scientists have claimed that discipline dissipates the more it is used—that willpower is a finite resource that is reduced every time it is used during the day. This is wrong. That does not happen. To the contrary, I believe, and studies have shown, that discipline and willpower do not go down as they are called into action—they actually get stronger.”<sup>39</sup>

Instead of discipline and willpower being finite resources that dwindle in supply as you use them, using them multiplies their existence within you. Discipline begets discipline. Willpower begets more willpower. Gratitude begets gratitude. Love begets love.

The same can be said for negative things. Anxiety begets anxiety. Worry begets worry. Fear begets fear. There is an endless spectrum to every emotion, and it’s within our power to promote or put the brakes on our emotions.

## **Learning Through Comparison**

One of the best things I’ve done for my health over the past few years has been cutting the cable cord. This has dramatically cut back the hours of television I watch, the amount of commercials I see, and it’s taken my news watching from small to non-existent. Mainstream news outlets know the “fear-begets-fear” scenario well. They play it to their advantage to keep you glued to their coverage.

I used to leave the television on for hours throughout the day. Even if I wasn’t watching it, it served as background noise

to my other activities. It provided a version of company in an otherwise eerily quiet house.

I thought this was totally normal and didn't realize how much television was harming my health until I cut it out. You want to further ingrain your black-and-white mindset? Keep watching commercials and news programs.

If you're trying to build a better spectrum mindset, it's best to silence the news channels and advertisements. They both sell themselves as servers of the public, yet they are only serving their best interests. By using scarcity and scare tactics, they keep you in a negative mental and emotional cycle, which is a positive cycle for them.

In advertisements, scarcity does not only mean, "Buy now before they're all gone!" Sure, they do use phrases like that, but it goes even deeper. A common way marketers get you to buy is by making you feel like you lack something. The main scarcity the advertisers want you to recognize is not in the supply of the product—it's within you.

Advertisers want you to believe that your social status is not high enough without this product.

You aren't happy enough without this product.

Healthy enough.

Wealthy enough.

Beautiful enough.

Appreciated enough.

Admired enough.

Satisfied enough.

I'm here to give you the opposite message...YOU ARE ENOUGH.

You're here so you can build a better mindset. When you stop focusing on how much you lack and appreciate how much you have, that's when your mindset—and life—can transform.

Letting the media and marketers fire shots at the fortress of your mind will break down an abundance mindset over time. Most people think marketers want your wallet, but the things they're really after are your thoughts, your emotions, and your habits. They want you to compare what you don't have to what *everybody else* is enjoying.

Marketers know that comparison is an instinctual process we make decisions by. Our brain's main job is to filter the millions of pieces of information we give it each day, and most information is processed by comparison. But comparison is a survival mechanism, not a thriving one. We instinctively label things as good or bad, friend or foe, so that we can make a decision about them, but this is a very low level of our thinking. It's time we evolve again, and think about the world more intricately.

Unfortunately, our species seems to be going backwards when it comes to comparison, thanks to social media. We are witnessing record-breaking rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide, primarily attributed to unhappiness. That unhappiness can be caused by constant comparison.

Social media makes it very easy to see everything we don't have. Social media marketing has become *the* go-to marketing tool because it's so easy, on these platforms, to create feelings of lack, then sell products that can fill that space.

When you research the happiest place on Earth, it's actually not Walt Disney World as most would assume. It's thought by many to be Finland, and its neighboring Scandinavian countries.

I wanted to know why, so I went online and found an article from the *Helsinki Times*. The author states that, "One other major reason why Finland is such a happy place to live is the free, relaxed way of life. Compared to a lot of the Western world, Finland is more laid-back and more at peace with itself. Finnish culture is also very warm and focuses on co-operation, rather than competition. It is also clear that Finnish people feel secure and do not worry about the outside world in the same way as the people in many other nations. That gives them remarkable resilience to deal with life and not to let problems get them down."<sup>40</sup>

The article goes on to talk about how the rich don't flaunt their wealth, and it's not admirable in their culture to have the most expensive car on the block. Says the author, "The rich in Finland have also traditionally been shy in showing off their wealth. The wealthiest people in Finland may drive an old Volvo or at most a bit more expensive Mercedes, but rarely a Lamborghini."

Before you begin unhealthily comparing yourself to Finland's happiness, think about what we can learn from them. If we can use comparison as a learning tool, it's going to help us rather than hurt us.

The Scandinavian people are showing us that it's best to live in abundance mindsets and they don't wish for a lot more than they already have. They are happy because their *wants* align with their *haves* and there isn't a huge disparity between the two. We

can get envious that we didn't win the award, or we can follow their lead.

In 2009, I started my writing career on a blog my brother and I created called *Living Superhuman*. It was about all things health and fitness. There were several players in this space who garnered huge followings, and I was not one of them. It's not easy to admit this, but my finite mindset wanted to see them flop. I thought to receive my piece of the success pie, someone had to forgo theirs.

This is a lie of the finite mindset. That success is scarce and one person's win is another's loss. If someone in your space of expertise has a bestselling book, celebrate and congratulate them. Leave a positive review and social media post about how much you admire their work. When you genuinely want to see others succeed, that is when you will succeed yourself. Abundantly support others because you truly have an infinite amount to give.

I want my kids to learn from comparison, not compete through it. Competing in comparison is that base level of our thinking. The finite mindset says, "I must judge this to understand it." But the spectrum mindset says, "I must understand this to judge it...and even then, I should reserve my judgments to only the things I need to have an opinion on."

Former US President Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Comparison is the thief of joy." With mental and emotional health taking a greater spotlight in our world today, it's vital that we change the way we treat comparison. Comparison has a way of showing us what we don't have, but our mindset must appreciate what we do have.<sup>41</sup>

We tell our kids, “you can’t have everything you want, but you can want everything that you already have.” In today’s instant economy, where everyone wants everything yesterday, it’s important to teach our kids how abundance is a mindset.

I want my kids to know that they are always *enough*, and they never have to entertain feelings of inadequacy. I want to give them the tools to help their mindsets mature as their bodies do.

This book was created because your mind is an incredibly powerful tool. You can use this tool to not only decide how much love, happiness, or discipline you want to have, but also to decide how much is enough. *You* can decide what qualifies as abundance in *your* life.

You are the creator of your abundance. Not because you can access Amazon.com with a few clicks, but because you have these renewable resources within you.

You can access the elements of a spectrum mindset whenever and wherever you want. They are never in a limited supply as long as you’re in control of your ride.

## CHAPTER 12

# Adaptability

*“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”*

*- William Shakespeare*

**T**hrough no fault of your own, your brain has been limiting your life.

You were born with a part of your brain that was made to keep you alive. It was made to identify threats, seek out sustenance for sustaining life, and find a way to reproduce. It's reflexive, reactive, and often inflexible. This basic level of our brain is referred to as our lizard or reptilian brain.

The lizard brain was life-saving when, each day, our life was threatened by predators. Most of us living today live very comfortable lives far away from animals who want to eat us or enemies who want to kill us. Our lizard brains help us categorize whether we're facing a friend or a foe. They help decide whether we should fight or flee. This brain labels things as good or bad.

This part of our brain serves a purpose. We have to categorize certain things, but we don't have to categorize everything. If we want to thrive, instead of just survive, we have to move to a higher level of thinking. This higher level of thinking starts in

the *mammalian* brain, where we can use our emotions and give special meaning to certain events.

When we realize that we have different parts of our brain made for different purposes, we are empowered to use the brain that helps us most in a specific situation. Many times, we have to go above our base level of reactionary thinking with the lizard brain and create thoughts at a higher level.

The lizard brain's structure of duality and system for categorization gives us a false sense of control over our environment. The only thing we truly have control over is the way we think. How we think and how we react is always completely up to us.

Dylan, like a lot of kids who are born on the autism spectrum, often had trouble pacifying himself in unknown environments. He would often shut down or throw tantrums when put in a place that was unknown to him, and developed unique strategies to cope with this stress. I've mentioned before how Dylan would carry objects in both hands to settle his emotions as he interacted with new places and people.

This need to control his environment is very real, and these strategies helped my son get through a lot of very tough situations. However, there were also times where these strategies held him back because both hands were full. Over time, at a certain point of moving along the spectrum, he was able to loosen the death grip around his comfort toys and become more open to the world around him.

