

Jerry Colona: Hey, Marcus, it's good to see you again.

Marcus Anderson: Jerry, my friend, it's always a pleasure to see you.

Jerry Colona: Uh, and so, when did we talk last?

Marcus Anderson: It- It was January.

Jerry Colona: January.

Jerry Colona: That's right. That's right.

Jerry Colona: And, let's just pause and recognize that the world is very different than it was in January 2nd, hey?

Marcus Anderson: My God. Six months, it's like, uh, a century has passed.

Jerry Colona: Yeah. Yeah. Let's, let's lay the context here, which is, we've got the pandemic still going on. We've got a global economic collapse, slash, certainly reshuffling.

And then, um, m- the l- language I would use is that, longstanding 400 years of systemic pressure is finally, um, being, um, addressed in a way that, um, certainly has not occurred in a generation, um, and, um, there's tremendous pain being expressed in the streets, and, um, uh, we both, uh, have, uh, clients and, um, I know that I have, uh, black clients who are having one experience, and non-black people of color who are having another experience, and white clients who are having yet another experience. And so I just wanted to name all that, um, as we go into a conversation now.

Marcus Anderson: It's so true. It's... All these things are coming together, everything is sort of coming to a head around this tinderbox. These are the things that have been needing to be talked about for, for years. And with all these things that have led up to, uh, between the pandemic, the economics, and then what happened in this country, the travesties, it's important for us to actually look at the elephant in the room and address it now and not just act like it's not there and try to go back to what's normal, because clearly that wasn't working before.

Jerry Colona: Mmm.

Marcus Anderson: And this is the time to, uh, to do the hard work, to take a... a look at all the things that are ugly and unfortunate so that we can try to turn that into something better so that these things happen to cause a positive change, and these are not just footnotes in history. These are not just things that occur that we try to... We get past and get onto the next thing.

Jerry Colona: I hear you, my brother. For those of you, tho- those of our listeners who don't really know who you are, um, let's just take a moment, introduce yourself, and talk about your book for a moment. So, give us an introduction for yourself.

Marcus Anderson: Yes, as you mentioned, I'm a coach. Um, I, I have a TEDx talk called *The Gift of Adversity*. Uh, I have a book called the *Gift of Adversity: Overcoming Paralysis and Pain to Find Purpose*. Uh, lifelong martial artist, uh, like yourself, in, enjoy the study of philosophy, um, Buddhism and Taoism, and applying those things to real life. For me, I, what I do is I, I coach others. I speak and I, I try to write to just give them... I wanna give them the wisdom that I've absorbed and condense it without them having to go through the hardship and the adversity that I had in the process of doing so. Um, and in my book and in the TEDx talk I talk about, at 38 I sort of had an early mid-life crisis.

My great-uncle was my biggest male role model outside of my father, and he passed away. And he was in the military. He was in the army. He was a lifer. And I was in chiropractic school at the time, so I've gone through a divorce. A week later my great-uncle passes, and I just feel like I'm without a rudder. [00:11:30] And I'm wondering why am I doing this? You know, I'm killing myself trying to get through school, trying to set up for, uh, this perfect life, but like I say, it's a... There's what we hope will happen, there's what we fear will happen, and then there's what actually happens in our lives.

So that made me really pause and look at what I was trying to do and why I was doing it, and I'd always wanted to join the military and I'd always had a reason not to, and I realized that my window to try to get in was now if I was going to. And inspired by my great-uncle's funeral, when I was there, they had all the regalia, 21-gun salute et cetera, and I kept everything together pretty well as a pallbearer until they played Taps. And they folded the flag and they gave it to my great-aunt and they thanked her for her sacrifice and that they were sorry for her loss.

And, uh, and that's when I fell apart. You know, here's my great-aunt, she's just lost her husband, and yet she's consoling me because I just feel powerless, and that was the, the big thing that really made me stop and look at my life and why was I wosh- rushing so hard, why was I pushing, why was I doing these things for so many other people? And that was sort of my, uh, my ground zero, if you will, to start my journey into myself.

