

This is the **DO IT SCARED PODCAST** with Ruth Soukup, **EPISODE NUMBER 65**. On today's episode, we are going to talk with one of the most inspiring couples you will ever meet, Chris and Emily Norton, about what it means to persevere even in the face of the most difficult circumstances.

Welcome to the Do It Scared podcast. I'm your host, **RUTH SOUKUP**, and each week on the show we will talk about how to face your fears, overcome obstacles, and, most importantly, how to take action and create a life you love.

Today's episode is brought to you by the Living Well Planner. I know that sometimes it can be hard to know exactly how to apply the lessons you're learning through this podcast on a practical, daily basis, but the Living Well Planner is the tool that was created to help you do exactly that. It is the only planner out there designed not just to keep you organized and help you keep track of your schedule, but to actually help you proactively identify your biggest goals and then stay focused on them all month long. It doesn't just help you get more done; it helps you get the most-important stuff done. That is ultimately what will make all the difference.

Right now, you can take advantage of our lowest price of the year on the Living Well Planner during our semiannual sale. You'll find it at livingwellplanner.com. But don't wait. This offer is only available for a limited time and only while supplies last. Once again, you'll find it at livingwellplanner.com.

Hey, there, and welcome back to the show. As always, my name is Ruth Soukup, and I am the founder of Living Well Spending Less and the Living Well Planner, as well as the founder of Elite Blog Academy, and the New York Times' bestselling author of six books, including my newest book, Do It Scared.

In today's incredibly powerful episode, we are going to be talking to Chris and Emily Norton, authors of the new book *The Seven Longest Yards*, which tells their own inspiring true story of courage and perseverance after Chris was paralyzed from the neck down in a college football accident. They first inspired the world when their video of Emily helping Chris walk across the stage at his college graduation went viral and was seen by more than 300 million people worldwide. Then, at their wedding, they again captivated the world with another walk down the aisle. Since that day, they have fostered more than 17 children, and adopted five girls, four of whom are sisters. They have so much insight and wisdom to share, not just on what it takes to push past the most difficult circumstances imaginable, but on how to look beyond your limitations to see what's possible.

And ultimately, that's exactly what this podcast is all about. It's about taking the

steps that will help us make necessary changes so that we can create a life we love, because in the end, courage doesn't mean we're never afraid; instead, courage is being scared but taking action anyway, despite our fear. It's putting one foot in front of the other, even when we're not quite sure where that path is going to lead.

All right, so, couple more quick things before we dive into today's episode. First, be sure to get all the show notes for this episode by visiting doitscared.com/episode65. Once again, that's doitscared.com/episode65. While you're there at doitscared.com, if you haven't already, be sure to take our fear assessment to discover how fear might just be showing up in your life, and to find out exactly what you can do about it.

Also, if you have any questions, or if you want to share feedback on this episode, you can send me a message on Instagram or just shoot me an email. I love hearing your thoughts and ideas for the type of content you would like to continue hearing on this podcast.

And now, without further ado, it is my honor to introduce you to Chris and Emily Norton.

RUTH: Welcome, Chris and Emily, to the *Do It Scared* podcast. Thank you so much for being on the show. It's awesome to have you here today.

EMILY: Yeah, thank you for having us. We're excited to be on here.

CHRIS: Yeah, thanks, Ruth.

RUTH: Yeah. Oh my gosh, okay, so, there's so much to both of your stories and so much that I want to talk about, I almost don't know where to start with it all. I was going through all the notes that I had. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, I don't even know how I'm going to keep this to 45 minutes." But let's just start at the beginning. For people who haven't heard of you, who don't know your story, give us the overview of how you got to where you are right now.

CHRIS: Yeah. A big starter for me came in 2010. I was playing college football at Luther College in northeast Iowa, which is a small school, small town, and I was just running down the field to make a routine tackle in our sixth game of the season. Well, I mistimed my jump just by a split second. Instead of getting my head in front of the ball carrier and colliding with my shoulder, my head hits him right on his legs, and in an instant, I lose all feeling and movement from my neck down. I'm face down, and I just can't move a thing. I'm trying to push off the ground, nothing's working. Little did I know, I suffered a severe spinal-cord injury.

I was flown out, had emergency surgery, and I was told I had a

3% chance to ever regain any feeling or movement back below the neck. Not a 3% to walk again; a 3% chance to move or feel anything below the neck, to scratch an itch on your face, to be able to feed yourself, so much more than just walking.

And then that was a new start for me, and then three years later, I was able to meet Emily. Then, Emily and I came together, and our first big goal that we accomplished was walking the graduation stage back in 2015. That video went viral, over 300 million views on that video, which a lot of people recognize for that. And then, we set our next big goal, which was to walk down the aisle of our wedding, seven yards, marking the seven-year anniversary since my injury. We also walked it side by side, which happened in 2018. So, that's [unclear 06:45] video also went viral and did a lot of media. So that's our quick synopsis of our story.

RUTH: Which there's a lot to unpack with that. Do you have anything to add to that, Emily?