I witnessed this change in him and took a hard look at myself. Where have I kept a tight grip on comfort and not stretched myself to enter new opportunities? What have I missed

out on because I opted out of something I didn't have enough control in? I wasn't even thinking about actual control, but simply the illusion of control.

“Just keep in mind: the more we value things outside of our control, the less control we have,” wrote the stoic philosopher Epictetus. He knew the importance of letting go of this illusion of control. It's an illusion we create for ourselves through our categorization process. “If I can categorize it, I can control it,” is the common thought process of our finite mind.<sup>42</sup>

If the finite, black-and-white brain helps us categorize and survive, isn't it important? Yes, it's vital to survival. But what most don't understand is that the finite mind was just meant to be a filter. The finite mind is only supposed to sift through information before it reaches a higher level of our thinking.

The problem begins when the finite mindset becomes your only mindset. What was meant to be the airport security of your brain has now become the pilot of your flight.

You may not have control over the world and what happens to you, but you do have control over your choices. You have control over how you react to situations.

## **Composure and Compassion**

I'm constantly working on my reactions. It's never a finished process. More recently, I almost lost my composure with Dylan. At the time of this story, he is eight years old. My expectations of him are higher now, as he's grown across his spectrum of life and gained wisdom. Clearly, however, he still has more wisdom to gain, because he thought it would be wise to hang from the

towel rack in his bathroom. He fell to the ground with the fluffy, formerly-hanging towels somewhat cushioning his fall. Two fist-sized holes were left in the drywall where the towel rack used to be.

As soon as dad's intimidating silhouette stepped into the doorway, tears rushed down his bright red face. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I don't know why my brain told me to do that!" Dylan blurts out between the tears.

Before I've said a word, Shannon is already behind me, telling Dylan it's OK and subtly reminding me to calm myself as well. The holes in the wall are not calming, however. I look down at Dylan again.

"I'm sorry!" he repeats, looking down at his arms. "Why is this making my body shake?"

My heart sank. I put aside all the interrogating and scolding I wanted to do in that moment, stepped across the fallen towels, and gave him a hug. As I held his shaking body, I remembered our "rock bottom" moment. He slowly reigned in his runaway emotions and got a hold of his breath again. It took both of us time, like a car without brakes trying to stop, but eventually, we were both calm again. Soon, Shannon took him into bed and further consoled him.

As I lay in bed that night, I couldn't help but think about how I *really* wanted to react in that moment. I had just finished painting the bathroom and hanging that towel bar only weeks prior. And I would have to be the one painting and patching again because of his mistake. I initially wanted to let Dylan know how upset I was about the work and stress he was now

causing me. It was hard to put my “I’s” aside and focus on Dylan’s needs in that moment.

When Shannon came into bed, she told me how proud she was of my reaction. I let her know that it was her cue of calmness that stirred my compassion. Had she said, “it’s just a stupid wall, get over it,” I would have gotten more irritated and defensive. Her compassion was contagious, and it helped me move across the spectrum from anger and frustration.

Most parents don’t default to compassion and kindness when they hear a crash in their house. Sometimes we have to jump completely across a spectrum in order to find the right reaction to a situation. Consoling Dylan was the opposite of what was instinctual, but it was the better choice for a dad trying to teach emotional regulation to a son who has his difficulties with it. An opposite reaction was the right one, at that moment.

## **Opposites Can Be Our Answer**

In the year 2020, a year that tested the emotions of many, I was fortunate enough to be working with a Conscious Leadership Coach, Jack Craven. The Conscious Leadership Group is a consultancy group founded by Jim Dethmer and Diana Chapman; they help leaders become better communicators and facilitators of healthy team environments. My brother Andrew, who co-owned the gym with me, got us signed up to help our business. At the time, I didn’t realize how much the coaching would transform my entire life, especially on the personal side.<sup>43</sup>

One of the biggest lessons I learned from Jack was being more playful with conflict. Whenever we felt ourselves going

*below the line* and starting to operate out of a place of fear, scarcity, defensiveness, or closed-mindedness, it was time to start asking ourselves questions to get out of it.

One of the questions Jack encouraged us to ask was, “What if the opposite is true?”

Often, when conflict arises, we enter with our own assumptions and biases about “what really happened.” We try to formulate the motives of others who have hurt us, or design stories behind why someone acted the way they did toward us. We can make things about us, like “our” towel bars being ripped off the wall and Dylan “making me” do more work, when it really had nothing to do with us.

Emotions are usually high in these moments, which makes it extra hard to summon the spectrum mindset—but Jack always made sure our emotional troubleshooting had an element of “play” to it. “Let’s play with this,” he would say, as he smiled during our most intense conversations.

Asking “What if the opposite is true?” started to shatter a lot of pent up frustration I was feeling. It gives people the benefit of the doubt, something we should be granting them more often. No longer could I use “always” or “never” statements. These statements completely lose their shape when you question them with their opposite.

Asking about opposites helps you examine the story you are shaping in your head. Most of us don’t even realize we’re living in stories we’ve created. We think we’re seeing the world as it is, but really we see the world as our own brain interprets it. Everyone has different filters and lenses they see the world

through. Stephen R. Covey, the author of one of my favorite books, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, said, “We think we see the world as it is, when in fact we see the world as we are.”<sup>44</sup>

Because we operate with a spectrum mindset, you could argue that things on a spectrum don't have a rigid opposite, and you would be correct. Opposites only serve as tools to move you toward the other side of the spectrum. They pick you up like the hand of a giant, and drop you in a new place. From there you gain new perspectives you couldn't see from your previous place. This is what exploring opposites does for us. It flips the script of where we are to help us write a whole new story about what's happening.

When I entered the bathroom and saw two giant holes in the wall, you can bet I was pretty angry. I had enough on my plate, and drywall patching wasn't making my to-do list anytime soon. But I quickly went to “thoughts of opposite.”

What if I laughed instead of lashing out?

What if I showed my son love instead of anger?

What if I opened my arms instead of pointing my finger?

What if it was the installer's fault (AKA, my fault) the towel bar fell?

We don't need all of our opposites to be proved true (I know for a fact the towel bar falling was 100 percent his fault, because he confessed to trying to do a pull-up on it). Simply wondering “what if” altered my state and my subsequent actions toward him. I chose actions that I could reflect back on and be proud

of, all because I chose the opposite of what felt most instinctual and reactionary in that moment.

When you consider an opposite, you don't just bring in a second choice. Everything in between becomes a choice as well. Because you were willing to see a second option, more options then appeared. It's a simple yet necessary concept: when we take the time to see more options, we see more options. We don't get stuck on being stuck, and we're able to access the adaptability of a spectrum mindset.

## **Locating Yourself**

There was another important question our coach Jack asked us in every situation: "Where are you?" In Conscious Leadership speak, he's asking for you to assess where you are in terms of "the line." Are you above or are you below "the line?"

"Above the line" means you are currently channeling traits of being open, curious, and committed to learning, while "below the line" means you are being closed, defensive, and committed to being right. As Jack would always remind us, "The goal is not to be above the line every hour, every day of your life. The goal is to have awareness of where you are at any given moment, then make shifts to get where you want to be."

The Conscious Leadership framework gives suggestions on how to make this shift. You can move from closed to open, from defensive to curious, and from wanting to be right to wanting to learn. These shifts aren't there for us to gain control of the situation, because we'll never be able to fully control everything.

But we can access composure from gaining awareness of where we currently are.

The spectrum mindset adds to this and asks you how you can shift to “more open” and “more curious.” It thinks less in the binary terms of the line, and more in terms of trying to embody more positive traits and less negative ones.

This asking of “where are you?” and “locating yourself” is the type of self-assessment I want people to do regularly when it comes to a spectrum mindset. Ask yourself, “where am I on *this* spectrum at *this* moment?”

The goal isn’t to read this book and gain a spectrum mindset that you automatically have for life. You will go back and forth between mindsets forever. But you can develop the awareness to always locate yourself.

“Am I thinking on a spectrum right now?”

“Where am I located on this spectrum?”

“What do I need to do to shift to a more desirable part of the spectrum?”

Let’s look at an example—for this, if you don’t have kids, substitute the term with “teammate,” “co-worker,” “friend,” or “family member.” Apply it to best fit your life.

When your child wants to do something that you will not allow them to do, what do you say?

You say “No!”

...And then you say “No!” ten more times, raising your voice higher and higher until they get the point.