Jerry Colona: Mmm. And, um, your subtitle, *Overcoming Paralysis*, that's not just a metaphor.

Marcus Anderson: You can take it at any level that you would like, but, in 2012 when I was preparing to deploy, I was 40-years-old and I suffered a severe spinal injury. I ruptured a disc in my neck and it paralyzed me from the neck down. And I went from being this upper echelon soldier who was preparing to defend his country to being broke, divorced, bed-ridden and paralyzed, at 40, trying to figure out, "What the hell do I do now? I've put all my eggs in this one basket. I

have given everything I can to this one purpose." And I felt like I'd been bitch-slapped by the universe.

Like, I'd... it'd just been ripped away from me. And now what do I do? And that was really when I had to do that deep soul searching. Uh, uh, again, like we were talking about before, with what's going on in our country now. This was not something that I could just ignore and act like it didn't happen and put my fingers in my ears in hopes that it would just la, la, la, magically go away and I would just get up the next day and, and go on about my business. This is something that demanded my full attention. And that's what adversity does. It doesn't give you a chance to just act like it's not there, just take no for an answer. It forces you to examine it.

And, that was my chance to start unpacking every hardship, every trauma that I had in my life from my parents to the, my- from my parents' divorce to my own divorce to what I was doing with this, this opportunity that I had and the fact that I wasn't utilizing it for the right reasons, or I wasn't utilizing it in the way that I could. And being paralyzed makes you understand quickly what's important and what is not. It makes you see that, um, the amount of money that you have in the bank is just a number on the computer screen. The clothes that you're wearing, the, the car that you drive and the place you live isn't that big of a deal because if you don't have your physical capacity, you don't have a lot.

I went directly from denial to anger, um, but I was angry, I was lashing out at everyone around me but I was angry at myself because I realized that at 40-years-old I had wasted a lot of my life, or at least at that point I felt like I had, because I kicked around and I had done... I had done what a lot of us do. I had done sort of the minimum to get by or I would just lean into my strengths and I tried to really expand my weaknesses like I should have.

And it felt like I was, uh.... It felt like the universe had given me 40 years to do something, I don't know what it was, but something big. And I felt like I had failed. And so I felt like the universe was like calling in my card and saying, "Hey, we gave you 40 years to do something big and you didn't, so we're taking it back." And that was, uh, the beginning to really start looking deep and figure out, what am I here for? What am I supposed to be doing? And where do I go from here if this is what my life's gonna be?

Jerry Colona: You know from my own work, and conversations we've had outside this conversation, and, and, the talk we did for your show about my book, I'm a big fan of my bastardization of that Zen saying, "This being so, so what?"

Marcus Anderson: Yes.

Jerry Colona: And, um, you know, I think you were handed a very... this being so a moment of, what am I gonna do with this? And I think, you know, as you tell the story, um,

there was that moment of considering not going on. There was a moment, um, of watching way too much Netflix, as you put it. Um, and so how do you go from the universe's sort of called in it, called back its card, if you will, and, uh, recognition that this is, this being so, this is your life now. This is not what you expected it to be, to, what am I gonna do about it?

Marcus Anderson:

Yeah, I had to actually look at it and just say, "Okay, I'm gonna try to control what I can control." And the only thing that I could control at that point was how I breathe. And sort of having these very shallow, vertical breaths, I tried to go into this meditative deep breathing, just for no other reason than that's what I could control. And then you and I understand physiology, if you can take some deep breaths you go from a sympathetic nervous system to the parasympathetic, you become more relaxed, you have more options to be able to start thinking your way through this and say, "What do I do? What, what's next?"

For me, when I had that u- understanding that I had to do something to counteract all the anger that I had, and for most of us the opposite of, of anger and hate is love, but I really didn't have that 'cause I was sort of isolated. But what I did have was this, uh, capacity to try to find gratitude, and something like, like, legitimate gratitude. Not the bullshit gratitude people are pushing. Like something really to be grateful for. And where I was, obviously, I didn't feel like I had anything to be grateful for, but what I did was I took myself out of the equation.