EMILY: Oh, I would just say that I've always had a strong passion, since I was real young, to help kids in tough situations. When I was younger, I started mentoring and learned that there are kids in our country who don't have families, who don't have love, so that was just my passion was to really reach out and help as many kids as possible in these situations because I did come from such an amazing family with parents who always loved me, always supported me. And so that was just honestly my goal. So we have now become foster parents and adoptive parents. We are parents to five girls right now. We just adopted recently, within the last six months, and we're continuing fostering, which is such a huge part of our story and just many different things have led us to this point.

CHRIS: Seventeen children in all that we've fostered.

RUTH: Wow, that's a lot. That's amazing. And you guys have not been married for that long, so to have done all of that just... How long have you been married now, a little over a year?

EMILY: A little over a year, yeah. We started fostering, though, before we were married, so we've been foster parents for about three years.

RUTH: Oh, that's amazing.

EMILY: Yeah. So, there was a situation where a girl that I mentored when I was in high school, who we have now just adopted in December, she was 17, and she had nowhere to go. So she called us, like, "Hey, they're talking about putting me in a juvenile detention center or a group home until I age out of the system. Will you

guys please become my foster parents? I have nowhere else to go.”

That’s when we knew that we had to. I love her so much, I always had, had this huge connection, so that kind of pushed us into doing that out of our plan. What we felt like our plan was, God just had an amazing plan that was a bit different.

RUTH: Wow. Oh, that’s amazing. That’s amazing. So, you guys actually met after the accident had already happened. How did you meet?

CHRIS: Online.

RUTH: Online. Really?

EMILY: Yeah. So we met online and just had this instant connection. I knew Chris’s injury. I had looked him up, stalked him online. I was curious about it, wanted to learn more about just how he seemed to be so positive through such a life-changing moment with his injury. And so we just started talking and met up in person, and felt like I had already known him for so long. It was just an instant connection.

RUTH: Oh, that’s amazing. So, Chris, that is actually one of my questions. You have this accident, and you were obviously awake when it happened and couldn’t feel, and then you said... I watched your video, and you said you woke up the next day and thought it had been a nightmare, and it was real. What did you do at that point? Hearing those words from the doctor, “You have less than a 3% chance of ever feeling anything again below your neck,” how did you even begin to process that?

CHRIS: Yeah, I mean, at first it felt like I’d entered the Twilight Zone. My ears were ringing. My vision was blurry. It was just like, is this really happening to me, and just a stunning effect of, wow, this is my life. How can this be my life? Then it’s like sudden urgency came over me, and a panic. I can’t live like this. I don’t want this to be my life. I have to do whatever I can to get out of this situation. It was a sink or swim sort of thing, and I was going to do whatever I can to fight to get out of that situation that I was going to be part of that 3% and not that 97%.

So I had to take complete responsibility over my life and over my circumstance, although I didn’t choose it. I didn’t want to be in this situation. This is the last thing I wanted, where I wanted to be, but ultimately, I had to be responsible, though, for how I moved forward. That’s when I committed to do whatever I could each and every day to get better, just knowing that your future will

take care of itself when you take care of today. I was just really focusing just on one day at a time. What can I do today to get a little bit better?

RUTH:

Wow. So, how long did it take you from first hearing the news to get to that point of I am going to be part of that, that determination of going to be the 3%? Did you have to go through a grieving process? Was there a time where you were just pissed off?

I can't imagine. And I think anybody listening to that, your story is the extreme of a situation where you go, "Oh my gosh, I can't even imagine, if that would happen to me, how I would respond to that." But I think there's so many lessons to learn in the way that you've dealt with it for people to go... We were talking just before we came on. We were talking about my book *Do It Scared* that just came out, and you guys said that you have it, and so you probably know that's one thing that I talk about specifically is that it does not matter what happens to you, because we all have things that happen that aren't fair, and you have to decide to take 100% ownership. So how long did that take you?

CHRIS:

Well, it was a roller-coaster ride, so there was a lot of ups and downs. At first, it was this panic of, I'm going to beat this. I have to beat this. I don't have any other choice, and so I was motivated right from the get-go, I have to get through this. But then there was just moments that just knocked you down.

I'll never forget the first time that my nurses came in to bathe me with washcloths. They pulled back the covers to my legs, and just seeing my legs there for the first time, motionless, and them moving my leg up and down and I'm not being able to feel it, it's almost like someone else's legs, and them bathing me, just hit me so hard of just how far I have to go and where my situation was at. That was pretty devastating, seeing that.

There was a lot of just moments like that, that you had to grieve what was once before, and having to let that go. And I still have to grieve things that I can't control and things that I wish were different. And so it all depends on that stage of life.

The very first thing I had to grieve was being an athlete. That was my identity. I was this strong man, athletic person, and that's where I got my own personal value out of. Now that I don't have that anymore, where am I going to get my self-worth and my self-value? So those are some of the reflections I had to do moving forward.

It was just very small steps of just working hard and just discovering that my value doesn't come from my physical movements. People value me for who I am as a person, and the love and the joy that I give to the world. That's what really matters to people, not how quickly you can move or what you look like.