They finally surrender and you have won that battle. But winning battles are meaningless if we are playing a game we can’t

actually win. As author Simon Sinek wrote about in *The Infinite Game*, things like business, education, relationships, parenting, and health are all infinite games. You will never win them. “The objective,” as Simon says, “is to perpetuate the game and stay in the game as long as possible.”

A weight loss challenge at your gym is a finite game you can win. But you can't win *health* in that challenge. You “win” health by staying in the game of life as long as possible. Same goes for marriage. You “win” the infinite game of marriage when the love lasts as long as you do. You “win” parenting when your kids become incredible parents themselves and still seek your guidance throughout their life.

Simon warns us to be careful of trying to turn infinite games into finite ones. He says, “When we play to win or be the best in a game that has no finish line, there are predictable and consistent outcomes. The big ones are the decline of trust, cooperation, and innovation.” Simon's messages are typically directed at businesses and teams, but I've seen my life change when I applied these ideas to parenting.

If I didn't “lose” a lot of battles with Dylan to keep playing our infinite game, I would have surely lost his trust and cooperation. He dropped his reliance on the items he was holding in his hands only when he realized it was safe to do so. I let go of my ego, and Dylan let go of his objects.

I could have taken the items from his hands, or chose one of the many options that would have made my life easier over the years, but thinking with a spectrum mindset got me thinking beyond myself. Simon says in his book, “To ask, ‘What's best

for me?’ is finite thinking. To ask, ‘What’s best for us?’ is infinite thinking.”

The “no’s” that we tell people are no good if the person we’re saying “no” to doesn’t understand the reason behind our response. This doesn’t mean you can’t say “no.” You absolutely can. But we can say “no” while giving more thought out answers for the people who deserve that from us.

One rule that I’ve tried to follow with Dylan, is to try not to lead with “no.” Whenever he comes to me with a question or does something I don’t approve of, I carefully select other words than “no.” Instead of acting like an outer force trying to impede his plans, I attempt to get on his team with a question or positive statement. This often looks like, “Hey buddy, help me understand this better” or “You’re doing great so far. May I offer my thoughts to see if I can help further?”

I’ve taken this rule to my business, and it’s incredible what can be accomplished when people know you’re on their team. By simply saying, “OK, tell me more,” you’re already connecting with that teammate way more than your initial “no” would.

It’s almost certain you’ll have an employee in your organization who always wants to play devil’s advocate. They feel like they’ll add value by pointing out the negative possibilities. While there can be a benefit in foreseeing certain scenarios, always putting on negative lenses will limit the capabilities of the player and your organization.

Since we learned Dylan was on the autism spectrum, I’ve tried my hardest to formulate every single response I’ve ever

given him. Every word I've said to Dylan in the last five years was thought-out and calculated for *his* growth, not mine.

But can you guess who changed the most from this higher-level use of language?

Yep...me, again.

It's important the leader of your business or household is careful with the responses they give. Good leaders are expected to have the answers, but it's more valuable if they can ask good questions.

This is where opposites can be incredibly effective once again. Instead of giving an answer to a question, you ask a question in return. You remember the spectrum mindset approach of being curious and open-minded. Oftentimes, when you are asked a question, you have limited information to go on. So it's not only helpful to volley a question back to your child or co-worker—it's *necessary*.

## **What True Adaptability Is**

One of my biggest regrets growing up was not asking enough questions. I'm a product of the public school system. While I loved so many of my teachers and learned so much, I wasn't taught much real-life problem solving. I was taught to memorize answers and then have them ready upon request. This type of learning serves *Jeopardy!* contestants well. It doesn't serve CEOs of businesses or COOs of households all that well.

Real life requires *adaptability*, specifically the adaptability to become curious when you most need it. Being curious was the

topic of our last chapter; being able to access curiosity when you need it is the focus of this chapter.

Let's discuss what adaptability is, and what it isn't:

- Adaptability is your ability to shift to states that will better serve your spectrum mindset.

How quickly can you understand the scope of the spectrum you're on? Can you locate yourself in this moment and make a shift across the spectrum?

- Adaptability is not becoming a chameleon who tries to fit their surroundings.

It does not mean you are moldable by outside forces. In essence it means the opposite—you are only adaptable by the user, and that's you.

- Adaptability is not compromising your values to openly listen to the values of others.

You can stay true to you, while still listening fully. You just have to make sure it's really you that you're staying true to.

- Adaptability is letting go of your lions. Just as Dylan loosened the grip of his Lady and lion figurines, some of us need to loosen the grip on the things that aren't serving us. We hold onto beliefs, coping systems, mindsets, and friend groups who are there because they've always been there. While some served a purpose at one point, many can be moved on from.

- Adaptability is being able to invite a sense of play into intense conflicts. It's being able to put aside your "I's" for "Us's." It's letting go of your ego and expectations, and inviting a sense of play into your parenting and leading.
- Adaptability is taking ownership of your ability to change. It's time to let go of things that are keeping you from piloting your own flight and living your purpose-filled life. Own your adaptability.

In adaptability, awareness is everything. Gain awareness by slowing down and not instantly replying with a "no." Creating some space between your reaction and your next action is key. If you can zoom out to ask, "Where am I?" and, "What if the opposite were true?" and, "What infinite game am I playing here?" and "What is best for us?" you'll be much prouder of the next actions you choose.

And lastly, beware of your assumptions. Assumptions will stifle your awareness. The only assumption we should make is that assumptions were meant to be challenged. Asking about opposites and experimenting with alternatives are great ways to chip away at an assumption.

Raise your adaptability game by upping your awareness and shrinking your assumptions.

## CHAPTER 13

# Persistence

*“A river cuts through a rock not because of its power  
but because of its persistence.”*  
-James N. Watkins, author<sup>45</sup>

When I look back on our last ten years together with Dylan, I wonder in amazement, “How did we get here?”

It’s a beautiful message to ponder. To be able to wonder how things got so good is a blessing that I don’t overlook. I thank God for His many blessings and the life I’ve been able to experience with my son.

I know there are many people on the other side of life’s spectrums, wondering how things got so bad. “How did my job become a chore I dread each day?” “How did my marriage fall apart, and where was all the love lost?” “How am I so reliant on drugs, alcohol, or emotional eating to get me through my day?” “How do I barely know anything about my kids anymore?”

I hurt for those who are hurting, and I hope this book provides hope for those who need it.

Some of you reading this are among the categorized. If you've been told you're on the spectrum, it is not an eternal judgment. It is a person's opinion at a single point in time.

Wherever you are, on whichever spectrum you currently find yourself, you can move. Your current standing on your current spectrum is not forever. Always remember that.

I know it's redundant to tell you today is just temporary, and that conditions are just conditional, but I have to help you realize how powerful every minor choice is. To move along your spectrums, it takes tiny choices each day that align with where you want to go. It takes persistence.

James Clear, writes in his bestselling book, *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones*, "Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become."<sup>46</sup>

This quote is fundamental to the spectrum mindset. Every action you take or choice you make is going to move you along a spectrum. You are casting votes toward your future identity with every microscopic choice you make.

There were many times with Dylan where I questioned, "Is this really worth it?" My finite mindset wanted to spend less money and perform less work. It wanted the results of Dylan being transformed without the effort.

We had Dylan on many supplements that we hoped would help him move along the spectrum. To help provide Dylan's body with Omega 3s to lower his inflammation (by balancing his Omega 6 vs. Omega 3 ratio), Shannon and I broke open thousands of fish oil capsules into his drinks. Each night after his

bath, he received two creams rubbed on both sides of his body to help with his body's process of detoxification. These were just a few of the things we did for Dylan.

How easy would it be to just forget a day or two? When we went on vacation, we could have chosen to travel lighter and leave his supplements and creams at home. Instead, we were persistent—we never let an opportunity to move Dylan toward better health pass by. We assessed each choice in isolation from the hundreds of other choices we had to make for him.

We asked ourselves, “Is *this* choice, *this* vote, going to help him or hurt him?” We chose paths that would help him, one choice at a time. Each choice seemed small in the moment, but it's a miracle to see what all those choices added up to.

You are correct in wondering, “Why would you ever choose to hurt your child? No one would ever choose that choice.” But when you think through a spectrum mindset, you realize we're always moving, forward or backward, with every choice we make. A choice to *not* help, could be a choice for hurt.

