



# RAISING THE PERFECTLY IMPERFECT CHILD

Facing the Challenges with  
Strength, Courage, and Hope

BORIS VUJICIC  
FOREWORD BY NICK VUJICIC

Praise for  
*Raising the Perfectly Imperfect Child*

“Everyone knows that Nick Vujcic is a remarkable man of great courage, passion, and grace. But most people do not know the person who invested the most in shaping Nick’s character. In this wonderful book, you will discover a father’s loving heart for the son he did not quite expect—and you will learn that there is much more to successfully raising a child with a disability than you’d ever imagine. I highly recommend *Raising the Perfectly Imperfect Child* to anyone who has questions about bringing up a special-needs son or daughter. Actually, its powerful and very personal message will bless *any* parents who long to show the unbiased love of Christ within their family. Read it and be blessed!”

—JONI EARECKSON TADA, Joni and Friends International  
Disability Center

“This book is a profoundly moving, triumphant testimony of what it means to be an extraordinary parent. Embracing who your child is, coupled with unconditional love, high expectations, and faith all open the door to unlimited possibilities. *Raising the Perfectly Imperfect Child* is a deeply inspirational, heart-wrenching, and heartwarming journey that shines a bright light on exemplary parenting.”

—ROBIN BERMAN, MD, author of *Permission to Parent:  
How to Raise Your Child with Love and Limits*

“I am so excited about this book. As someone who lost an eye to cancer at the age of five, I know my parents would have welcomed such an invaluable resource. Nick is a shining example of how strategic parenting can position us imperfect children to make a world of difference. Thank you, Boris, for this important tool.”

—LISA BEVERE, Messenger International, best-selling author  
of *Lioness Arising*, *Kissed the Girls and Made Them Cry*,  
and *Fight Like a Girl*

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*This book is dedicated to all those who have helped my wife and me to encourage and support Nick over the years, especially to our other children, Aaron and Michelle, as well as to our daughter-in-law Kanae, our parents and family members, and, of course, God, our primary Source of strength through Christ Jesus.*

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## Foreword by Nick Vujicic

I was born without limbs, and my disabilities have brought many challenges, yet I've often said anyone who grows up without loving and supportive parents has far more to overcome than I did. I can't imagine how difficult that would be.

My father and mother were always there for me. That's not to say they coddled me or gave me everything I wanted. As my father notes in this wise and insightful book, my grandparents and others often wondered how my mother could not rush to help me as I struggled to stand as a toddler.

"Let him figure it out," my mum would say. "He needs to do things for himself."

I admit this approach sometimes annoyed me, especially when my parents required me to earn my allowance by vacuuming the house, cleaning my room, and making my bed. Then there were the many long nights Dad drilled me on math problems while my idle Nintendo games called me to come play.

I understand now that they were being good parents. They worked to instill a strong work ethic, personal responsibility, and a foundation of faith in me and in my brother and sister as well. They also told me nearly every day that there were no limits on my life. "You may lack limbs, but you can do anything you want," they said.

Later my father and mother may have wondered if they were too successful at giving me the roots and wings to become an independent adult. At the age of nineteen, I announced plans for my first international speaking tour. I had arranged to travel to South Africa with the goal of giving away twenty thousand dollars in savings to needy orphans there.

My parents strongly objected to this audacious plan, as you might imagine. They were concerned for my safety while journeying through a rugged part of the world in a wheelchair. And they were shocked that I would dish out my hard-earned nest egg at such a young age.

I reminded them that they'd always said there were no limits on my life, and every single night of my childhood they'd made sure I prayed and asked God to help the poor children of the world.

"You planted the seeds for this!" I said.

They were not amused, but they did not stand in my way. Mum and Dad are still sometimes taken aback by my big dreams and adventurous spirit, but they are always encouraging and willing to pitch in.

They are not perfect, of course, but to borrow from this book's title, they are "perfectly imperfect." The older I get, the more I realize the parental warnings and rules that bothered me in my teen years were actually signs of a caring mother and father preparing me for a productive and accomplished life.