RUTH: I love that. So, the first goal that you really set after this whole accident happened was that you wanted to walk across the stage to get your diploma, and you did that, and that video of that moment—and, Emily, you were there, you helping him across the stage—that ended up going completely viral. How many million views has it had up to this point? I mean, a crazy—

CHRIS: Over 300, yeah.

RUTH: Over 300 million views. And truly, I can see why, because it is so, so inspiring. But I feel like—and you've touched on this a little bit, and I want to unpack it a little bit more—but I feel like sometimes moments like that, these amazing moments that everybody's watching, can feel so misleading because they almost gloss over all of the hard work and the sweat and the tears that go into that point. So what was that like for both of you? How did you get through it? And looking back, what would you say to anyone who finds themselves in that situation of having to push through something so, so hard that it seems impossible?

CHRIS: Yeah, I would say that there was plenty of times leading up to that moment where not only myself, but Emily, would question, what are we doing? Is this goal even worth trying? Are we going in the right direction? Should we keep going? Is this just all going to be wasted? Although we had the self-doubt and those questions that we were asking ourselves, ultimately we decided that we just need to keep going, that we felt like there was a part of us that felt we have to keep working hard.

And so I think just pushing past your own insecurities and your doubts of failure is such an important step. How I am able to work past that is just by taking action. When I'm frustrated, when I'm mad, when I'm doubting myself, I just have to, then, find something to do at that moment that I feel like is progressing myself. I think when you can find progress and know that you're working as hard as you possibly can, there's a part of you that feels a sense of peace in knowing that you're doing everything that you can.

So I would just say for everyone who wants a goal, they're pushing, they're doubting themselves, just when you find those

moments of doubt, just find something that you can do in that moment that's going to progress you towards that goal. I think when you just keep going and going, it just adds up. Those baby steps add up.

EMILY:

Yeah. And I would say that I think when I look back at it, the most amazing part to me is just how... A year before is when Chris was like, "I'm going to put this out in the public. I'm going to say that I want to walk across the stage at my college graduation, and be vulnerable and put it out there." And at the time, I did not even know how to walk with him. I couldn't walk with him at all. His therapist had tried helping me, and it was so hard to just be able to walk with him. I couldn't do it. We couldn't even take a few steps. That's where we were at. And he was using this big walker, so it was a goal that seemed almost impossible at the time.

Chris did not let that hold him back and let those fears—the fear of failure, the fear of putting himself out and not being able to accomplish it—get in the way, which I really admire, because that's something that's hard for me is just being vulnerable and putting myself out there. So I think when I look back at that, I think it's absolutely amazing he had this goal. Ever since he was injured, he had the goal to walk across the stage.

Then, I mean, he worked so hard, hours, every single day. We completely moved to another state to work on the training. Six hours a day, if not more, Chris was constantly working. We were watching a TV show, he's over there lifting weights trying to get his arms stronger, doing everything he possibly could to make this goal happen.

It was just so incredible at the end of it, because we had no idea that it was going to impact, that over 300 million people would see it and that it was going to give people hope and help others know that anything's possible. So that was cool, too, was there was that goal that God had put in Chris's heart that was so strong, and we didn't know the outcome of it, but he knew he was supposed to do it, and he did not let fear get in the way, and he did it. It was just so cool to see the way that God used that and how it was just all part of His plan, and that that was in him for a reason.

RUTH:

Wow. Was it crazy for you when it went completely viral?

EMILY:

Oh, yeah.

RUTH:

How did you even deal with that? Was it just this... I can't even imagine having that many people see this moment that you had worked so hard for, and then just the attention and all of that that came after that. What was that like for you?

EMILY: It was insane. It was. It was crazy. We did not expect it at all. We were just back in Iowa visiting after with family, had shorts and T-shirts, no dresses. And all of a sudden, here we are getting messages for interviews and going crazy trying to get outfits, trying to get ready. Then first time ever being on live TV and stuff was terrifying, so terrifying. It was definitely just a crazy whirlwind of moments and with all of that. It was pretty cool, though.

CHRIS: Yeah, they work fast. They'll be like, "Hey, can we come over in one hour?" I'm like, "Yeah, sure, you can come over in an hour." And it'd be people from all over the world. It's amazing how fast they can operate and get a hold of you.

RUTH: When it's hot news. So did it all happen all at once and then just fade away? And it's like, "What just happened?"

EMILY: Oh, yeah. Exactly, yeah.

CHRIS: Yeah. Then it's over, and then, yeah, back to normal.

RUTH: Back to normal. Now we're just regular people again. So, Chris, I love, actually, what you said about the taking-action part, because I think that there's so much wisdom in that also, of literally just taking a step and then taking another step and then doing the next thing and the next thing and the next thing, because that is what will help you overcome that fear every single day.

I've heard it said, and I wish I knew who said this, but that research shows that we are happiest as humans when we're striving for something, when we're actually reaching for something. It's not when we achieve the goal that we're happiest; it's while we're working towards it. Having that thing and then that next thing to keep working towards gives you the energy and the motivation to get up.