You choose to answer emails instead of reading with your kids. You choose to not sign your kid up for the sports league or FitKids class because your schedule is too busy. You choose to enjoy a beer on a beach chair while your kids go build a sandcastle. These choices are small, but they could be harming your child—and they add up over time.

I am far from the perfect parent. I know how far from perfect I am because Shannon is pretty close to it. I am not perfect, but I am persistent, and that makes all the difference.

In the chapter on *Patience*, I quoted the following Bible scripture from the New King James Version Bible. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” - James 1:4. This verse spoke to a tired heart. A heart that was exhausted with anxiety from worrying for so much of my life. At a time when I felt like worrying most, worrying about my son’s future, this scripture gave me the peace that I needed.<sup>47</sup>

What you may not realize is that different translations of the Bible use different words. (Sidenote: The black-and-white mindset would claim that this discredits the Bible because they can’t fathom how there can be such a spectrum of Bible versions.) In the New International Version (NIV), it changes the wording from “patience” to “perseverance.” It reads, “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” - James 1:4<sup>48</sup>

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines perseverance as “continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.” *This* is what living in a spectrum mindset is all about: continued effort.<sup>49</sup>

Other Bible versions use the words “steadfastness” and “endurance” in the place where “patience” was. All of these words describe the importance of continued effort.

## **Is Perfection Possible?**

There is a fine distinction between persistence and perseverance. Perseverance chases something, a certain goal or endpoint. With persistence, the effort is the goal. Persistence is more about con-

tinuing the effort in spite of obstacles. To use your spectrum mindset, make your effort the goal. You can always control your own effort. We never fully control external events or outcomes, but we can always manage our effort.

Far too often, we expel all our effort in an attempt to achieve perfection. I've started and then stopped so many endeavors when I realized perfection was out of reach. How I wish I would have just made "progress" the goal, instead of completed perfection. We underestimate how consistent progress will add up over time.

Hall-of-Famer football coach Vince Lombardi explained the perfection chase eloquently to his Green Bay Packer football team, "Gentlemen, we are going to relentlessly chase perfection, knowing full well we will not catch it, because nothing is perfect. But we are going to relentlessly chase it, because in the process we will catch excellence. I am not remotely interested in just being good."<sup>50</sup>

Note that quote, "Nothing is perfect." Everything is progress.

But wait, didn't James 1:4 just say "you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing?" Yes it did, but I believe that is God's version of perfection.

I love this quote from actor Michael J. Fox: "I am careful not to confuse excellence with perfection. Excellence I can reach for; perfection is God's business." He's spot on when he says God is the only one in charge of perfection. It's our role to live in an imperfect world and seek excellence.<sup>51</sup>

Again, this is my Christian view of perfection that you don't have to share. But whether you are Christian or not, when you

realize “perfection” is just perception, it holds a lot less power over you. Perfection, if possible, is completely subjective to the user. My idea of perfection is different from your perfection, and that’s perfectly fine when we see each other through a spectrum mindset.

When we respect everyone’s perception of perfection, we turn a black-and-white world into a beautiful one. We all have our own ideals of perfection, so we must let the idea of perfection go and let each other catch our own versions of excellence.

Is perfection possible with the things we have here on Earth? Even if we find the perfect dream home or marry the perfect spouse, do those things not need constant intention from us? Can something or someone (yourself included) be so perfect that it’s not worth any further investment or effort? Would you ever stop parenting because your kids are too perfect? How about your health? Can you stop going to the gym once you reach your perfect body?

If you’re an art connoisseur you might say the *Mona Lisa* is perfect. But the *Mona Lisa* was never finished.

In 1503, Leonardo Da Vinci started the painting. He continued refining it for 14 years. It was then that his right hand started to become unusable, and he died two years later. He never finished it fully to his standards. The *Mona Lisa* was then left behind for all to marvel at for over 500 years. Da Vinci had been quoted saying, “Art is never finished, only abandoned.”<sup>52</sup>

The same thing could be said about life. We design our lives every day with the choices we make. We hope, pray, and work toward our ideal of a perfect life, but no matter how great it gets,

it's never fully complete. It can end, just as a painting is "finished," but ending and being complete are two different things.

As seen in the *Mona Lisa* and many other works that line museum walls, legendary art is created when the artist seeks not a perfect endpoint, but rather an infinite one. A legendary life is created when we try to make it our best each and every day, with no perfect endpoint in mind.

## **Always and Never**

I want your mind racing with the everyday votes you're going to cast to move along your professional spectrum, your health spectrum, your spiritual spectrum, your family spectrum, your financial spectrum, and so on. I want you acting on these ideas if you haven't already.

Can you imagine how much progress you could make in your health and wealth if in each isolated choice you chose help over hurt? You have the power to overcome the largest of obstacles when you take it on choice by choice. That hurdle that once looked so high is now way more manageable. That burdening deadline that loomed over you is now diminished.

You have the power now with your mind and your vision to see what you never saw before. You can see opportunities that weren't visible before love and acceptance entered the picture. You can now travel a path of progress as you're equipped with a curious mind and a patient heart. When these elements of a spectrum mindset work together, there's no telling what you can do.

Albert Einstein said, “The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.” Now that your thinking has changed, your life can change.<sup>53</sup>

There is *always* a choice to make and a vote to cast. There is *always* a move to make, and you are *never* stuck in one spot.

This is the only time I want you to use “always” and “never” statements. Make a rule to only use “always” when you’re talking about always progressing, or always doing little habits that benefit you.

Too often in our lives we use “always” or “never” in statements that are making our mindsets ever further fixed and finite, and limiting any progress we hope to achieve. We will say, I will always be overweight, anxiety-riddled, addicted to sweets, less intelligent than others, etc. Or we’ll say, I will never be fit. I could never write a book. I never get the breaks other people do.

Just as bad as projecting these limitations on ourselves is projecting them onto others. Many businesses and marriages have ended over “always” and “never” statements that couldn’t get reconciled. These statements have a hard time getting repaired because of how final they are. In an argument, they’ll often be used as one party tries to have the final word with the most final statement possible.

If you want to make a bad situation worse between you and a loved one, tell them how they’re always doing something wrong, or they never do anything right. Sometimes you don’t even have to vocalize these things—just holding them in your head alters the way you interact with that person. It’s very unhealthy to

hold these statements about others, and even more detrimental to your own health.

Be careful with “always” and “never” statements when they are not 100 percent positive, because they have funny ways of becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.

When you want things in your life to change or you’re hoping for people to change, watch what you say about them. This applies to the thoughts in your head as much as the words you speak. Change your language around the things you want to change. Now *that* is a self-fulfilling prophecy we should get behind.

Make a pledge to yourself to only use “never” and “always” when it’s in a 100 percent positive context. I choose statements such as, “I will always do my best to be the greatest dad possible to my kids,” “I never take a day for granted or waste a moment of my life,” and, “I always take care of my body and mind.” These are the only times I want to tie finality to my statements.

I choose these statements because my kids are my “why.” I want to have purpose in my persistence. It’s important we don’t “always do something” just for the sake of staying busy. Busyness can be a distraction from our real purpose in life. Don’t just move for the sake of moving. Always move with intention and purpose.

## **Trade “All or Nothing”, For “Always Something”**

Heraclitus, the Greek philosopher said, “No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not

the same man.” The river is always changing and so is the man; therefore they are never the same when they interact in the future. This statement is even truer for our kids who are constantly changing. Your child will never be the same kid they were yesterday.<sup>54</sup>

To the everyday eye and the black-and-white mindset, the river (and the child) will look the same every time they come to it. When you have the spectrum mindset, however, you know there is way more that lies below the surface. There’s a fluidity to the river that is always moving and shaping the rocks and dirt below.

A river is never still, and it is never the same. Author James N. Watkins stated, “A river cuts through a rock not because of its power but because of its persistence.” The river creates change because the river relentlessly shows up. Always showing up is the most important part of creating change.

Shannon and I chose the name “Dylan” because we both liked the way it sounded. We looked up the meaning of the name and found that it meant “son of the sea.” We thought it was fitting since we lived in Jupiter, Florida—a beach town right on the Atlantic Ocean. What I recently learned in my research was that “Dylan” is derived from the Welsh words “dy”, which means *great*, and “llanw”, which means *flow*. Here I was being taught the fluidity of a spectrum mindset by my son whose name means “great flow.” That was a powerful realization as I felt Dylan’s tremendous impact on my life.<sup>55</sup>

The black-and-white mindset wants and waits for a pivotal and powerful moment to change their life. They want the lottery

to change their finances. They want a supernatural happening to transform their faith. They want a magic pill or flashy diet to fix their health problems. Movies are like this, but real life rarely is.