Like in Zen, when you take yourself out of that, it's not about me, me, me, or I, I, I. And I asked, "Okay, uh, had I been in Afghanistan, had I deployed, and I'd have suffered the same injury," because I believe that I still would have suffered the injury, irrespective of where I was in the world. If I had been deployed, that means that if I'd have been injured, for every one man that is injured, it takes two men to pull him to safety. So that means I would have endangered my team. I would have endangered another team, I would have endangered a squad, I would have endangered... the Chinook that would have had to fly into a hot zone to come and get me.

And that was the very beginning of this real, [00:22:30] legitimate, unbiased, unconditional, 360 [inaudible] where I was just like, "Holy shit, I am lucky." Not that I'm lucky, but I was lucky that nobody else had been hurt, and that was the beginning of really seeing, "You know what, I'm lucky to be able to breathe. I'm lucky that I have this."

Jerry Colona:

I wanna take a moment and read to you from your book. "What is the gift of adversity? Adversity is a natural law. Like the law of gravity. It doesn't care about your opinion, when you're trying to lift something heavy. If you can't handle the burden, too bad. That's not adversity's problem. You see adversity every day whether you're aware of it or not. It comes disguised as hard work. It may show itself as a huge setback that will stop every inch of progress you have made and even cause you to lose ground."

I'm gonna skip ahead. "Why is adversity a gift? In Steven Pressfield's phenomenal book, *The War of Art*, he speaks in depth about the force and phenomena that he deems resistance. He tells how resistance knows you inside and out, and therefore knows all your resistance. I see adversity much in the same way Pressfield sees resistance. Adversity is a meaner, more aggressive big brother of resistance. So why do I call adversity a gift? Think of adversity as a challenge that you have no choice but to accept, an offer you can't refuse. Adversity is the trainer. He sees that you want to give up during the hardest part of your workout, but doesn't let you quit."

So there you are. Paralyzed. What was the trainer trying to get you to see?

Marcus Anderson: The trainer was trying to get me to see that this was my opportunity to, to have courage. Genuine courage. Not false bravado. Not some motivational quote that you put in your head to help you keep going. To look at the fact that this looked insurmountable, that there was no way to get beyond this. And for me, I desperately wanted to walk again, but that ended up being a by-product of looking at all the other things in my life, all the other stuff that I had tried to step around and circumvent. And that's when I started asking... Because there was that guilt. That was almost like this, uh, like, it, this was karma somehow, like I'd done something wrong. But then I realized that that was just part of human nature. I realized that I had, in a lot of ways, squandered some of my opportunities, and I reminded myself that, again, that that was out of my control.

The thing I kept trying to remind myself was that there had to be something to be grateful for in any situation. And again for me, it was about the fact that nobody else had been injured when we deployed, and that was the beginning. And a week after I started having that genuine gratitude, 360 gratitude, I started getting a little bit of feeling back in my hands. I know it wasn't a lot, but even if that's as far as I got, that was more than where I was, and that was sort of that glimmer of hope that I had, and it changed the way I looked at everything. It looked at way- changed the way I looked at everybody. It changed the way I was able to apply that in, in every part of my life.

Jerry Colona: What did you feel guilty about?

Marcus Anderson: I felt like I hadn't done enough. I felt like, it was easier for me to push harder than to step back. It was easier for me to put the gas down than to pump the brakes and really look at what was going on. And for me, this was, at 40-years-old, the first time that I had to stop everything and look and see it for what it was. This is the first time I had to stop and examine, what part of that relationship fell apart? Or the part of the previous three relationships fell apart?

Jerry Colona: How if I'd been complicit in creating the conditions I set and don't want.

Marcus Anderson: Exactly. I didn't even know it then, but that's what it was. It was, the common denominator of all those things was me. How, how was I trying to save people that didn't need saving? How was I not allowing myself to be saved by people? How was I pushing them away? How was I claiming to have empathy when I was actually having arrogance and hubris? How was I claiming to be, uh, open as a vessel and trying to learn more about myself and using that as an opportunity to, to be on this spiritual high horse? Oh, one more, you know, enlighten this person, or I know more. And, this person just doesn't get it and if they knew what I knew they wouldn't feel that way.