Still, it is a little disconcerting to consider that my father has been proven right about nearly everything he cautioned me against, warned me to avoid, or emphatically told me not to do! There were so many times I thought he was dead wrong, but as it turned out, he was usually dead right.

My father always seems to be three steps ahead of me. I have this nagging feeling I will never catch up. Sometimes as a child I wondered if there was more than one of him or if he had superpowers. He juggled three jobs, started several churches as a lay pastor, and helped my working mum do all it took to raise a disabled daredevil and two other lively kids.

Yet whenever we needed Dad, he miraculously appeared.

This occurred on the night after I'd tried to drown myself in the bathtub and then told my little brother my plan to commit suicide before the age of twenty-one. My parents didn't know about the suicide attempt, and neither

did my brother. But Aaron went to Dad and told him what I'd said about killing myself before I turned twenty-one.

My father came to my room and talked calmly to me. He offered assurance that mum and he loved me, that my brother and sister loved me, and that God loved me too.

Then my dad sat on my bed and gently stroked my hair until I fell asleep. I will never forget that.

Oh, we do still bang heads because we are so much alike. We have the same intense drive and strong-willed temperament. He predicted that I will probably butt heads with my kids too. When we announced that Kanae was pregnant with our first child, he smiled and said, "Now you'll see what it's like to be a father."

Once again, Dad was spot on. I tell my son Kiyoshi to pick up his toys. I will one day make him do chores to earn his allowance. Already at night, I remind him to pray and ask God to help the poor children around the world. Then I put my chin on his head and nuzzle him until he falls asleep. I hope he never forgets that.

Perfectly imperfect sons become perfectly imperfect fathers. I pray that I'm as good a parent as my mother and father. Still, I can think of one thing I will do differently with my son. When Kiyoshi comes to me at the age of nineteen and announces that he's traveling to some faraway place to give all his savings to the orphans, I will say, "I'm coming with you!"

Thanks for everything, Mom and Dad. You prepared me for a ridiculously good life. You encouraged me to pursue a life without limits, and you showed me how to love without limits.

Kanae and I will do the same for our children.

Love,

Nick

One

# The Perfectly Imperfect Child

Accept, Love, and Learn  
from Your Unique Child

My wife, Dushka, and I were excited and more than a little nervous. The prenatal tests had looked fine for the baby. There'd been no problems at all during this pregnancy. When the baby made it known that he was ready, my wife went to the delivery room with the doctor and nurses. I prayed while waiting for the call to join her, adding to the hundreds of prayers I'd offered up in the preceding months.

Dushka was a nurse and a midwife. She and I were well aware of the potential for problems in a pregnancy and during the delivery. So many things can go wrong. I'd often thought a normal birth is a miracle.

Since this was a first pregnancy, we knew the delivery might take a long time, and it did. Twelve hours of labor passed before the call came and I was allowed into the room. The first thing that struck me was the joy in my wife's eyes. I shared her elation when I looked to the tiny form resting upon his mother's chest: a baby boy with two arms, two legs, and a beautiful face.

He was a perfectly formed, beautiful child of God.

*Our first grandchild!*

My beaming son, Nick, the proud father, was at the bedside of his wife, Kanae, the mother. It was a miracle! Nick was euphoric, so happy he seemed to levitate over his wife and newborn son, nuzzling them, kissing them, reassuring himself they were real—his own family at last.

This was a moment Nick, Dushka, and I had hardly dared to dream about. We'd feared that because he had been born with neither arms nor legs, Nick would never find a wife or have a family. But within two short years, what had seemed impossible had become a reality. Nick had met and won the heart of a beautiful, soulful, and spiritual young Christian woman, Kanae Miyahara.

One year and one day after their marriage, their son Kiyoshi was born.