But, Emily, for you, this has been a really hard journey for you, too. Obviously, Chris's journey has been integral to your relationship and to your journey, but can you talk a little bit about your own struggles? I know you've struggled with depression. How has that fit into the bigger story, and how did Chris help you through that?

EMILY: Yeah, absolutely. Literally, right after the graduation walk is when I went spiraling down into a really dark time where I was very depressed and suffering with anxiety. I'm very independent. I want to do everything myself. I hate help from anybody. So I had a lot of different things that held me back from getting help and for suffering for way longer than I needed to.

When I was helping so many of the kids and hearing these stories of what they had gone through, I put that weight on my shoulders. In high school and college, I had just this sense of responsibility, like it's my responsibility to help them. They don't have anybody, and I'm the only one here. I had not yet learned to depend on God and put that on God, so it started getting to a point where it was so hard to carry all of that, and I would just bury it down and I wouldn't ask for help. I wouldn't let it out, felt like I could just do it all myself.

So I started feeling some different signs like that. I wasn't caring as much, and I'm somebody who cares very deeply and feels very deeply for other people who go through hard things. Even before the graduation walk, I started feeling that a bit, right after college. But I was very busy focusing on helping Chris make this goal happen—it was a good distraction—and I just buried it deeper. So right after the graduation walk, we didn't have that, things just came out quick.

I went through a time where I literally had no hope left. I felt like I was never going to be me again, went away from God, and it was too hard to admit and actually deal with what was going on because I hate feeling vulnerable and uncomfortable. I hate those strong feelings. So instead of those, I felt anger.

Our relationship really, really struggled. Chris didn't understand it. I didn't understand it. I didn't understand it at all. I couldn't admit that I was depressed or struggling with mental-health issues because I felt like I had never gone through anything difficult. I have never been abused like these kids I was trying to help, hadn't lost anybody at the time that was really close to me. So I did not understand it at all, so I pushed it off. I didn't accept it.

And that was another big reason that just held me back from getting help. I had this view that if I couldn't do this myself, that I was just screwed in life, because if something bad actually happened, I'm not going to be able to make it through that if I can't get through this. So, so many of these views that were so off from the reality. Obviously, when you're depressed, you have those views that are just so clouded. Everything was clouded.

I, again, hated getting help, hated it. I suffered for almost two years of it and went through just a really, really, really dark time because of how stubborn I was to get help. Then eventually, we started going to church again. I was able to get strength to just know that it's good to get help, that getting help is actually strength, not a weakness.

And I was able to make an appointment and go into a mental-health therapist and get on some medication, which absolutely changed everything. They told me, "In a few weeks, you're going to notice it, probably three weeks." I'll never forget, about three weeks later, just like the lady said, we were playing a game, and I had this thought where I'm like, "Man, my life is so good," and I had not thought that for so long. So that was a huge thing for me.

Afterwards, you're like, "Man, I wish I would've got help sooner," which is such a big reason that I'm putting this out there in the book, because I don't like being vulnerable. It's still uncomfortable and still scary for me, but I'm doing it anyway. Like you said, do it scared, like your book, I'm holding onto that, of doing it anyway because I know how important it is, and I hate that there are people out there who are feeling like that. I hope that my story helps people get help sooner and to just know that it's a strength to get help.

RUTH:

Wow. It's so true. I've dealt with depression also, but what you said really struck me about how you felt like it was almost like you felt like you didn't deserve to be depressed. Nothing had happened that would justify the way that you were feeling, and so you felt like it was this... like you had done something or you weren't strong enough or you weren't able to pull yourself up. Sometimes that's literally not the case. If the medication was able to help you that quickly, it was clearly a chemical imbalance. It's a disease just like anything else. It's not a sign of weakness.

RUTH:

Chris, how did you... That's a lot to deal with. Having gone through a serious depression, I understand how hard it is for family members to deal with that and to keep dealing with it, because the problem with depression is that it just doesn't go away overnight, and when it lingers for a long time, it can be really hard to stay supportive. How did you deal through that time, and what advice would you give to someone who's dealing with a family member who's struggling with depression?

CHRIS:

Yeah, it was a struggle. I really struggled with it. I didn't know how to help her, so that was tough. I want to help her, I want to do what I can to make her feel better, and I couldn't. I felt so helpless myself and out of control. I felt like it was even harder than what I went through with my spinal-cord injury, just because my spinal-cord injury, I knew what I could be doing to help myself to get a little bit better, and with Emily, when she was going through this tough time, I didn't know how to help her. That was really hard. And so I did all the wrong things at first. I'm like, well, I'm a motivational speaker. I'll just speak motivation to her, some tips

and tricks that had helped me.

RUTH: Oh, boy.

CHRIS: Yeah, but every time I did that, she'd go—

RUTH: I'm cringing right now, thinking about that.

EMILY: I know, right?

RUTH: How many times can I punch you in the face?

EMILY: Right?

CHRIS: Yeah, that's probably exactly what she said or looked like when I would try to do that. So, yeah, that didn't work. Then I tried to encourage her to get back into the things that used to bring her life and joy, and nothing was working. Yeah, it was hard because then I felt like ... Then I was starting to blame myself, too, that it's something that I did, it was something that I wasn't doing, that I wasn't good enough. It was just a really hard time, and I'm just glad it's over.