Realize that life is a spectrum, and only death is binary. When it comes to death, you're either alive or you're not, but life itself is not black-and-white. There are so many different degrees to the quality in which you can live your life. Many people will spend the last decade of their life barely living and incapable of doing simple tasks to take care of themselves. Would you call that "being alive" or simply "not being dead?"

This is why I do what I do as a fitness professional. I want to help people live a degree of life that is at its highest quality for the longest duration of time. I want clients to invest in themselves now so that they can live amazing, long lives later, and not just physically.

The spectrum mindset knows that lasting success lies in the persistence, progress, and attendance of today. If you want real power over your own life and to feel like you truly control your destiny, focus on persistent effort and always doing something.

I've seen so many people fail at their health goals because they couldn't escape their "all or nothing" mentality. I would observe my clients make unbelievable progress, only to unfortunately watch them gain all the weight back they had lost.

Their all-in focus on health was followed by an all-out escape back to their old ways. They failed to find the path of moderation and access consistent progress. They couldn't pull their attention away from the scale and simply focus on daily depos-

its. Many times that was a failure on my part as a coach for not helping them realize how helpful a spectrum mindset was.

I'm here to stop you from making those same mistakes. Be watchful of an "all or nothing" mentality. Trade "all or nothing" thinking for "always something" doing.

Also, be aware that the finite mind will see most things in life as transactional. The finite mind will think, "if I devote an hour to the gym, I should see an hour's worth of weight loss on my body." It gets discouraged easily when it doesn't see the outputs equal the inputs. It struggles with the concept of irregular returns.

Real results worth waiting for are not linear. There are no *overnight success stories* in a spectrum mindset, because it recognizes how much work actually contributed to the big breakthrough. People can work their whole life to become an overnight success. Many artists, athletes, and entrepreneurs do. Don't belittle your inputs just because the outputs don't match. Every second devoted towards a direction counts.

Many people would look at Dylan's transformation and call him an *overnight success*. If it wasn't for consistent action rooted in these 10 elements of the spectrum mindset, our journey would have been a lot different. Our progress doesn't stop with the publishing of this book, it's simply the beginning of a new chapter.

I'm constantly checking in with myself to ask if I've been persistent enough with teaching my kids and leading my family. I'm careful not to get complacent, and rest on the progress we've made. I plan on helping my kids grow until the day I die, because

that's the same way I treat myself. Growing mentally, physically, and spiritually until the day God takes me.

Your mind and life don't need a complete, overwhelming overhaul—seek out several small shifts, take each day as it comes, and vote the way you know you should go.

The majority of us know what to do to move us in the right direction. We just need to do it with persistence and consistency.

Your actions may never be perfect, but you can always be persistent.



## CHAPTER 14

# A Christmas Miracle

*December, 2021. Dylan is about to turn eight years old.*

I don't know what I was expecting, but when we walked up to the amphitheater full of musicians, vendor tents, and spectators, my heart started to race. Dylan was squeezing my hand hard in a musical rhythm matching his excitement. I look down at him and see he's no longer walking—he's full on skipping with joy.

He's pumped.

I'm praying. Praying to God this will go well for him.

By this point, Dylan had been taking music lessons for a year and a half. He played a few different instruments with his instructor, Mr. Brad, every Monday for a half hour. They basically jammed out, which was fitting since the place was called JAM—Jupiter Academy of Music. Dylan played piano/keyboard, ukulele, guitar, and drums. He was not overly proficient in any of them, but loved playing around on anything he could make a melody with.

Mr. Brad asked Dylan on November 1 (I confirmed this with Dylan, and that kid *never* forgets a date) if he'd like to perform "Jingle Bells" on the ukulele for their Christmas concert. He was so excited for his very first performance, but I was worried that he was still very underprepared to play in front of a hundred people. He didn't practice a lot at home, at least not by my standards.

When we arrived at the concert, we wove our way through the crowd to find an empty spot of grass right up front to sit on. A student and teacher orchestra were already playing a variety of Christmas songs. There was an array of flutes, clarinets, tubas, trumpets, trombones, and drums.

After the orchestra finished, Mr. Brad came on the mic and announced that they would rearrange the stage and have his students play for everyone one-by-one. We weren't sure when Dylan was coming on and the suspense was killing us. Dylan, on the other hand, looked cool as a cucumber standing on the side of the stage, waiting for his turn.

In between musicians, I waved to Dylan from the crowd. He saw me waving and waved back. "Hey Daddy!" he yelled. I laughed, as it was the only thing you could hear from the currently quiet stage.

Finally, Dylan got the call to come on stage. Every musician that had performed so far besides Mr. Brad was either playing an instrument or singing. No one yet had done both at the same time. Knowing that it was Dylan's job to do both in "Jingle Bells," I wondered how he'd be able to pull this off. He was also one of the youngest people who had graced the stage so far.

He walked on stage to play alongside Mr. Brad, who would be playing a guitar. Dylan looked so cool and calm. I was nervous enough for the both of us. My heart was racing. I was praying hard, “Please help him sound good, Mr. Brad. Please, God, don’t let him get frustrated or growl. Just fill him with joy in this moment.”

Dylan had quite the fan club at his concert. Shannon’s mom drove in from Orlando to visit. My parents were there. My brother Andrew and my nephew Cooper came, too. We all rushed the stage with our phones in hand, ready to take video.

“This guy has got quite the paparazzi,” commented a spectator behind us, which got a laugh from the crowd nearby.

Dylan jumped up to his stool, his legs swinging, not able to touch the ground. Mr. Brad pointed the microphone down toward Dylan and handed him a ukulele. Arielle, Dylan’s little five-year-old sister said, “I’m so excited! You got this buddy!”

Dylan smiled back and said confidently, “I got this!” We all laughed.

Dylan started the song, and for the next two minutes I was focused on keeping my phone camera from shaking and wishing he would keep going no matter what. He paused a lot in his practicing, and I was just hoping he would keep a continuous beat.

Over halfway through the song he was doing great and was strumming right along. His fan club were all beaming with proud smiles from behind our phone cameras. All of a sudden, though, his singing started to drift off and get really quiet.

“Just keep going. Just keep going,” I said under my breath. “C’mon buddy, finish strong.”

That's when the crowd behind us started to pick up the volume that Dylan was losing. Like something out of a movie, the crowd brought the song back to life! Dylan played off the energy of the crowd and finished the song loud and clear. He built up to a dramatic ending: "...and a one horse open sleeeeeigh!"

Everybody cheered, and there were lots of, "Great job Dylan!" chants—and not just from his fan club.

I gave him a big thumbs up. He looked right at me and gave me the biggest thumbs up back. I was so proud of him. He joyfully skipped back to the side of the stage with excitement.

A day later, I rewatched the video of his concert five times. I cried every time he gave me that big thumbs up.

There is something special about watching your child do something that you never thought they could do. Usually when we think that, it's honestly because they're doing something you never thought *you* could do.

I never wanted to be that parent who pushed their kid to accomplish something they failed to do in their lives. I never had dreams of being a musician on stage, and I still can't fathom that for myself in this lifetime. But seeing my son do that before the age of eight is nothing short of a miracle to me.

When my dad got home, he texted me the same. "We are so proud of Dylan. You have worked miracles." He was referring to the miracle Shannon and I have worked in Dylan, but we can't take credit for Dylan's miracle, and we can't take credit for the miracle God has placed upon us.

Right now, someone, somewhere is learning for the first time that their son or daughter is on the autism spectrum. They are

wondering what that means for them and their future. They are having feelings of fear, sadness, frustration, faith, and everything in between.

I used to be one of these parents. I was afraid of the “spectrum” label because I was afraid of the limitations it would have for my son. As Dylan has shown us in ten years, he has spoken things, played things musically, and remembered things that we didn’t think were humanly possible. These were things I didn’t know any human could do, let alone my own son.

Why not let “spectrum” mean “superhuman?” Why not let the Autism Spectrum Disorder initials, ASD, be a reminder that I have an incredible family in Arielle, Shannon, and Dylan? Why not give new meanings to old words?

