

Personal Growth Part 4 – Make it About You

TD Fitness Family, welcome to episode #116 of the TD Fitness Podcast. This is fourth episode of my personal growth series, and in this episode, we talk about ways to make your growth about you! It may sound strange, I know, but many times when we are seeking to improve or better ourselves, we take things that may have worked for others and try to apply those things to our situations. I'm here to tell you that it's *your* personal growth that I'm interested in, and with that said, I think that there are four things to focus on as you truly make it about you. The first is to identify your why – your reason for wanting to grow in any particular area. The second is to start where you are, because your journey has to start with you. The third is to prioritize your actions. This gets to the personal things that you value and the areas that you feel you can make progress in. And finally, you have to plan your steps. This is how you will make progress toward your goals given the priorities you've determined.

Notice that in each of these four steps, are the letters y-o-u. That's because it has to be about you. Identify your why. Start where you are. Prioritize your actions. Plan your next steps. And these steps will be the focus today as I step you through my six focus areas of personal growth: fitness, nutrition, stress management, marriage, parenting and spiritual living. So, let start with identifying your why.

Do you ever wonder why you have high motivation in some areas and lower motivation in other areas? One answer could be your underlying reason for doing what you're doing. If reaching your goal is important to you because it's tied to something you truly value, this will often motivate you, fuel your performance, provide the push that you

need when the road gets difficult, and drive you to success. That's why it's important to make your goals an extension of your values and things that are important to you. Because the more you can relate your goals to things you deeply care about, the easier it will be to stay motivated. This internal motivation that leads to personal fulfillment is called intrinsic motivation. External factors such as praise, support and direction from your family, coach, or physician are extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivation is important when you're trying to change behaviors, instill habits and grow in a particular area of your life. This is because intrinsic motivation drives you to take action for your own fulfillment, betterment or pleasure. Intrinsic motivation is also more often associated with higher levels of adherence and consistency, meaning you're more likely to stick with a habit and grow if you're doing it for a reason that is important to you. That's why intrinsic motivation and internal desires are key. And that's why it's so important to identify what those true desires are. When your motivation is connected to those deep, personal desires that are important to you, you hardly have to worry about staying motivated. Lasting motivation comes from within. Extrinsic motivators from external factors simply do not provide the same level of motivation over the long term, so it is important to reframe extrinsic motivators as intrinsic motivation.

Let me give you an example here. Let's say your spouse wants you to be healthier and more fit. In this example, your spouse is the extrinsic motivator. The intrinsic motivation in this case, is your desire to please your spouse. And if the **cost** associated with pleasing your spouse (changing your diet, exercising more, etc.) outweighs your **desire** to do so, you're unlikely to change your habits. But as we talked about in the previous episode, it's not an all or nothing game. You could reduce the cost

of pleasing your spouse by starting small. Start with a very small change to your diet or a small step toward exercise. Your desire can and will grow in these areas and the so called cost won't seem as high.

Another way to make this goal more meaningful is to relate the end state (weight loss) to something that is more important to you...something that justifies the cost of changing your diet and exercising more. Maybe it's wanting to be more active with your children, or maybe it's an internal desire to get back to pre-pregnancy weight. Although the end result is the same (weight loss), the motivators, and therefore your likelihood of working toward that result, are very different.

So how do you find your underlying motivation? One way is to repeatedly ask yourself "why" until you discover the reasons why your goals actually matter to you. This will help bring out what you value in life and ensure your goals are tied to what's important to you. You can then frame the personal growth you want to make in those terms.

So, let's talk about your why in fitness. I argue that your fitness why should actually change over time. You see, many people feel that fitness is always about a desire to lose weight. Others may say they want to feel better. This is a great reason and a great example of intrinsic motivation. Some may say they want to be able to move without pain and to perform activities with the family. This is another great reason. And others may have a desire to live a longer, more fulfilling life. I love when people frame their exercise goals in this way. It expresses the deep-down motivation of what they truly value. But one of the things that I've noticed over my years of personal training and