### TAKEN BY SURPRISE

Seven months earlier, Kanae and Nick had done their best to make the surprise announcement of her pregnancy memorable—and they certainly succeeded. We gathered at Nick and Kanae's home for a belated Father's Day party because Nick had been traveling. Our daughter, Michelle, was visiting, so she joined us for a wonderful dinner prepared by Kanae. After the main course, Kanae brought out a cake for dessert. We wondered at first if she'd lost her usual graceful touch as a decorator. Half of it was covered in blue icing. The other half was pink. We were clueless about the purpose of this color scheme. We took the cake but not the hint.

I didn't even catch on to her little secret when Kanae asked, "Okay, Dad, do you want a blue slice or a pink slice?"

"Blue," I said.

Dushka didn't pick up on the hints either. In fact she didn't want any cake at all.

I'd already started eating my blue cake when Kanae said with a laugh, "Well, obviously my hints didn't work for you."

I was way behind the learning curve as usual, but Dushka and Michelle screamed out, "You're pregnant!"

The not-so-subtle symbolism of the blue-and-pink cake finally became

clear to dull-headed Dad. I joined in the celebration of Father's Day—the first time I had shared the holiday's guest-of-honor role with my son, the father-to-be.

Our first Father's Day together was truly one of the highlights of my life, and it was made all the sweeter by the emotional journey we had traveled with Nick through his childhood and into manhood. We'd had no idea that Nick would be born without limbs, and though doctors reassured our family time and again that it was not an inherited trait, we certainly were relieved when Kiyoshi was born with all the standard-issue appendages.

The arrival of our grandson washed away any lingering pain from the grief and fear we experienced when his father was born. Such a contrast between those two events in our lives. Such relief that God had a different plan for our grandson.

Yet by the time Kiyoshi was born, I'd come to have a much different view of what constitutes a perfectly made human being. My wife and I were lifelong Christians, yet we had each experienced a crisis of faith when Nick was born. We could not believe that a loving God would burden us with such a severely disabled child. Was He punishing us for reasons neither of us could fathom?

We would come to realize our reaction was very typical for the parents of a disabled child, but at the time we lacked perspective. We also lacked the power to look into the future and see what was in store for Nick, who eventually proved to be an incredible blessing, not only to our family, but also to millions around the world.

## WONDERFULLY MADE

With our limited vision, Dushka and I could foresee only struggle and anguish for Nick and for us. We were so wrong, of course. Our son and our

experiences with him have enriched our lives beyond measure and taught us many lessons at the heart of this book. Nick gave us a new definition of the ideal child and a deeper appreciation for the complexity of our Father's divine vision.

Nick taught us to find new meaning in the psalm that says we are “wonderfully made.” We came to see Nick as God's beautiful creation, lovingly formed in His image. We lacked the wisdom, initially, to understand that. We saw Nick as disabled rather than enabled. We could not grasp that his missing arms and legs were part of God's unique plan for our son.

When people around the world see Nick, they understand immediately that he had to overcome substantial physical and emotional challenges. They can imagine what it must have taken to build such a positive and remarkable life as a speaker and evangelist who travels the world helping others and giving hope to all. For that reason, when Nick speaks to them with messages of inspiration and faith, they are moved and impacted in profound and life-changing ways.

Dushka and I know now that Nick and Kiyoshi and all children are perfectly formed. It took us a long time to attain that knowledge. We went through many difficult days and nights to reach that enlightenment. The low points were deep. Yet all the pain and frustration we endured while parenting our remarkable son has only made his victories and achievements all the sweeter and more meaningful.

## TWO VERY DIFFERENT BIRTHS

The arrival of a first grandchild is a special moment for every grandparent. When I saw Nick place his forehead to that of his newborn son and nuzzle him for the first time, my soul soared. Nick's birth was such a shock and so frightening. Kiyoshi's was just the opposite—an incredibly blissful experience.