EMILY: Yeah, I would say that Chris is the only person that knew some of what was going on. My family is extremely supportive and has always been there, but they had no idea. I hid from everybody. I think that came from just feeling like I needed to... I've always been a perfectionist and feeling like I needed to just put on that persona like everything's good. I'm the one that takes care of everybody else. I don't need help. I'm good.

So no one had any idea, so that was... Chris knew a bit, and so I took out a lot of how I was feeling, the anger I was feeling, on him. So after I got on that medication, I'll never forget, we had just picked up Panera and we were sitting in the car, and I just broke down, crying, and was finally able to really apologize to him for the mean things I said. Again, I was in denial about what was happening, so I would blame it on like, "Well, you're not making me feel loved or cared about," which the only way I was going to get that was through God, which I realized later. But at the time, I was just trying to search for anything that could make me feel any better, and you'll never, ever be able to get that through a person. So yeah, he definitely got the worst of it. Then we were young, had no idea what was going on, extremely naïve to it, and we both just had no idea what to do.

RUTH: So, now knowing what you know now and through everything that you've gone through, what advice would you give? What

are the signs? What are some of the signs that you should have recognized, and what would you tell somebody who's starting to recognize those signs? I'm sure there are people listening to this right now who are thinking, "Oh, that's kind of me. I feel like I don't have a problem. I feel like I can't get help." What would you say?

EMILY:

I would say the beginning signs that I noticed was just starting to not feel a lot like myself, feeling like I was losing who I am and who I have always been. Then, I was shutting down a lot of my feelings and emotions. I was totally not feeling very much of anything—not joy, happiness, sadness. The only really thing I was feeling was a lot of anger. I was definitely not feeling the way that I always had, which was a big thing.

And then, just way more tired and headaches. There were so many times... There was multiple times I was like, "Well, there's something wrong with my thyroid. It's messing with my emotions and everything going on," because my family has had thyroid issues. I was like, "That's it." I went in and got that checked. Everything's good. Oh, my heart rate is 100 resting, trying to lay down and sleep. That must be a problem with my heart. I went in and tried to get my heart checked out. Everything was good. Oh, maybe it's a brain tumor. I wanted it to be something physical. I'm getting headaches all the time; it's got to be something physical.

But I still remember when I would go in and they would ask me questions of "Are you feeling depressed or anything?" I would always say no, because I never could... But even when I was going in, saying my heart rate's 100 when I'm just trying to sleep and I can't sleep because it's so high, I would never say, "Oh, but I'm not feeling quite like myself, not feeling really anything." I could never admit it. I even remember like, "Oh, well, maybe it's anxiety." I was like, "No way, it can't be anxiety. What do you mean? I've got to have a heart problem."

So that would be, I guess, really just... Those things are big signs. And just admitting that something's going on, and there's nothing wrong with you. I felt like I was crazy if there was something going on mentally, like I wasn't strong enough, like I was weak if I couldn't do it, just knowing that the chemicals get messed up sometimes.

Just like if you go break your arm, you're going to go to the hospital and get it fixed. Chris broke his neck; he had to have surgery, or he'd be dead right now. Those are the same thing.

Those medical things that are wrong, it's the exact same thing with a mental-health issue, that you can't just not get help, because I was dead on the inside, too. I completely was feeling dead, and life kept going.

I would say just going and getting the help you need and talking to somebody about it and not burying it down. It's going to be really hard for a while, but you have to face it. If you don't face it, you're going to continue suffering. You just absolutely have to take that first step and face it.

RUTH:

I love that. So, switching gears just a little bit, one of the most incredible parts of your story for the two of you is just your heart for kids, the fact that you've fostered 17 kids already and then adopted five. It's incredible. You guys are so young. That's amazing. Can you share a little bit more about that journey, what that's been like for you? How did you come to that point, and what is your day... I'm even curious, what does your day-to-day look like? Is it crazy?

EMILY:

Yeah. No, absolutely. We love fostering so much. It is by far the best thing I've ever done, and adopting as well. Those have been moments that have just filled our hearts with so much joy, but it's definitely been hard as well. I would say so strongly that things that I learned when I went through the depression and anxiety have helped me to be a foster and adoptive parent. It helps me to understand the kids more when they're feeling alone, and not letting them feel like that, and fighting to not let them push us away is a huge thing.

Then, also, it has helped me to depend on God. We have had so many kids come into our home with stories and abuse and neglect that they've gone through that could literally ruin you. If you really got into, like I used to, and put that on my shoulders, it would take and steal all my joy away. But instead, I'm able to know that I can't do it all, but God can. So I'm able to give the weight and give that heavy stuff to God and surrender it to Him, and then just get to work every single day doing what I can do. Letting go of what's out of my control has been huge, and just really focusing on being in the moment and meeting the kids where they are and doing what you can and then letting go of everything else.

So, yeah, we have five kids right now, the ones that we've adopted. We are also continuing fostering, but we're going to be gone for about a month visiting family in Iowa, so we're not doing it for a while. We're taking a break. We just had seven kids about a month ago, so that was a bit crazy. But we did it. It worked.