health coaching is that we sometimes get stuck in the past with our “why” for exercise. The “why” should actually change as we live life, and that means that we should change how we exercise in different stages of our lives. When I was in my early 20’s, it was all about aesthetics. I worried more about how I looked. And that drove what I did for exercise. Hardly any cardio...it was more weights as I tried to pack on muscle (unsuccessfully, mind you, but that was my goal). Then in my 30’s and really my 40’s, it became more about proper recovery and injury prevention. I knew this needed to be a focus area because of my education as a trainer and coach, but many of us are still trying to do the same exercises we did in our teens and 20’s...weights or high intensity workouts of the day. That’s not necessarily a bad thing if you’re at a high level of fitness, but don’t ignore the requirements for rest, recovery, and proper muscular balance through regular mobility work, especially as we age. These things are important for injury prevention. At this point, it should be about moving without pain for most people, not trying to max your bench press or squat. Then, as we start to hit the late 40’s and 50’s, there should probably be more focus on heart health. This means cardiovascular activity. You can’t just lift weights all the way into your 90’s without exercising your heart muscle. Don’t get me wrong, strength training is still important beyond your 50’s, but it’s because resistance exercises strengthen your bones. Maximum lifts aren’t required to accomplish that. Body weight exercises are just fine. So, as you think about your “why,” and the reason why you are choosing certain forms of exercise, consider what’s important for your health, not just the way you look. Our goals, and therefore our actions and activities need to change as we get older.

As we think about our why in nutrition, the logical question is ‘why do you want to eat better?’ And again, most would say to lose weight and to be healthier. Diet is certainly important in maintaining a healthy weight, and it will help you to live a healthier life. Let me provide an example of repeatedly asking ‘why’ for making changes or improvements to your diet. This isn’t an actual conversation, but it is based on real-life interactions I’ve had as a trainer and coach.

- You may say, “I want to eat better.” I’d ask you why?
- Your response may be, “I’d like to lose weight...about 15 or 20 pounds.”
- I might ask, “Why is this important to you?”
- You may say, “I want to wear smaller clothes and feel better.”
- I’d ask, what else? You respond, I’m not comfortable with my size. I feel self-conscious and I get out of breath quickly.”
- What else?
- I know I should be eating better, but I’m not. It’s frustrating because I feel like I don’t have time to cook healthy meals and it’s expensive to go buy healthy meals all the time. I also want to set a good example for my kids so they can stay healthy into adulthood and not struggle and stress over weight like I have. (End conversation.)

Now we’re getting somewhere. We know the why behind the desire to eat better, and it’s not just to lose weight. And we also know some of the challenges you feel are preventing you from eating better. Here, the behaviors that might help you reach your goals are options for quick or low-cost healthy alternatives to your current diet. There are probably some small habit changes we could address as well. This is a good

example of how knowing your true 'why' and true motivation can better define the specific actions you need to take to grow in this area of life. If you just stop at, "I want to eat better," or "I want to lose weight," that's not likely set you up for consistent action toward your ultimate goals. Hopefully that makes sense.

Moving on to stress management, what drives your desire to reduce or manage stress? Before we answer that question, there's something to point out. I'd venture to say that each of us want's less stress in our lives, but many people don't even realize the amount of stress they're carrying. Stress can build up gradually, and its effects can be insidious. You can take on more and more burdens and stressors over time, and before you know it, your "normal" life is one that has you sleeping less, worrying more, and eating less healthy foods to find some comfort. But none of that seems like a big deal because you've gradually gotten to this point over time. So, as we think about the 'why' behind the need or desire to reduce stress in our lives, we must first realize that the stress does indeed exist. The dietary practices and inability to sleep are oftentimes symptoms of stress, not always the causes of it. So, your reason for wanting to grow in this area, for wanting to reduce stress is likely rooted in a desire to live a life of less worry. But it can go much deeper than that. It should go deeper than that, because the less chronic stress you have, the healthier you'll be over the long-term. Chronic, excess stress has some very real negative physical and metabolic effects, from weight retention to hormone imbalances. Your true 'why' for reducing stress will likely go beyond the desire to worry less, and more into the deep reason for wanting to be healthier over the long run.

Switching gears, as we move on to marriage, the question is why do you want to be a better spouse? Perhaps I should first ask *if* you want to be a better spouse, because if not, then maybe this podcast isn't for you. But if you do want to be a better spouse, what's the reason why? Marriage can be tough at times. The stresses of work, family, health, finances and the like all take a toll on the relationship. And it's easy to get caught up in the difficulties of here and now. My 'why' is threefold. First, I want to be a better spouse because my desire is to stay married. I don't view marriage as an option...it's the goal. It's an infinite game in which the goal is to keep playing, not to win or lose. It's not about being right in an argument, it's about maintaining the relationship. Secondly, I don't just want to stay married, but I also want our marriage to thrive. If we just go through the motions to stay together, what's the fun in that? I want our relationship to be fun, enjoyable and remarkable. My wife and I both want this. And finally, my wife and I want to provide a stable home for our daughters and set an example for them, just like my parents did for me and my wife's parents did for her. Part of the reason my wife and I each look at marriage the way we do is because of the examples our parents set. My parents had been married for over 50 years before they passed. My wife's parents are around 45 years of marriage. Couples like that are clear on their 'why.' And it's important for us, if we have the chance to, to set that same example for those around us.