I realized that all those things were sort of these, um, I was chasing my tail spiritually in a lot of ways. And it made me feel good, but, in the end, I didn't accomplish a lot. That's what was really going through my head, all those conversations, all those, um, relationships that I couldn't resolve. All those times I wish I'd said I was sorry. All those times I wish I'd been present, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Jerry Colona: And so what I, what I hear you doing, just to reflect back, what I hear in the story was, that this being so a moment, the paralysis forced you, literally, to stand still. Literally to do nothing but face actually who you really were.

Marcus Anderson: Yeah. Absolutely.

Jerry Colona: And, um, you could have turned away. You could have turned to anger. But you didn't. I mean, you were angry.

Marcus Anderson: Right.

Jerry Colona: There's this... base acceptance that your namesake may have inculcated in you. You know, I was gonna get there.

Marcus Anderson: Of course.

Jerry Colona: Um, and that is that, um, well, it reminds me of a, of a quote from one of my Buddhist teachers who long passed before I even began studying Buddhism, and he said, um, famously, "Pain is not a punishment, and pleasure is not a reward." Um, and, you know, side note, he said it at a wedding which still (laughs) confuses (laughing) students. But, um, there's something really powerful in, um, and it reminds me, your, your notion that adversity like a law of gravity kinda doesn't give a shit.

Uh, you know, um, this happened to you. And this pain happened to you. And there's something in that moment, I think, of you, helplessly giving over to the fact that you are powerless which then caused, uh, dare I make the observation, a power to arise, which is a different power, not the power to control. Does that resonate at all?

Marcus Anderson: Yeah. It, it strikes a chord, on, in every fiber of my being. It... And in martial arts there is great power when you have a stronger opponent that pushes into you. Me trying to push back against that opponent on the same plane is the definition of insanity. I can't win, but if I can capitulate, if I can blend, if I can go with that energy, even for a moment, that's my opportunity. That's when I might be able to change the angle or switch or, you know... it... run away, whatever it is. You don't have to win. You just have to survive. And that's what I was realizing.

Jerry Colona: Yeah. The, uh, uh, and, and, and that is one of those brilliant, um, constructs that in some ways easier to discuss than it is to, in the moment, live with that, right? Um, because, you know, w- w- to, to focus on survival in that moment means you run the risk of extending the pain. Um, which is, you know, counter to the way we are wired, which is to move away from those painful situations.

Marcus Anderson: And that was the opportunity. As humans, just like you say, our notion is to get as far away from hardship and pain and adversity as we can. We wanna create that distance as soon as we can get away from it, but, if we have the ability to stay with it and sit with it when, when the wound's still open, that's when we can figure out what caused it, we can figure out what's in it, we can figure out what continues to cut us, or how we cut ourselves.

And that notion is so hard for us to, to hold on to, for me, because I was in a bed for three months having to just examine that, having to look daily at that. And again, that's even without, that's even with having these notions, these philosophical ideals, these seeds in my mind, you know, reinforced all my entire life. It still took me that long to get there.

Jerry Colona: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Marcus Anderson: And it's, again, it's very easy to talk about it. It's easy to be philosophical about somebody else's headache.

Jerry Colona: Amen.

Marcus Anderson: We like to be the ex- We like to be the exception to whatever the rules are. And the reality is, none of us are exceptions. We all fall down, we all feel pain, we all want love, we all want respect, we all want freedom. And that's what makes us human, and that's why, what's going on in this country now, this is hopefully the big wake-up call, the slap in the face that we need. The adversity that will make all st- stand up and look and say, "This is not okay." This is not something we can just turn a blind eye to. We have to act. We have to have the discussion. And we have to continue to do that. It can't just go away in the next new cycle.

Jerry Colonna: You know, um, I was fascinated by your exploration of the notion of adversity. I was also equally fascinating by your notions around purpose, and, here again, I wanna read to you, "Without purpose we lack direction. Without direction, our

lives simply meander down the path of least resistance. We become controlled by purely reactionary or strictly pleasure seeking existence. We're constantly putting out fires, in some ways, waiting to be victimized by things we are unable to control." So, what's your purpose?