CHRIS: Made it happen.

EMILY: We made it happen. It was worth it.

RUTH: Chris, you're very quiet during this conversation. You have anything to add?

EMILY: Yeah, right?

CHRIS: I was terrified going into it. I was thinking, "How can I be a dad?" I was thinking about the worst. Our first kid that we brought in, and not really a kid, Whittley was 17 years old with a laundry list of behaviors, and I was like, "Can we do this? What if the worst happens?" I'm like, "How can I protect you if something goes wrong?"

I had all these crazy fears, but Whittley and every kid, they just need a stable environment. They just need some love. They just need to feel like they're appreciated. And they don't get that. They've never gotten that. They've been told the opposite. And so that's really opened my eyes of what we're capable of doing, and just how other people are out there who don't feel that. It's just amazing that anyone can really make someone feel loved and special and appreciated. That's a quality that we all carry. That's what I realized, too. I don't need any physical movements to be able to do that and to be a father or to be a husband. That has kind of been a discovery for myself.

And it's also, when you have a 17-year-old in your care who's six and seven years younger than you, there's just some pretty fun moments, too. When I had to pick her up when she was sick from school, I get in there, and I tell the nurse, "I'm here to pick up Whittley." She looks at me funny, and she says, "Well, students aren't allowed to check out another student." Of course, Whittley is trying to be like, "No, no, that's my dad." Then the look on her face, just like, "What? How does that work?" trying to do the math in her head.

RUTH: Trying to figure it all out. Oh, that's funny.

EMILY: Yeah, there was a lot of moments like that, which was always funny. We were at the doctor's just for a checkup, and the nurse, when Whittley told her I'm her mom, she asked how old I was, and then she's looking down at the paper, that Whittley's 17, and like, "Wait, she's 24? How does this work out? This doesn't make any sense." She felt like she needed to explain to Whittley that it wasn't possible, because she thought Whittley really thought that. It was like, oh gosh. Those are the funny things that kind of just

help you through the hard moments.

Then when a child comes, they're like, "I feel special." There's been multiple times, doing the smallest things, where one of the kids has just for the first time, it feels like, realized that they're special, something that every single person, every single child, should know. Having those moments where they realize that, or they open up about something for the first time when they used to be so closed off and pushing you away and where they feel like they're really loved, or they're getting these skills that you're trying to teach them of finding the good and being appreciative of what you have instead of focusing on what you don't have, when you see those moments where you see those changes, it's just always been worth it. It's been amazing. Even through the hard moments, even through the goodbyes, which are really hard, we just hold onto what we were able to do and focus on that.

RUTH:

That's amazing. I would think that, and you can speak to this, and maybe I'm completely off base, but I would think that even, Chris, for those kids to see your attitude and the way that you've persevered through adversity would be such a hugely inspiring day-to-day lesson for them, because these are kids that are going through a lot themselves, and it would be easy for them to sink into "I'm going to feel sorry for myself. My life has been so rough. Why should I try?" type of attitude, which obviously you've never taken on. Do you ever see the impact of that, or has there been ever moments where they've acknowledged that?

CHRIS:

Yeah.

EMILY:

Oh yeah.

CHRIS:

What's really nice is you can see my challenges. Everyone can see my physical challenges, so it's a lot easier for me to speak on that when it's just so readily before them to be able to visualize. That's been really helpful, and a tool to be able to relate to the circumstances and the situations that they're going through when they're focusing on what they can't do or what they don't have, and just how to go through that process.

I talk about it all the time, but I have a privilege to be able to inspire people just by them looking at me and just being able to talk to them. Most of our challenges, though, however, you can't see. I think it's also really important that you treat everyone, though, with respect and kindness, whether you see their challenges or not.

EMILY:

Yeah, and I would say literally just a few days ago, Chris had the

most amazing conversation with one of our daughters who has been struggling. She's just been in a little bit of a rut of feeling like she's not good enough because of things that have happened, and just questioning her worth because of those things. Chris just had the most amazing conversation where he was able to really relate with her of right after his injury and having those same sort of feelings of being in a wheelchair and what that meant, of if he's still worth it and he's still good enough, or those self-esteem issues with wondering if he could be confident and love his life in a wheelchair, with his circumstances, with the things that have happened.

I saw a night-and-day difference with our daughter. She woke up the next morning smiling and in a good mood. I was like, "Did that help, that conversation last night?" and she's like, "Yes, that was so helpful." I had just tried having this conversation with her, and I'm like, "Chris, I don't know what to do. She's really struggling with her confidence." I was like, "Go talk to Dad about this." I sent her right to him—

RUTH: Call in the motivational speaker.

EMILY: Exactly. He was able to relate a little bit more with those feelings. Yeah, it just absolutely helped a ton.

RUTH: Oh my gosh, that's amazing. Obviously, it's not hard to see that you're very inspiring, which makes sense that you would become a motivational speaker, because how can you not, really? Your story is so, so amazing. But when you are up there on stage, I'm curious, what is the one thing that you always hope that your audience takes away from your message? When you get up there, if they only take away one thing, what is it going to be?