Now, what about parenting? Why do you want to be a better parent to your children? For me, it goes beyond simply making them happy. It goes beyond my desire

to give them even more opportunities than I had growing up. It goes beyond wanting them to be successful and to be able to live out their dreams. The reason I want to be a better father is because our children will very likely be raising our grandchildren in years to come. And both our daughters and their children will need to be productive members of society. So, taking the long view with our daughters is what drives me. All the rest, making them happy, providing options and opportunities in their lives, living out their dreams...that's all a bonus.

And wrapping up how to start with your why with respect to your spiritual life, why is it important that you grow in faith? Let's repeatedly ask why with this one. Why is it important that I grow in faith? Because I need to be a good person. Why? Because that's what God wants of me. Why? Because he sent His Son to pay the price for our sins. What else? As I grow in faith, my life becomes more and more like the example that He set. What else? When I live out my life according to Christian principles, I become a light for others to see and I serve as an example for others to follow. I could go on and on here. There are so many reasons why it's important for me to continue to grow in my faith. I am so thankful for the blessings we have. Also, the Bible and my life experiences have taught me that I need this foundation of faith in my life, largely because it allows me to deal with, handle and cope with what life throws at me. So, identify your why, whether it's in fitness, nutrition, managing stress, marriage or parenting. For me, continuing to grow in faith allows me to grow in every area.

Moving on to our second principle of making your growth about you, that is starting where you are. If you seek growth or improvement in certain areas of your life, it's best to start from where you are, not where you eventually hope to be. Oftentimes we think drastic change is required to reach our goals, and we try to make sweeping changes in our lives. A better approach is to start where you are, start with who you are, and make the change you seek fit you. Your goals are defined by who you want to be, but the best way to get there is by your personal preferences, realities and desires. If you want productive and sustainable change, this is the best approach. So, as we think about where to start with positive, healthier living change, the best place to start is right where you are, and to personalize your habits to fit you. What do you do well already? What do you struggle with? Recognize those things and simply look to improve. Asking the question, "how can I grow in this area" is better than the "what should I start or quit" approach. This causes you to start from where you are, vs. trying to be someone you're not. So, choose one or two things that you feel get you closer to being the person you want to be.

How do we apply this "start where you are" concept to fitness? Well, most of those who are looking to improve their health go about it by hiring a trainer, purchasing a plan or by just planning to exercise on most days of the week. Now, as a personal trainer and health coach, these are good goals, believe me. But many of us just aren't at the point where that's either realistic or sustainable. So why not look at your current level of exercise and simply look to improve. What more can you do than you're doing now? Can you add another period of exercise at some point during the week? Can you

exercise for a bit longer than you usually do? Instead of trying to find time to go to a gym, can you get up a few minutes earlier and do some calisthenics? Can you walk or jog in the neighborhood? There are countless ways to improve that don't involve sweeping holistic changes to your current lifestyle. And you'll find that when you take the approach of being a little bit better than you are right now, your fitness habits will start to grow.

Nutrition is also one of the areas where we often look to make drastic changes. So many times, I've heard things like, "I'm starting a new diet...grapefruit juice and vinegar!" Really? Look, if you want to eat healthier by consuming more vegetables or more water, or if you want to reduce the amount of added sugars in your diet, you can certainly try to go cold turkey. But if you want lasting change, you have to teach yourself to get more accustomed to the way you eventually want to eat, and that doesn't happen overnight. Especially when you consider how much practice you've had and how good you are at eating the way you currently eat. But what gets us to the point where we think drastic changes are needed is our desire to quickly reach our goals. We want instant or overnight results. But habit patterns develop over time, with practice. That's why they're called patterns. So, think about where you want to go, your goal, if you will. But also consider where you are right now, and what small steps you need to take to get just a little bit better tomorrow than you were yesterday.