Kiyoshi was born with a normal body and thus seemed perfect to all who viewed him. Yet just as we had no vision of the life Nick would create, we cannot foresee what God has in mind for our grandson. Will our “perfect” grandson be able to follow and surpass the achievements of his “imperfect” father? There are some big shoes to fill, but I don’t think that is really important. I want Kiyoshi to be happy and fulfilled according to his own desires and expectations.

What is important, I believe, is that we place no limits on our children. We should not burden them with our expectations, because our vision is no match for that of our Creator. There is a tendency to think a glass can be either half empty or half full, but there is a third option—the glass is always full. It may not be full of a liquid, but what is not liquid is oxygen. We usually measure only what we can see. The truth of things is often hidden from us, like the invisible oxygen that fills the glass.

When Nick was born, his path in life seemed very steep. We failed to account for the human capacity to rise above and soar beyond. Beethoven gradually lost his hearing during the last twenty-five years of his life when he composed some of his most renowned symphonies.

He was disabled as far as his hearing, but he didn’t write from what he heard; he created music from the heart. Stephen Hawking has thrived in a forty-year career as a theoretical physicist and author despite being severely disabled and, eventually, paralyzed by motor neuron disease. In effect he has no arms, no legs, and only a shell of a body. Heart is what really matters. The strength of our spirits can overcome nearly any weakness of the body.

Over time our son revealed to us what we could not see when we looked at that limbless cherub in the maternity ward. He humbled us and forced us to open our eyes and our minds. Nick seemed incomplete at birth, but it was our perception that was flawed.

## FEAR VERSUS FAITH

After Nick was born, Dushka and I had great trepidation—not only about his limitations, but also about our own. We did not feel at all capable of providing for the basic needs of such a child, let alone raising him to be a happy, self-confident, and high-achieving adult.

Certainly we have not been perfect parents to Nick or to our other two children, Michelle and Aaron. Dushka and I have our strengths, in particular our shared faith, but we were tested in every possible way while raising Nick. The strength of our love for each other was tested many times, sometimes nearly to the breaking point.

Yet, with God's help, we brought Nick to adulthood. I'd like to say we molded him into the man he is today. The truth is probably more that we succeeded in not ruining the man God created Nick to be. I readily admit, for example, that Nick found his purpose as an inspirational speaker and evangelist without any guidance or even much support from me. I didn't see that potential in him, but I didn't try to stop him once he believed it was possible. I'm very grateful for that.

I did suggest that he should have a backup plan, however, and I pretty much insisted that he get the education necessary to support that backup plan if he needed it. Nick didn't thank me then, but he does now. I did it out of love, of course, and because it was our parental responsibility to guide Nick, sometimes blindly, sometimes with purpose.

We began our journey with Nick with a very narrow focus on what he lacked. Over time, though, that view changed because Nick seemed to find ways to do whatever he needed to do or figured it out with help from us. Gradually our focus shifted away from what Nick could not do to what he could do. That simple shift in focus made a big difference in our feelings and our daily approach to parenting.

Many parents whose children have severe disabilities seek us out when we attend events with Nick. Others write or e-mail us. Most of them give me more inspiration than I could hope to provide them. Still, just knowing that you are not alone and that others share your feelings and fears can bring solace and comfort. I am grateful for the opportunity to help other parents in any way possible. In that regard, being Nick's father has brought many great rewards.

### BLESSED TO SHARE

In the spring of 2014, Dushka and I journeyed to Vietnam to attend a stadium event featuring Nick, who by that time was an internationally known best-selling author, inspirational speaker, and evangelist. With more than 7.5 million followers on Facebook, 350,000 on Twitter, and at least twenty-nine YouTube videos, many with one to four million views each, Nick has become one of the world's most well-known and beloved disabled individuals.

Because of Nick, the parents of other disabled and special-needs children are drawn to us. They know we have been through what they are experiencing and have many questions, just as we did. When we began our journey with Nick, these questions kept us awake and trembling at night:

- How will we keep this child alive?
- Will he be able to feed or dress himself one day?
- Is his mind damaged too?
- How will we educate him?
- Will our child ever have a normal life?
- How can we help him be self-sufficient?
- If we have other children, will they have the same challenges?
- How do we explain his disabilities to him? To siblings? To other children?