You can decide how much weight and what meaning you’re going to give to the labels in your life. Watch yourself when you label something as a burden, when all along it was meant to be a blessing.

My heart feels for the families who have it so much harder than us. We know how lucky we are to witness a son go from high functioning to even higher functioning. My heart wants to also offer encouragement to every family, no matter where your child falls on the spectrum. Your child is special in a miraculous way. I promise you this. There is something within your child that you can’t conceive right now, and even when they do it, it will still be hard to believe.

When Dylan was at his most stubborn at four years old, I could have never believed that the boy who ruined the singing of every “Happy Birthday” song by angrily screaming, would

someday be singing on stage to a few hundred attendees. Instead of him stopping a song with his screams, people were singing along with him.

I cry tears of joy at that thought. Even today, I cry while rewatching the video of his performance because I can't believe how far we've come. I can't believe how far Dylan has come in this short life of his so far. I can't believe how God has moved in our lives to give us Dylan and show us this miracle right before our eyes.

My mind has transformed as I've watched my son transform. He broke down every obstacle that my mind created for him. It's hard to even see obstacles anymore, knowing how the fluidity of a spectrum mindset can erode anything that gets in our way.

My mind has been renewed by a miracle.

I quoted Romans 12:2 to start this book, and I'll quote it again as we near the end, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."<sup>56</sup>

The pattern of this world is a black-and-white, finite mindset. Its patterns are ones of selfishness, self-indulgence, scarcity, (unhealthy) skepticism, negativity, unkindness, impatience, perfectionism, and control. It's up to us to have the awareness to recognize and resist the unhealthy patterns of this world, and those of our minds.

It's up to us to take the thoughts of the finite mindset captive, just like the apostle Paul advised us to "take captive every

thought to make it obedient to Christ.” God or not, religious or atheist, you must take every thought captive.<sup>57</sup>

Get started by making every thought work for you and the life your family deserves. Your thoughts are going to create your life. Make sure they survive through the standards of a spectrum mindset.

Strongholds of finiteness keep us from seeing what we’re truly capable of. Stop letting a finite mindset keep you or your family from living a purposeful and fulfilling life. Leave the darkness and step into the light.

It’s going to be a process, as the spectrum mindset always reminds us, but our minds will be renewed, over and over again.

As long as the process never stops, your progress will never stop.



## CHAPTER 15

# Make Every Day Count

*“Don’t count the days. Make the days count.”*

*- Muhammad Ali, American Professional Boxer & Activist*

**I**f someone offered you the chance to know your date of death, would you take it?

Would you want to know how many days you have left on this Earth?

How powerful would that be, to know how much time you had left? Would you live every day differently if you knew you only had two months to live?

What about two years? Would you waste a single day?

What about 10 years? Would you waste a single one of those 3,650 days?

3,650 days sounds like a long time. It may sound like you can waste a few days in there and not miss them, but what if I told you that you only have 10 Christmas holidays left with your family? Would you spend money on that flight to go see your loved ones? Would you take a little longer to write that Christmas card to make sure your family knew how much you loved them?

While we can be infinitely powerful with a spectrum mindset, our lives are still finite. Our time here on Earth will come to an end one day.

In a finite mindset, it's easy to fall into the trap of counting down days. You count down the days of that work project you have to do. You count down the days until your next vacation or the weekend. You count down the days until your kids don't need to fall asleep in your bed with you.

It's also easy to fall into that "I'll be happy when" trap we talked about in our *Patience* chapter. We think happiness will automatically arrive when we lose weight or when we make a certain amount of money. For those who have done it, they will tell you, "Happiness wasn't waiting at the destination."

I used to have a countdown for everything. Whenever we had a vacation or fun event booked, I had a countdown to it. I couldn't wait to get done with one day so that I could get to the next. Sadly, that same mindset came on vacation with me. It's hard to enjoy vacation when, on Day 2, you're already thinking about going back to work. It's an unhealthy cycle of finite thinking that keeps you out of enjoying the moment.

Becoming a parent was the first time in my life I consciously made this switch from counting the days to making them count.

The spectrum mindset respects the gift of time, the preciousness of life, and the opportunity available in every minute that we are given. It breaks down the minutes you have left in this world into moments. And moments have endless possibility for anything you want them to be.

No matter how magical or numerous the moments are in our lives, we will always want more. That's OK, to want more moments.

My grandfather (on my mom's side), who lovingly goes by "Pop Pop," lost the love of his life on October 31, 2019. The next week, our family traveled up to New Jersey for my grandma's services and to comfort our Pop Pop. We talked about how they had the perfect marriage. They were high school sweethearts who spent time apart in college, but were brought back together through some God-caused coincidences. Their relationship also made it through my Pop Pop's time in the U.S. Air Force. They had three daughters and one son together, including my mom.

My grandma was 87 years old when she went to be with God. They had been together for almost 70 years. They loved each other deeply, and my grandpa kept the chivalry going up until her last days. He would make her breakfast every day and had it ready on the table for her when she came downstairs.

We cried a lot that weekend as we laid my grandma to rest. It was hard seeing my Pop Pop, an absolute rock of a man, crumble in his sadness. He broke down as he stood next to her coffin.

"70 years together, and it still wasn't enough!" he said through his tears.

While Pop Pop would say that grandma was perfect, and their lives were truly blessed, there was still an incompleteness to their life together. No matter how perfect our life is, we will all want more.

We will want just one more tomorrow.

A finite mindset stresses about deadlines and a future date with death, but a spectrum mindset takes life moment by moment and seeks to maximize every single one.

The finite-minded will always find themselves trading time now for time later.

Finite-minded dieters use periods of restriction in order to earn their way to gluttony. Finite-minded misers will save pennies now only to spend them years later when they are worth a lot less in actual value and meaning, in terms of the experiences they're buying. Or worse, they will never get the opportunity to spend them at all. Finite-minded "weekend warriors" wait all week for work to be done so they can finally get to the "good stuff."

The finite mind assigns a lower value to the time we just want to get through. This is where the finite mind goes wrong. All time is valuable and should be treated as such. All steps taken toward a goal are important, even the smallest ones.

Time at work is just as valuable as time at play. If this concept is too foreign to grasp, it's possible it's time for a career change. I love working hard and feel most fulfilled when I'm busy. I've made both mistakes in my life—valuing rest over work, and valuing work over rest. Like most, I've bounced between burnout and idleness. I constantly have to take inventory of the balance in my life and make sure I'm valuing work *and* play, and allotting time for each.

True balance in your life starts and ends with intention. Every moment does not have to be filled with activity to be special; it only has to be purposeful to you.

If your intention is to do nothing, then it's not really time wasted. I love legendary musician John Lennon's quote, "If you enjoyed the time you wasted, then it wasn't wasted time." The enemy is not inactivity, it's being unintentional. We have to stop going through the motions and escape the habitual rat races that bound us.<sup>58</sup>

The comedian Jerry Seinfeld has a great outlook on making every moment with your children matter. He says, "I don't need any special days. I mean they're all special. We spend a lot of time together and I enjoy every second of it. Again, I'm a believer in the ordinary and the mundane. These guys that talk about 'quality time' – I always find that a little sad when they say, 'We have quality time.' I don't want quality time. I want the garbage time. That's what I like. You just see them in their room reading a comic book and you get to kind of watch that for a minute, or [having] a bowl of Cheerios at 11 o'clock at night when they're not even supposed to be up. The garbage, that's what I love."<sup>59</sup>

Appreciating the time you're given, even in what might seem like garbage moments, is a special concept. It gives meaning to otherwise forgetful minutes. Allowing minutes to waste away with the people you love is distinctly different from simply wishing them away. There was a time when I used to wish minutes away, back when I valued time differently. My hope is that you never again wish away a single minute of your life.

When you have a baby, it's easy to want the time to go by faster. "I can't wait until we can sleep again...It will be a great day when I don't have to change another diaper...I can't wait until our next family vacation."

But there is going to be a last time your baby breastfeeds, or a last time you give them a bottle. There will be a last time they crawl, and a last time they use their jumper. There will be a last time you carry them upstairs, and a last time they wear their favorite pajamas.

What I've realized since, now that my son is ten and my daughter is seven, is that nobody tells you when that last time will be. Nobody warns you that you have five more times of rocking your son to sleep before he's too big to do so anymore. Nobody warns you that this is the last time your daughter will fit into her favorite princess dress.