Applying this approach to stress management, I'm reminded of the Bhagavad Gita, which is one of the holy scriptures in Hinduism. One passage from this scripture

states, “Far better to live your own path imperfectly than to live another perfectly.” I love this. As we think about stressors in life, I’m reminded of how much of our stress comes from the disconnect, the difference or the tension between who we are and who we want to be. Or between what is, and what we wish was. And this passage that reminds us to live our own path, to follow our own destiny is a reminder that we’re all different and that we can’t be someone else. And when we try to be someone we’re not, stress is the result. Oscar Wilde said, “be yourself...everyone else is already taken.” When you strive to be yourself, you’ll find that you’re so much closer to that goal than when you try to be someone else. And that’s a lot less stressful.

Let’s talk about marriage. Think for a second about who your favorite, most perfect married couple is...either in real life or fiction. I think you’ll find that in real life, no one is perfect, even if they appear to be. And in fiction, well, that’s why it’s fiction. It’s made up perfection. But both of those are ok, as long as we realize and accept reality. If you’re someone who wants to improve as a husband or wife, it’s healthy to strive to be like the perfect couple that you envision. But understand that you’re not them, and they’re not you. That’s not to say that you can’t grow in marriage. But as you seek to grow, consider your marriage as it is right now, as the starting point, vs. viewing someone else’s marriage as the goal. Start where you are. Love who you’re with. And grow together.

In parenting...I wish I was a perfect parent, but I’m not. I’ve certainly made mistakes as a parent. But my yesterday doesn’t define my tomorrow. And neither does

yours. I recently heard a story about a grandmother who never accepted, spoke to or acknowledged her grandson...because he was of mixed race. It wasn't until after the grandmother passed and the grandson graduated from college that the grandfather reached out to him. This grandfather decided that it wasn't too late to make amends. And as parents, we have to remember that too. There are times when our kids don't want to speak to us. There are times when they feel like they don't need us. And it's easy for a parent to say, "well fine...that's just the way it is." Well, that's the way it is if we let it be that way. Our job, as parents, is to show love...unconditional love. Because they do need us...even if they don't want to talk to us. If things have been rough in the past, you can always start from where you are to move forward.

And finally, in faith...if you're not a believer, it's easy to look at those who are believers and think, "I have to be better or more perfect to be a part of that crowd." Let me tell you that no group of people, no matter what they believe, are any closer to this idea of perfection than any other. Because it's not proximity to perfection that defines a person or group, rather it's their actions and mindset toward being better. For example, you can decide right now that you want to live a better life, be better to others, do more for those you know and don't know. And you would be just as close to God and viewed with the same amount of favor by Him as the person who has been consistently going to church for years, volunteering, giving and living a spiritual life. And that's because what we do doesn't get us any closer to God. Rather, what he did for us is what brings us close. God wants you just the way you are. He's not looking for perfection. And I'm so

thankful that that's the case. Because none of us are perfect. We can't be. And that's ok. But we try to live a Godly life because it's His will, not because it gets us any higher on the rung to perfection and eternal life. My belief and my faith are prime examples of starting where you are on the road to growth.

The third principle in making your growth about you is to prioritize your actions. Sometimes we find ourselves falling into the trap of just doing what others are doing. But once you figure out where you should start your growth journey, be it in fitness, nutrition, stress management, marriage, parenting or Faith, you don't want to choose just any and every approach. You have to choose what you will and won't do. You have to prioritize. And I mean choose just one or two priorities. If everything is a priority, nothing's a priority. Decide what you will do and what you won't focus on. Prioritizing is just as much about choosing what you won't do as it is about choosing what you will do. Some ways you might choose to decide the actions you'll prioritize are:

- Focusing on an area where you're closest to meeting a goal.
- Choosing the easiest thing for you to implement today.
- Picking an approach that excites you the most.
- Choosing a habit that will have the biggest impact on progress toward your goal.
- Or choosing something that will give you the biggest mental boost from a psychological win standpoint.

As you decide what's important to you, consider these things. And remember, trying to do everything usually means you won't be successful at anything. In making your growth about you, your priorities are key.