- How do we teach a child with so many challenges to love God and to know God loves him?
- How do we give this child hope and a strong spirit?
- How will we ever have the strength and resources we need to guide this child?

Dushka and I are humbled and often brought to tears by the stories told to us by other parents. Mostly, though, we are grateful for the opportunity to provide them with hope, as well as a model for raising a physically disabled child into an accomplished and well-balanced adult.

Nick often says that while he has never received the miracle he sought as a boy—to be made whole with arms and legs—God has put him in a position to serve as a miracle to others, to offer them inspiration and to encourage them in faith. My wife and I have been blessed in much the same way. We prayed for limbs on Nick's behalf after his birth and for many years afterward. As you can imagine, we also prayed for wisdom, or at least someone to guide us in our efforts to parent a child facing a daunting future.

During Nick's childhood, we never found other parents who'd raised a limbless child from birth, so the help and insight we sought did not come. We had to figure it out ourselves through many trials and errors. Therefore, we are grateful to be able to give parents with disabled children encouragement, guidance, and practical advice based on our own journey.

## BLESSINGS BEYOND BELIEF

I reflected on that journey during our trip to Vietnam with Nick. In this country so different from any I'd ever known, I felt peace and gratitude as thousands of people cheered for their hero, our son. Dushka and I watched in wonder as members of the audience jockeyed for positions to take his photograph, to speak with him, to touch or hug him.

For years after Nick was born, Dushka and I had allowed ourselves little hope for his future. I could not fathom that he would grow into such a strong and accomplished man, let alone a husband and father. Nick is proof that none of us are limited by our circumstances and that all of us can create meaningful, fulfilling, and joyful lives if we choose to focus on our gifts rather than on what we may lack. All of us are imperfect. All of us are perfect.

My son has written about those themes in his books, which have sold successfully around the world. My approach for this book is from a different perspective—a parent's. My wife and I would never claim any special gifts for parenting. We were ill prepared in almost every way possible when Nick came along. We are both from immigrant families who fled religious persecution, so we do have some resilience and inner strength in our heritage. Nick's success as an adult, however, is all the work of our truly remarkable son and God's incredible power. How wrong can a parent be? Well, it turns out I can be incredibly wrong, and this is true for all parents. We can all be blind to the potential of our children, even those kids born without disabilities. I have always considered myself a man of strong faith. I've served as a lay pastor and established churches. Yet when my son was born without limbs, I did not trust that God had a plan for him, one that would far surpass anything my wife and I could imagine.

Nick showed us the way. Even as a toddler, he taught us that his value and potential were beyond the reach of our limited vision. Our son is proof that through faith and determination, all things are possible. And Nick is not alone in proving this point.

As we observed on that trip to Vietnam and on many others with our son, Nick is a magnet for other disabled people. We've been overwhelmed and inspired by men, women, and children who have overcome incredible mental, emotional, and physical challenges to rise above and live beyond their limitations and circumstances.

Though my wife and I once wondered if God was punishing us by giving us a child with no limbs, we have come to realize what a gift he is to us and to the world. Indeed, because of Nick we know for certain that Scripture is correct when it tells us that “all things are possible to him who believes.” More than ever we understand that what is impossible to men is possible to God.

Where once we were devastated, Dushka and I are now proud and honored to be the parents of Nick. We are thankful that God used us as guides and supporters for such a courageous, resilient, faithful, and loving person. Our greatest gift through Nick, beyond any other—except maybe our grandsons, Kiyoshi and Dejan—has been the honor of serving as sources of hope, inspiration, and guidance to other parents of disabled children.

This book is meant to be useful for all parents who feel overwhelmed or underequipped, and especially those mothers and fathers who have special-needs or disabled children. The primary goal is to light a path to a brighter tomorrow so that you, in turn, can guide your child to make the most of life.