I've experienced so many "firsts" with my kids, and so many "lasts." We've had our last days of preschool, last days of training wheels, last days of carrying them both at the same time, and so many more.

Now, when I'm holding my 70-pound daughter and my arms are about to fall off, I want to say something like "I can't hold you forever." But I refrain from saying it in strain. I don't change my words, but I change the meaning behind them. I say, "I can't hold you forever," and I squeeze that girl even tighter. I know I only have so many more opportunities to hold her in my arms.

For most people that's a sad thought, and I apologize if I evoked some somber emotions. But I want you to be motivated by time. Be motivated that you only have so much time here in your physical body. Be motivated that you only get one body. You only get one chance at this life here on Earth.

No matter how much you love your kids, they will surely do things that will make you want to pull your hair out. The next time your kids do something that stresses you, do this simple visualization.

Picture yourself as a 90-year old. Somehow, your life went by in the blink of an eye, and now your kids have their own kids, and possibly they have kids too! As you're sitting there in your favorite chair, this specific memory of your kids driving you crazy pops into your head. This was a moment that was stressful, gray-hair causing, and possibly your *rock bottom*. What would you give to go back in time to this super stressful moment? I'd be willing to bet that you'd give every single cent you owned to travel back in time to be right there with them again.

I would go back to my *rock bottom moment* in a heartbeat with Dylan if it meant getting to relive him as a little boy. Those times were priceless. I would go back and hold him so close in our hardest times. I would cherish every nothing moment and garbage minute we ever had together.

When you're older, you won't be able to revisit memories you weren't present in. You have to truly live in the moment, if you ever want to relive the moment.

We can get so caught up in the material things we own, but truly owning your memories is the most priceless possession. I hope you can spend the last days of your life revisiting your favorite memories and knowing you had a life worth living.

We shouldn't have to wait for old age or a death diagnosis for inspiration to live our lives with greater purpose and intention-

ality. No matter how long we have, our minutes are declining. Our timer is ticking.

I think about my death every day, because every day that I wake up and think about death, I value my life.

Albert Einstein said, “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”<sup>60</sup> I choose to wake up each day and thank God for the miracle of a rising sun and a beating heart. I thank Him for the miracle of family and life.

The finiteness of our lives reminds us to live infinitely in our heart and mind, as long as we can. I want you to be inspired by both the finiteness and infiniteness of life.

Wake up each day and put on the spectrum mindset. Channel the elements of growth, intention, acceptance, love, patience, presence, curiosity, abundance, adaptability, and persistence.

Even with hundreds of mornings trying to channel these traits, I’m not even close to being a perfect man. But like the spectrum mindset says, I am a progressing man. Each day, I’m moving toward the man I want to be. The man I want my kids to see.

This is my closing prayer for you: that a spectrum mindset will be accessible for you every morning when you wake so that you can see the possibilities in each day you’re given.

May you leave behind the black-and-white world, and may you wake up every day with...

GROWTH

A hunger for growth and a mind that expects to grow each day.

INTENTION

A purpose, a set of values, and a focus for your life to have meaning and fulfillment.

ACCEPTANCE

An indescribable sense of peace from accepting who you are, where you are, and those around you.

LOVE

A heart filled with love for everyone, and a gratitude for the preciousness of life.

PATIENCE

A patience and perseverance that gets stronger through tough times.

PRESENCE

An ability to be fully present with everyone who you come into contact with.

CURIOSITY

An ability to be an endless listener and student, and have an imagination for what's possible.

ABUNDANCE

An appreciation for everything that you have and all that is available to you.

ADAPTABILITY

A flexibility to lose your assumptions and know you can change your mind for the better.

## PERSISTENCE

A driving force to show up and cast votes for the person you want to be and the life you want.

I think about how much I used to miss each day by looking to tomorrow. I didn't start a consistent journaling habit until my daughter Arielle was born and Dylan was already two. I wrote in one of my first journal entries, "I'm committing to this habit because I have to write more about the special moments God is putting in my life."

Even then, I only journaled after special occasions and vacations. My journal entries were consistently about two to three weeks apart. I only wrote when I felt like I had something to write about. When you have a spectrum mindset, you *always* have something to write about. You are *always* seeing the world in a special way where every little movement and moment in your life is significant and deserves to be remembered.

Now, I journal every day. I'm so glad I got more consistent with my journaling. I learned to recognize how important the little things are in life, and how there are no little things when it comes to your kids' "firsts," "lasts," and "in-betweens."

The more I wrote about the special moments in my life, the more moments I was given—or, it's possible I was finally recognizing what was already there. Whatever it was, this positive cycle of recognizing gifts and receiving more became real. When you realize you can't ever get back certain little moments, those moments become enormous.

When you wake up each morning, tell yourself that you will have special moments today. Moments worth writing about.

This book was all just a bunch of moments, moments that changed my life—and I hope they’ve changed yours, too.

Thinking about the finiteness of life can be troubling to some, but I find a peace unlike any other believing that God has an infinite plan. This is not a plan that is just reserved for me, but one that is available to every single human being. It’s a choice to follow Jesus, or not. This choice doesn’t dictate whether or not you have a spectrum mindset, but realizing the power of choice does.

Choice is the beauty of life and of the spectrum mindset. You always have a choice to make to move you along life’s many spectrums.

Remember what Dr. Dweck said about her book *Mindset*, “This book shows people they have a choice by spelling out the two mindsets and the worlds they create. The point is that people can choose which world they want to inhabit.” The same could be said for choosing a spectrum mindset.

It’s your choice. You get to choose the world you create with your mindset.

Take control of your life with your choices every morning. Show up and be fully present, wherever you are. Never wish away another minute, and be grateful for every moment.

Live with a spectrum mindset, love like it’s your last day on Earth, and leave everything and everyone better than you found them.



# DON'T LET YOUR MINDSET GROWTH STOP WITH THE READING OF THIS BOOK!

To continue your growth, head to **spectrummindset.com** where you can access additional free resources like journaling prompts, reflection questions for each chapter, and more. Joining my email list is also a great way to continue your growth. I only send emails when I can offer an incredible amount of value to the reader. I don't send messages to check off arbitrary newsletter deadlines. If this book helped change your life in the slightest degree, your positive review on Amazon.com would be appreciated more than you know. There are so many people who need this message. I needed it so badly 10 years ago. Your positive review or recommending this book to a friend can be life changing to someone else.

Thank you.

-Tony Frezza

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## AFTERWORD

**T**hank you for spending your priceless time with me. I hope you found this book to be life-changing, and I hope you'll gift it to someone you care about.

I finally finished this book at the close of 2023, but started writing it over three and a half years earlier. The idea for this book came at the worst time in the world that I've experienced in my almost 40 years on Earth, the 2020 pandemic.

It was May of 2020 when our gym, FitTown Jupiter, had been shut down for two full months. I was stressed, frustrated, and wondered if our business would survive this. I mourned for all the lives lost and prayed for healing. There was so much unrest and so many unknowns. New normals, social tension, political wars, and loss of real connection with our fellow humans thanks to social distancing/isolation made this a very dark time for me.

The darkness of what I, and our world, was going through brought this book to life.

It hurt to see how unkindly people acted toward each other. It bothered me to see how closed-minded everyone had become in these unknown times. It was no longer safe to have an opinion or even tell your own personal story. You needed bulletproof skin to step out onto the minefield of social media.

An election year only heightened this divide between “choosing sides” in every possible topic. Somehow, if you believed something when it came to one topic, it automatically meant you believed another totally different thing. It was perplexing to me, and I failed to understand this way of thinking.

This was not the world I wanted to raise my six-year-old son and four-year-old daughter in.

I wrote and published work often for my small circle of friends, family and gym members, but this time inspired me to create larger, positive change with my words. I thought if I could just get myself upset enough, this book about fighting against a black-and-white world would have to flow out of me. I'd be so unhappy with how the world was that I would write a book to try to change it.

I've never been one who was motivated by negative outcomes, so nothing came of this book for over a year. I wrote thousands upon thousands of words—some made it to the publish button, while a lot did not. I hid many of those words out of fear of judgment from the unkind.