So, how do you prioritize what steps to take to improve your fitness? I mean, in a perfect world, I would find the perfect balance of cardiovascular activity, strength training, mobility work, and recovery. But if you lead an already busy lifestyle, it's hard to find time for everything. So, what do you do? The important thing to remember, particularly if you're in your mid 30s or older, is that what you actually do is oftentimes less important than the fact that you do something. So perhaps focus more on being consistent rather than spending a lot of time trying to determine the right mix of exercises. But within the different types of exercise, I'd recommend making cardio the priority because it's about heart health. Then mobility and flexibility work are important to ensure you're moving well. Then make sure you get some core work in, and finally don't forget the strength training. There's a lot to consider with fitness, but remember that you may not be able to do it all. And you can rotate your priorities from week to week too. Sometimes I'll be sure to focus on cardio as the priority for one particular week, but stretching and strength training will be the priorities the next week while I'm traveling from one hotel to the next. Put simply, stay as consistent as you can with movement and activity. And constantly reassess the things you have time for, and those that you don't have time for from week to week.

When it comes to nutrition, none of us are “perfect eaters.” So, what’s the best way to determine the dietary steps to take to still improve our nutrition? The easiest thing in my mind, and probably the one that will provide the most benefit in the shortest amount of time is to simply drink enough water throughout the day. When you are hydrated, you feel better, you move better, and your body functions more efficiently. Next, I focus on reducing or limiting those things that make me less healthy. Things like sugary drinks is a great place to start. I don’t necessarily advocate for quitting things like this cold turkey, but by taking steps to gradually reduce your added sugar intake, you’ll find that your health will improve. Next, start to incorporate things into your diet that add nutrition. Insert fruits and veggies where you can. And one final piece that is hugely important, but typically the biggest step for most is finding your individual plan for managing calorie intake. For many, this takes the form of calorie counting, portion control, or intermittent fasting. But remember, these don’t have to be drastic steps. Start where you are, choose an approach that works for you, and prioritize to make gradual changes.

As we dig deeper into the principle of making your personal growth more about you, and the subprinciple of prioritizing your actions, these principles are so important to the topic of stress management. In my life, much of my stress comes from the feeling of having too much to do...from being over-committed, stretched too thin, and from not having enough time to accomplish all that I feel like I need to. As I think more about this...whether it’s stress related to work, family, relationships, money or health, I can definitely see how being more diligent with my priorities can help to remove some of the

stressors from my life. I tend to have a bunch of priorities, some more important than others. But part of the theme with this principle of prioritizing is deciding what you're not going to worry about. Instead of having varying priorities, I should have a couple of priorities...period...and forget about the rest. We often put too much stress on ourselves. Let me say that again. We put too much stress on ourselves. That means it's not always external stressors that get us worked up, but it's the amount of time, thought and attention that we give to all of these things that really get us worked up. If you want to grow in your ability to handle stress, try being more deliberate about what you will worry about, and more importantly, what you won't worry about.

Let's shift to marriage. When it comes to prioritizing relationships, I am going to make a bold statement and say that your marriage is the single most important earthly relationship that you are a part of. Marriage is more important than work, it's more important than your pride and being right, it's more important than relationships with other family members, and it's more important than the relationship between you and your children. This may rub some people the wrong way, but I stand by this statement, and here's why. I've been involved in this military career for over 25 years. I've known my wife for 22 years. But my military career will eventually end. My marriage will endure. That's why my marriage is more important than my job. Marriage is also more important than my pride. I forget this sometimes, but the truth is that I can try to be right today, or I can look long-term and think about being together tomorrow. Disagreements and arguments aren't about being right. Instead, staying together and honoring one another is the ultimate goal. Here's another one...your marriage is more important than

relationships with other family members. I was very close to my parents for my entire life before they passed, but when I got married, my wife took the number one spot. This is rooted in scripture. And to take it one step further, your marriage is more important than the relationship you have with your children. That's because if you want to build and model the strongest examples of how children should behave and treat their partner, it starts with the example you set at home. Moreover, you can't effectively parent as a couple if you're not strong as a couple. My wife and I are better parents because we are a strong couple. When it comes to relationships, marriage should be the priority.

Speaking of parenting, how do I apply the priority principle to being a better parent? Let me give you some tangible examples. Like many of you, I have a demanding job. But even if you aren't working right now, if you're a parent, I'd argue that your job is even more demanding than the job I go to every day. The point is that we're all busy, for one reason or another. But despite how busy I am at work, and no matter how many people are depending on me in that setting to do my job, I know that there are two young ladies at home that also depend on me. They depend on me to be there when I say I'll be there. They depend on me to teach them things that will prepare them for life. They depend on me to love them like only a father can. And if I don't do these things, if I don't follow through with my word, if I don't teach them, if I don't show them love, they will eventually get these things from other sources...sources that I may have no control over. That's why I make it a point to break away from work when I can to see them off at the bus stop or to meet them there after school. That's why I try to keep a boundary between what I do at work and keeping it there versus bringing it home.