CHRIS: I really hope that their perspective on their challenges and their life shifts. I think a lot of times the conversations I have afterwards, people are just like, "I'm going to stop complaining and sweating the little things in my life," and they get the bigger picture on life and just appreciating what they do have. I think that's just such a powerful shift.

I think there's always this sense, I do it too, where you always want more. You always wish you could have this or that. I think with my story and what I've gone through and what I've discovered, it gives people that ability to take a step back and really take their life in and appreciate everything that they've been given. Then, also, it gives them the courage to work through their challenges that they are facing, the storms and the battles that they're in, that they can get through it. They just have to keep

going and not give up.

RUTH:

I love that. So you guys are pretty busy with all the kids and all the things, and you got a new book coming out, which I guess we should talk about the book also. But I'm just curious how you practice self-care for the two of you. You're still newlyweds. How do you make sure that in the midst of all this other stuff, you're taking care of yourself and nurturing your relationship and making that part of your day-to-day routine?

CHRIS:

Well, it's still a work in process. It always will be, as things change and our schedules change and what new things are going on and what seasons of life we're in. But something that I think that we have been doing a pretty good job of is at night after the kids are in bed, that's when we can just talk and have our conversations. For me, I know that Emily feels loved and appreciated with that attention and with those conversations, and that fills her up. Then just recognizing that what I need, whether it's physical touch and just our alone time, just the two of us, is something that... Just recognizing what the other person, how they feel loved, is important. That's the self-care, I think, that we do.

EMILY:

Yeah, for our relationship. I would say for me it's getting in the Bible and reading God's Word and just trying to process that and how it works in our life. That's where I get a lot of my help and fills me up. And then journaling has been helpful recently. I always get in a bad habit of not doing it, and then when I do it, I'm like, "Man, this helps a lot. I need to keep doing it," writing down prayers and just what's going on. So that's been helpful. And, yeah, just trying to take some time for yourself, too, to make sure, do what makes you come alive and what fills you back up.

RUTH:

Yeah, absolutely. So, your new book is *The Seven Longest Yards*, and it is really your love story, right? Let's talk a little bit about the book. We've talked a little bit about your story. But specifically, what inspired you to write this book and to put it all out there for people, and what are you most hoping people get out of it?

CHRIS:

Yeah, I think that we want to give people who are hopeless, hope. We want to encourage people to just take one step in front of the other and just to keep going, even if you don't know where you're going, just to go, and like we talked about, just taking action. We hope that our struggles and the low moments that we've had will give them the courage and the strength that, "Okay, because they kept going and they've been able to get to where they're at, we can do the same. We're not different than Emily and Chris."

I think it'll be really relatable. I think you see on social media or

you see in the news media, you see this great wedding of ours, we see this graduation walk, this wedding walk, these beautiful moments, but like we talked about before, the struggles and everything that led to those moments is what really matters and what really counts, and I think will really relate to people, because the walks themselves have been the easiest part of our journey. It was everything getting to that point that was difficult. And so I hope people see that and will give them the courage to keep going.

EMILY:

Yeah. I think that's a big thing is just offering hope. Again, it was hard for me to share this story of depression and anxiety and really putting myself out there. I've never been feeling so vulnerable about something. But I know what it's like to be in that situation, and it just breaks my heart knowing that there are others who are feeling like that right now. That's why I wanted to write about that in the book, is just so other people know they're not alone, and to hopefully help them to get help sooner and look at help as a strength and not a weakness.

Then, also, I really hope to encourage others with foster care, to just get involved some way, somehow, or adoption, because there are so many kids in our country and around the world who just don't even know what love is. I'm really hoping to raise a little bit of awareness about that, and just to help others know that when you put God in the first place, everything falls in the right place, and how much that can help your relationship with your kids, with your spouse, with everyone, and just finding what makes you come alive and doing it.

RUTH:

I love that. So how do you get started with fostering? What does that process look like?

EMILY:

Yeah, so there's a bunch of... There would be an agency in your area that is a licensing agency, sometimes it's through your state, that they will license you. You do background checks and all that kind of stuff. They make sure that that's all good. Then you have to do some classes. We did ours in a few months. We did a fast-track pace to get all the classes and everything done. Sometimes it takes a little bit longer.

But it would be just reaching out. There's orientation classes with the agencies where they talk to you about foster care, what it's like, what to expect, the process to do it. A lot of paperwork. It's not too bad, though.

RUTH:

Lot of paperwork. I can imagine. All right, so aside from the book, which is very exciting, and having launched a book, I know how

much work and everything goes into that, is there anything else you guys are working on right now that has you really fired up?

CHRIS:

Yeah, there's a couple of projects. This summer will be our first wheelchair camp for families and kids. I have a foundation that helps other people with physical challenges, and one of our new initiatives is to put on a free camp for kids in chairs and their families. It's all paid for to do archery, ziplining, water sports, just regular sports, just everything you would do at camp, doing it in an adaptive way and just building an environment that's uplifting and supportive. That's really exciting for me.