Marcus Anderson: My purpose now is to use my pain and my experience to help others get out of that hardship. But I guess the greater purpose for me is to help other people understand that they have a power within them. To understand that the adversity that they're facing is their opportunity, if they're willing to... Adversity shines that light on the things that we don't like. It, it, it hastes that weak part of us, and we all have weaknesses, but it forces us to really look at the chink in the armor unapologetically and examine it.

And that's what we all have to do. That's why all those questions that you have are so brilliant. It forces you to really step back and say, "Man, what... what's going on there? Why am I offended by this? Why am I afraid of this? How is this behavior manifesting in other ways? How does that make me treat myself? What does that do to my internal dialogue? And then, what is that internal dialogue make me do for other people?"

That's the purpose, and, uh, again, as a coach, I, I love how you say, by making better you make better CEOs, better founders. And that's what this is. I do it on a broader scale, but when I'm coaching that individual person and they're coaching their teams and they're, they're leading, that's what it is. D- When people say, "What sort of coach are you?" You can't just say you're a business coach. You can't just say you're an executive coach, because they all bleed together.

How many times have we talked to people that may be incredibly financially successful but they have scorched earth around them, because they thought that they could just do the same thing they were doing as a CEO to their wife or to their kids. And that's a... That's a very shortsighted mentality.

Jerry Colona: I- I wanna disagree with one concept that I think you have, and that is actually inclusive in the, the title, *The Gift of Adversity*. I actually think that what you did and what you do is extract the gift out of adversity. And I think that that's linked to the sense of purpose. Um, you took it back to what I was saying before. You could have wait there and continued to wait there. You could have been victimized by things you were unab- to be, to control. But instead, you chose a different path, and I actually think that's the gift. It's that choice.

Um, and so, you know, I'm playing a little semantic game here, but I think it's an important distinction because what I do not hear in your work, which is important to think, is a romanticization of suffering. And there is that tendency in the human experience, right? Um, I imagine what I'm about to say is true. I can't imagine that you would wish upon anybody a severed vertebrae.

Marcus Anderson: No. Not at all.

Jerry Colona: But, but I think we both wish upon people that they're able to have the capacity to extract something from the experience that reinforces their sense of purpose. Does that align with your thinking?

Marcus Anderson: That's, that's absolutely it. It's... A- And you're absolutely right, there's so many people that will try to take it to the extreme and they say, "Oh, so, adversity is a gift, so I should, don't, you know, get into a street fight," or do whatever. Um, that's not the case at all. Um, anything in excess becomes its opposite. The idea is that adversity is inevitable, like we sort of alluded to, so, if it is going to be around you all the time and you can't escape it, you might as well get comfortable with it. Not really comfortable but understand that it is there, so how can I use this? What is this forcing me to look at?

And by finding the gift within that, that allows us to now no longer be afraid of it, and not live our s- lives in fear, and live in a courageous manner. Because by doing that, that not only helps us but it emboldens others to do that. And there's the goal.

Jerry Colona: I, I often will say to folks that Nietzsche's infamous quote, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger," is not a prescription. (laughs) It is a description.

Marcus Anderson: (laughs) Agree.

Jerry Colona: The, um... So let's talk again about the times that we're in, and, um, there's a time to [inaudible] for, of adversity right now. Some folks listening to this may be unemployed. Some folks listening to this may have lost a loved one to disease. Some folks listening to this may have had their minds finally opened to the suffering of black Americans that have been going on since 1619. Some folks listening to this may be confronting the pain of seeing the ways that they have been complicit in maintaining systems of oppression. And some folks may be experiencing the pain of having to deny all of that, and not wanting to look at that.

I don't know the answer to my own question, which is always a dangerous saying. When I was a reporter, we didn't do that. But I'm curious to know, what is the purpose, what is the gift that someone ma- who may be suffering right now can extract? Um, and, and I don't mean to put you in a position of, of prescribing something that is universal or general. So maybe let's make it personal. What are you taking from this experience? Of the dumpster fire that is the world right now?