That's why I try to be present, and not distracted when I'm with my family. That's why I prioritize my family, even as I strive to uphold and maintain the responsibilities I have at work. When it comes to parenting, for me, prioritizing my actions takes on a whole new meaning.

Now, on to priorities in faith. If you've read the Old Testament, you're likely familiar with all of the rules and laws that were required to be kept to have a chance at being saved. But when you read the New Testament, the new law, the new "requirements," all of these thousands of old laws were stripped to their essence when Jesus taught us the Golden Rule...to love God and to love others. All of the other rules and laws, the Ten Commandments included, can be summed up by this simple rule. Love God and love others. Maybe you've felt overwhelmed by the perception that you have of what it means to live a life of faith. Perhaps you believe that there's no way that anyone, let alone you, can live up to the never ending expectations of what it means to be a believer. But it's not about what you do. It's about what God has done for us. You are already set free from the things that hold you down and seem to keep you from Grace. You're free because of what He did for us. He sent His Son to pay the price for all of our sins. So no, we can't live up to the expectation of perfection. And no, I can't follow thousands of rules. But I can love. I can love, worship and praise Him. Not because it's a requirement to be saved, but rather because that's what He did for us. That's the example that God set by sending his Son, Jesus, to pay the price for our sins. And I can love others too. Love God. Love others. If you're wondering what should be the priority in faith, there it is.

Our fourth principle in making it about you is to plan *your* next steps. Create your own path by choosing your focus areas and deciding your own next steps. You are the most important person, the one with the biggest impact on your growth journey. It's not your doctor. Not your spouse. Not your trainer or coach. It's you! So why do we sometimes allow ourselves to fall into the mindset of just going along for the ride? Perhaps at times we feel like others are more qualified. And while it may be true that professionals are trained in techniques, procedures and maybe the psychology of change and growth (I mean, as a personal trainer and health coach, I know how to coach change and growth), but the fact of the matter is that nobody knows you better than you. You are attuned to your preferences as well as the things that demotivate you. You know your history, your past attempts, successes and struggles better than anyone. You know your 'why' and that internal driver for change. I may help you to uncover some of that, but it's all inside of you. So, you have to be an active participant in the growth process. How do we do that? By setting your short- and long-term goals. By identifying your obstacles. By taking an active role. When you do this, your planned habits will be more realistic, appealing and fun, all of which are necessary characteristics for consistency. In practice, this looks like you choosing your focus area and not waiting for someone else to tell you where to put your time and effort. What fits within your life and what you can do right now? Get specific. And remember that involvement creates buy-in. When you play an active role in planning your growth, acting on your plan and seeing results, your confidence grows and you start to recognize all that you are truly capable of.

Let's talk about fitness. I recently read the book, Can't Hurt Me by David Goggins. It's packed with stories of David Goggins simply deciding that he wasn't going to let external factors prevent him from carrying out his plan, intentions and growth as an individual. The book contains some explicit storytelling of simply unbelievable feats of physical strength and fortitude, but there are also highlights of how and why these things were possible – through an undeniable mindset and realization that each of us is so much more capable than we think. So, as you plan your next steps to grow your fitness, are you letting external factors and other obligations dictate what you can't do and why you can't find time for exercise? Or are you committed to finding time to better yourself physically, given the hand you've been dealt? You can't create your own path by being a victim in your circumstances. You create your own path by controlling what you can control and by making decisions to do what needs to be done. When it comes to personal growth in the area of fitness, you can create your own path by deciding your next step and acting on it despite the limitations and setbacks the world tries to throw your way.

On nutrition, instead of asking the question, "what does this diet call for," consider making the statement, "this is what I'm going to do to improve my nutrition." Think about that for a second. It's more than just simply saying "I'm going to be my own person." This is you determining what the best course of action is for you right now, given your particular set of circumstances, at this particular time in your life, because you know yourself better than anyone. One of the areas where we stumble is in underestimating

our own strengths and what we're capable of. You are capable of so much more than you think. Society and marketing make us think we can't lose weight on our own. They tell us that we don't have the willpower to stick to our own plan for better nutrition. But again, you are more capable than you know. So, drink more water today. Manage your calorie intake in a way that works best for you. Add fruits and veggies in a way that works for you. Reduce the amount of sugar you consume, but go about it your way. You can do these things with nutrition.