I encourage all parents to reject labels and to look instead into the hearts of their children. Teachers, physicians, and psychologists put labels on kids because that is what they know, but they don't know what is inside the individual they have categorized as a slow learner, dyslexic, Down syndrome, disabled, or special needs.

We always fought any attempt to label or marginalize Nick because we wanted our bright and unstoppable son to have every opportunity to prove his value in the world. Subjective assessments, perceptions, and prejudices are illusory. All children have strengths and weaknesses, and they can surprise you in so many ways. Our duty is to nurture, encourage, and motivate them, and help them build upon their strengths.

Dushka and I know what it is like to carry the constant weight of guilt,

frustration, and uncertainty that can accompany the birth of a child with special needs and disabilities. Our experiences with Nick taught us patience, flexibility, perseverance, and a depth of faith we'd never known before.

## TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

Another important point I want to make is that the key to raising any child into a successful adult is to provide that child with a role model for success. As the classic Edgar Guest poem says, "There are little eyes upon you, and they're watching night and day." How you live is far more important than anything you say to your child. Children are very observant and will call you out anytime your actions do not match your words.

All children are ideally made for the lives God intended and created for them. Sin and evil can thwart the plans of God, so it is up to us to help our children find and fulfill those plans. The guidance provided in this book will include and build upon what Dushka and I have learned and shared along the way in these specific areas:

- Understanding that all God's children are perfectly made, and maintaining a positive and proactive approach to parenting special-needs and disabled children.
- Allowing yourself to grieve without guilt upon learning of your child's disability.
- Moving toward acceptance and adjusting expectations without losing heart or hope despite dealing with the additional stress and costs of raising a special-needs child.
- Keeping an open mind, listening, and observing so that your child can teach you how to be the best possible parent.
- Learning to be your child's best medical advocate and knowing the right questions to ask of professionals.

- Making sure all your children receive the love and attention they need and deserve, because the siblings of special-needs kids often feel neglected, guilty, or obligated to be “superkids” for their overburdened parents.
- Choosing the best methods for educating your child and then dealing with the challenges that will come with any system or bureaucracy.
- Preparing your child for the world while also preparing yourself to let go, which includes building a strong emotional foundation for dealing with insecurities and bullying and which allows your child to make mistakes and experience failure in order to grow into the most self-sufficient and productive adult possible.
- Maximizing communication, seeking understanding, and spending time together as a couple and as a family to support each other and to nurture and love your child.
- Leaning on your faith. We have experienced the power of prayer in our marriage, and every couple parenting a child should feel free to ask for spiritual guidance and help.

Wherever Nick goes, his fans and supporters line up for hours to meet and hug him. In some cities, they've had to close down streets because so many want to just see him. We are often asked how we raised him to be such an optimistic, determined, accomplished, and faith-filled man despite the challenges of his disabilities. This book is my answer to that question.

After God, Nick deserves most of the credit. My son's approach to life offers strong testimony to the power of faith and the human spirit. When your child is old enough to read and comprehend, I encourage you to introduce him or her to Nick's videos and books. Let your child see that someone born with an imperfect body can grow into a man with a perfect purpose, a man who lives, as he says, “a ridiculously good life.”

## TAKEAWAY THOUGHTS

- Your child's disability does not define the person he or she will become.
- Your first perceptions about raising your child will not be your reality. With time, the reality is often much more rewarding than you'd thought.
- Often what seems at first like a great burden proves to be an incredible gift.
- Know that many other parents have gone through this. Seek their advice and counsel at every opportunity.
- You know only what you have experienced in the past; embrace what you are about to learn.
- Have faith that you will find the strength and support you need if you remain open to them.



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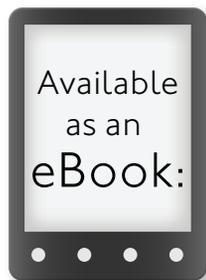
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