Marcus Anderson: There is so much going on, clearly. For me, I'm trying to find where is the opportunity within this.

Jerry Colona: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Marcus Anderson: What is this making us do? What conversations is this forcing us to have with ourselves and in an internal dialogue and with others, and then what actions can we take to change these things? That's the way I'm trying to look at it. That's the, the gift in this adversity. We've had things happen in this country for years. How many more times does it have to happen?

Jerry Colona: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Marcus Anderson: How many more people have to lose their lives? How many people have to be in economic ruin? How, how much of this has to happen? This is the thing that will... This is the catalyst that can change, that can turn the tide. This is the first domino that can fall, that can create a huge positive change, a huge tsunami of positivity, if we so choose. But if we try to act like it's not there or if we feel good about it because we talk about it for a week, and then we try to go back to what we were doing before, that's not really causing a change. That's lip service at best. And that may make you feel better, but the people that really need our help won't feel any different at all.

Jerry Colona: I hear you. You know, for me, one of the ways that I have come into relationship with the suffering that exists right now is to be mindful of the self-aggrandizing aspect of guilt, and depend upon and rely upon the reparation from that hi- uh, that inquiry process. I would extend the question, for example, that I often ask, "How have I been complicit in creating the conditions I say I don't want?" Into, "How have I been complicit in maintaining systems of suffering that I say I don't want? And how have those systems served me? And how do they block the world that I want to see from coming into existence?"

Um, I ask those questions not to spread guilt but to take responsibility for creating a different world. And, um, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist teacher says, "Peace begins with me." I have to resolve these turmoils and conflicts within myself so that I can then stand shoulder to shoulder with others, and do the work that the world needs. And so for me what I'm trying to extract from this entire experience is a reinforcement of that notion. Whether it's, it's the glaringly obvious expression of racial injustice through the murder of innocent people, or the economic inequality so prevalent and demonstrated in, for example, the disparate experience of COVID, where if you have money, you are likely to actually survive it better than if you don't. To the challenges around power that are so obvious. That's, that's what I'm trying to extract from it.

Marcus Anderson: I, I absolutely agree, there's... This is the opportunity to, just like any sort of conversation, if I am just listening to wait for my turn to speak, I'm not really listening. If, if you look at empathy, it's spelled very similar to empty because we have to empty ourselves like, like we're emptying that tea cup to be able to be there for that person, to listen to them and to see what's really, what they're really saying, what they really need. That is the whole goal of this. The whole reason why Socrates was so intelligent, allegedly, was simply because he says, "I know that I do not know."

Jerry Colona: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Marcus Anderson: So, so to me trying to say, "Well, you're saying this. Well, here's my counterpoint to that." Why don't I just be present? Why don't I just do, as you mentioned on my show, why don't I just show the fuck up for this person and be there for that person, and listen to that person, implicitly, with no expectation, just to hear what's really going on and challenge what I might believe I've thought that this has been for so long. Maybe, just maybe, that's the beginning. And this is the huge opportunity to do that if we so choose.

Jerry Colona: Amen, brother. Well, last question I'll ask you, uh, how's your health now?

Marcus Anderson: Uh the health now, I'm, uh, fully recovered I guess you could say. I still have numbness from the middle of my forearms to my hands and the middle of my shins to my feet, but I actually, um, I'm actually grateful for that because it reminds me, it keeps me tethered to what I've gone through. Um, I still practice martial arts, I still stay physical as a way to help me get stronger in my mind. And I've also realized that, uh, with, with meditation and all these other practices, it is a practice, and all these things overlap into those universal truths that keep me honest and hopefully keep me in a position where I can continue to help more people for as long as I'm here.

Jerry Colona: Um, bless you for doing that. Thank you so much, Marcus.

Marcus Anderson: Uh, it's just an honor to get to talk to you. Um, I love our time, learn so much from you, and, uh, it's an honor to be here. And the book was, uh, something I had to do. And I'm, I'm just honored that it's gonna help people.

Jerry Colona: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, good. Thank you so much, my friend.

Marcus Anderson: Thank you so much, my friend.