You also have more control than you think when it comes to stress. We let stress get to us. Let me say that again. We let stress get to us. Think about it. It's not the things that happen in our lives or the circumstances that we must overcome. Rather it's how we let those things affect us. Someone dented your car in the parking lot while you were in the grocery store and they didn't leave a note. Now you have to deal with insurance and repair. So, it happened. How will you respond? This can be a stressor, or you can move on. You broke your ankle playing football. Now you're in crutches for the next few weeks. This can be a stressor, or you can accept it and live a new normal for a little while. You think you're going to get laid off at work. You can worry about it and let it stress you out, or you can focus on the things that you can control and not worry about the things you can't control. There are so many things that can get us down and cause us stress, but what I want to highlight here is that it's not actually the things that get to us. It's all in our approach in handling them. To paraphrase something that I recently read from the Daily Stoic, "Stressors are a fact of life. Being stressed, feeling stressed,

acting out in response to stress...that's a choice." Plan your next steps and control your responses to stressors.

In marriage, I am of the opinion that being deliberate in marriage can solve so many of the problems and issues that many married couples face. As we talk about planning your next steps in personal growth, when it comes to marriage, many of us have a tendency to just go through the motions and let the days come and go. But when you plan your next steps, when you're deliberate about how you treat your spouse, what you intend to do for him or her, how you plan to act, and how you'll work to listen, marriage takes on a whole new dynamic. It's more of give and take, back and forth, it's active, not passive. Give 100%, no matter what your friends, or even your spouse is doing. Love is a verb in marriage, not a noun. It's something you do, not something you uncontrollably fall into or out of. You have to invest time, energy and effort into your relationship. That's right, *your* relationship. Own it. Take responsibility. Be the husband or wife you need to be. That's how you take control of your actions and plan your next steps in marriage.

Parenting is another area where intentionality is key. I'm not just talking about being intentional with putting your kids in sports, or remembering birthdays. I'm talking about bringing all of yourself to this parenthood thing. Think about who you are as a parent, and who you want your children to become. Just like you envision yourself after reaching a fitness or nutrition goal, envision your children as adults, raising their children. What do those people look like? What do they value? Of all of the things that

my parents gave me, the things that I remember the most are the examples they set. Because those examples weren't typically one-time occurrences. They were consistent actions that were grounded in the things they valued. Many of which I also value now. What do you value? How do you impart those values while raising your children? Our kids will be exposed to the experiences of others, and to what they see in movies or on TV, and to peers. And as disconcerting as it is, we will not be able to control all of that. But what we can control is the message that we continue to send them every day. Messages about how much we love them. Messages about how we will always have their back. Messages about behaviors that we will accept and behaviors that we won't accept. Your kids don't need all of those other influences. They'll get them but they don't need them. What they need is us. They need us to embrace being parents and to be intentional with the precious gift of parenthood.

And finally, how do we determine our next steps in personal growth when it comes to faith? Well, the answer is written in God's word. Psalm 119:105 says "you are a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." What this means is that when we don't know what's next or what to do, God shows the way. We don't have to have all of the answers. He is there for us, to guide us and to show us the way. We're not meant to go it alone. God is there for us. But we do have an obligation to do something. We have an obligation to take action, and you either take action and do the things that are required for growth, or you don't. As 2 Corinthians 9:6 says, "you reap what you sow." This means the good and the bad. You get what you put in. Therefore, it's important that we

remain invested in God's plan for us, even if things aren't abundantly clear to us. Especially when things aren't clear. Trust in God and he will show you the way.

As we close this episode, remember that in order to grow, you need to make it about you. Identify your why. Start where you are. Prioritize your actions. And plan your next steps. Your growth depends on it, and you're more powerful than you know. You have more influence than you think.

Thank you for listening. And if you like this content and these topics, don't forget to spread the word. And leave a rating or comment. And as always, if you have feedback, let me know.

If you're looking for more of these principles and concepts to help you grow in different areas of your life, head over to tdfitness.net and download my "Principles for Personal Growth." It's a one-pager, it's free, and I created it for you.

As always, thanks for listening, have a blessed one. Coach T, out.