Over a year later, June 2021, I still had this gravitational pull to complete this book. I turned to God in my morning prayer ritual and asked Him, “...Should I write this book?” I followed-up with a second question, “...and if it's not meant to be, can you free me of this urge to write it? But if it is meant to be, speak to me, and let me know this is part of your plan.”

The message must have gone to God's voicemail because I didn't get an answer right away. I didn't get an answer for a few

days. Then, as my mind was clearing from another busy day of work and parenting, I received God's message to finish this book.

Before I share that message, I want you to know how odd I once thought it was for people to talk to God. I thought it was just as made up as the fairy tales I read about as a kid. It seemed absurd and impossible to hear God speak to you. But as I've grown older, I've moved across a spectrum of faith from the impossible, to the possible. And that's exactly why this book was written—not to bring you closer to God, but to bring you closer to possibility. What you once thought of as impossible, isn't so impossible after all.

I did hear God, and He gave me a distinct clarification along with His affirmation to finish this book.

He said He didn't want me to write this book out of frustration, but rather He wanted me to write it out of inspiration.

What did He mean by "inspiration"? And what did "inspiration" mean to me?

I immediately thought of my son, the most inspiring person I've ever met in my life. I knew then that this book needed to have the lessons my son had taught me. That was when the idea of the spectrum mindset became as clear as day.

For a year, I had been trying to write the wrong book. I was trying to write the book that would change others rather than sharing the story that changed me.

We've lived a life of massive frustration that blossomed into miraculous inspiration. It was time I shared my wisdom with the reader.

Am I frustrated it took me over three years to write this book? Was I frustrated we tried to have a baby for over a year and a half before we got pregnant with Dylan? Was I frustrated that it took so long to find solutions for Dylan? For all of these, yes. At first there was frustration, but I now realize there are purposeful timelines for everything in our lives.

I was living a spectrum story while writing about one. Writing a book is the perfect example of spectrum thinking at work. You have no idea where the story will lead, but you just keep writing. This book was never truly finished, but at a certain point it had to be published.

We all live spectrum stories every day.

We must realize that no matter how frustrating life is, it's way more fluid than frustrating. Whenever frustration enters the scene, inspiration can join as well. As I learned in this writing process, frustration and inspiration can both be sources of motivation.

You might be frustrated with your job or the way you look in the mirror. You might also be inspired to be your own boss or to have confidence in that bathing suit. When it comes to using frustration vs. inspiration, there's no right answer as to which you should use to help move you across the spectrum of life. Staying with the theme of this book, I'm only sharing what has worked for me. I find inspiration to be a greater motivator than frustration.

When you're trying to change your life, remember this: life-changing movements start with life-changing moments. You will experience small, tiny moments that don't look very

life-changing in isolation. You can only see the life change if you're staying open, understanding, and zooming out every once in a while to see the bigger picture at play.

I'm grateful that I took up the habit of journaling when Dylan was just a couple years old. When I go back and read my journal, I see our journey across our life spectrum. I forgot about some of our hardest times together, but when reading them, I realize how far we've actually come.

It makes me grateful for our tough times as much as our best times together.

It doesn't matter if you're going through a great time in your life or a rough patch—start writing about it. With enough time passed and pages journaled, you will see the spectrum of your life shine as clear as day.

You'll see how far you've come and you'll see how so many things came into your life for a reason. You'll see all the things that were placed in your life for a purpose.

I will be forever grateful for the purpose that was placed in my life on December 27, 2013. Dylan transformed who I was as a person and has continued to do so every day since. I'm equally grateful for my second purpose, Arielle, born on March 25, 2016.

May this book move your soul to make positive change in your home and in our world.

Like Mother Teresa said, "If you want to change the world, go home and love your family."

May God Bless you and your family.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicated this book to God, and my wife and kids. This is a book written from the heart and without these pieces of my heart, I wouldn't have much to write. I must reiterate my gratitude towards them for giving me life, love, and purpose.

I wrote this book, but my wife Shannon lived it with me. She is the most incredible mother and exemplifier of the spectrum elements. Dylan, Arielle, and I are so grateful to have you.

Thank you to my parents, Carol and Buddy, who always told me I could do it, no matter what I was doing. Thank you for telling me I was a great writer, even when I wasn't. You set the bar high as parents and continue to do so as grandparents. Thank you for always speaking life into me, and never missing a moment to let me know how proud you are of me.

Thank you to my brother, Andrew, for being my best friend since (his) birth. Creating our gym and raising our families together has checked off a giant part of my life bucket list. You've helped me grow so much over the course of my life.

Thank you to all of my family, friends, and readers. Especially the ones who encouraged me to write a book. This book does not happen without the support you all have shown me. Thank

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Thank you to our family members who specifically got involved to help Dylan move along the autism spectrum. It was a God caused coincidence to have a functional health doctor marry into our family just before Dylan was born. Thank you Grandpa/Dr. Manny for all you've done for Dylan.

Thank you to all the teachers and tutors who helped Dylan move along his many spectrums. We are grateful for the care you've shown our son. There are never enough *thank you's* for our teachers and educators.

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There were hundreds of books that I've read—and countless podcasts that I've listened to—that helped transform my mindset over this past decade. I must give credit to all the authors and speakers who give their knowledge and experience generously into the world. You truly have more impact than you know, and without your influence, my life and this book wouldn't be the same. There are many more than I'm listing here, but here are a few. Thank you to Carol Dweck, Jon Gordon, John C. Maxwell, Joe Dispenza, Simon Sinek, Lewis Howes, Ed Mylett,

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My last acknowledgement is to you, the reader. I acknowledge you for doing the hard work to grow. Growth is never easy, but it's always worth it. If you are a parent or teacher, I acknowledge you for taking on what is truly a *world changing occupation*. You are shaping the future of our world by shaping our next generation. Thank you for all you do to make this world a better place.



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### **Chapter 15: Make Every Day Count**

<sup>58</sup> John Lennon quote - <https://quotefancy.com/quote/844161/John-Lennon-If-you-enjoyed-the-time-you-wasted-then-it-wasn-t-wasted-time>

<sup>59</sup> Jerry Seinfeld quote - [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jerry-seinfeld-parenting-quotes\\_1\\_5cc71741e4b0fd8e35bfc0f](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jerry-seinfeld-parenting-quotes_1_5cc71741e4b0fd8e35bfc0f)

<sup>60</sup> Albert Einstein quote - <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/987-there-are-only-two-ways-to-live-your-life-one>

**You won't regret reading ANY of the cited books above.**

**I highly recommend them all! Here are a few more of my favorites to check out!**

- “The One Truth: Elevate Your Mind, Unlock Your Power, Heal Your Soul” By Jon Gordon

- “Do It for a Day: How to Make or Break Any Habit in 30 Days” By Mark Batterson
- “The 15 Commitments of Conscious Leadership: A New Paradigm for Sustainable Success” By Jim Dethmer, Diana Chapman, and Kaley Klemp
- “The Daily Stoic: 366 Meditations on Wisdom, Perseverance, and the Art of Living” By Ryan Holiday and Stephen Hanselman
- “Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win” By Jocko Willink and Leif Babin. (Also by them: “The Dichotomy of Leadership: Balancing the Challenges of Extreme Ownership to Lead and Win)
- “Limitless Expanded Edition: Upgrade Your Brain, Learn Anything Faster, and Unlock Your Exceptional Life” By Jim Kwik
- “How to Win Friends and Influence People: Updated For the Next Generation of Leaders” By Dale Carnegie
- “The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth: Live Them and Reach Your Potential” by John C. Maxwell
- “The Power of One More: The Ultimate Guide to Happiness and Success” By Ed Mylett
- “Awaken the Giant Within: How to Take Immediate Control of Your Mental, Emotional, Physical and Financial Destiny” By Tony Robbins
- “No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child’s Developing Mind” By Daniel J. Siegel MD & Tina Payne Bryson PhD



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**T**ony Frezza lives with his wife Shannon, and two kids, Dylan(10) and Arielle(7), in Jupiter, Florida. They are surrounded by immediate family, and have a much larger gym family at FitTown Jupiter, which he and his brother Andrew started in 2012. For over a decade, Tony has coached and led his gym congregation in person and through routine writings online. His mission is to help people become the best version of themselves, and inspire them to live life to their fittest and fullest. He takes a holistic approach to health, helping people with their physical, mental, spiritual, and social fitness. He has read hundreds of books in the self-help category, but believes there is no better book for personal growth than The Bible.