We have a film coming out, as well, called *Seven Yards*. That's a documentary film on our story, which we don't know what platform it will be on, but we're in some pretty exciting conversations right now. So we're looking forward to that.

Then my motivational-speaking career has just been growing, and I'm thankful that we have that. And just being parents is just really exciting, and just the growth, the development, the stages that they're going through is always exciting. Those are definitely a few things that we're kind of fired up—

RUTH:

Just a few things, a movie, a camp, 17 foster kids, just the typical stuff that everybody's doing. You guys are amazing, and I'm so inspired by this conversation. So we have one final question that I always ask everybody on the podcast. It's, what is the best piece of advice that you have ever received, and why?

CHRIS:

I would say, for me—I heard it from a friend—he told me, do what you have to now so that you can do what you want to later. I'm sure that's a quote by somebody. I don't know where it came from.

RUTH:

Totally plagiarizing people right now, but it's okay.

CHRIS:

Yeah, exactly. But it just resonated. I heard it pretty early on with my injury, and it just reminded me that you just have to do the hard things, that you're not always going to feel motivated every single day, but just to still work on it and still take action, whether you're motivated or not, and just doing what you have to so that you can get where you want to. That just resonated so deeply with me, and I always remind myself of that, to do the hard work, to do the things that's not always fun, the things that maybe not is Instagram-worthy or it looks cool, but you know it's worth it and it's going to add value to other people, because that's what we really focus on is the value and the why and the other people that might be struggling who need help, so just doing the hard things.

EMILY: Yeah, and I would say that, like I've already said, is getting help is a strength. It's a strength to do that, from God, from others. Just being vulnerable is what brings us together and connects us, and just being okay with that, because that's why I am able to be a foster parent, an adoptive parent, and deal with these hard things is because I'm able to let it go to God and get that help through Him and through others when needed.

RUTH: Oh, I love that so much, and I love that we got two pieces of advice for the price of one today. Thank you. Chris and Emily, thank you so much for being on the podcast today. Is there any final words of wisdom that you want to leave our listeners with? Then, also, please let us know where we can find your book and where we can find you online.

CHRIS: Nothing comes to mind as far as piece of advice. Everything that we've been talking about, I feel like, has been our heart and what we're all about, unless Emily has something of wisdom.

EMILY: I agree.

RUTH: It was so good, there's nothing left to say, really. It was like truth bombs left and right.

CHRIS: Exactly. I would say, too, you can connect with us through social media, We're pretty active with that—Instagram, Facebook. My website's chrisnorton.org.

Another way, too, if people want to get the first two chapters of the book, a way that we've been giving it out is just by texting the message *seven yards* to the number 44222. Again, if you just text *seven yards* to the number 44222, you can get the first two chapters and also the movie trailer. And *seven yards* can be the number 7 or just written out seven, but a way to get the book and our trailer and information on us.

RUTH: Oh, that's awesome. I love that. We will make sure that we add all of those links to our show notes as well. Chris and Emily, thank you again so much for being here today. Such an inspiring story. I wish you both the best in all your endeavors.

EMILY: Yeah, thank you.

CHRIS: Thank you, Ruth.

EMILY: You too.

Okay, so, don't forget that if you would like to get all the show notes for this episode, along with the links to everything that we just talked about, you can find it all at doitscared.com/episode65. Once again, you can get all the show notes and links on our website at doitscared.com/episode65.

And don't forget, while you're there at doitscared.com, to take our free fear assessment to find out exactly how fear is showing up in your life and, more importantly, what you can do about it.

And then before we go, I just want to say, as always, that I love hearing from you. If you have any questions about what we talked about today or any other topics that you would like to see addressed on the Do It Scared podcast, please feel free to reach out either via email or just by messaging me on Instagram.

Don't forget that today's episode was brought to you by the Living Well Planner, the practical tool designed to not just organize your time, but to proactively identify your biggest goals and then stay focused on them all month long. It doesn't just help you get more done; it helps you get the most-important stuff done, and that is ultimately what doing it scared is all about. Be sure to take advantage of our lowest price of the year on the Living Well Planner during our semiannual sale, which is happening right now at livingwellplanner.com.

And that about does it for this episode of the Do It Scared with Ruth Soukup podcast. Thank you so much for joining me today. And if you liked what you heard, you can leave a review on iTunes or, better yet, share this episode on your Insta story and tag me to let me know. If I repost your story, we will send you a "Do It Scared" T-shirt just for fun. Also, be sure to subscribe, either on iTunes or wherever you like to listen, to be notified of new episodes.

And speaking of upcoming episodes, be sure to join me next week as we continue our "summer of courage stories" by talking with author, blogger, and my dear friend JoAnn Crohn about letting go of your mom guilt for good and about how persistence is really the only thing that matters. JoAnn is the founder of No Guilt Mom, as well as the creator of several amazing courses for kids, including Homework 911 and Tame Your Morning Chaos. She has a ton of wisdom to share, both as a mom and a former teacher, and as a business owner. Next week's episode definitely runs the gamut to talk through all those different things. It's an episode packed with golden nuggets that you won't want to miss. I will catch you then.

