

Ep 199. The River of Misery



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With Your Host

Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is Better Than Happy Episode 199, The River of Misery.

This podcast is for people who know that living an extraordinary life is not easy or comfortable. It's so much better than that. This is Better Than Happy and I'm your host, Jody Moore.

Are you guys so excited to learn about the river of misery? I guess I haven't taught this concept on the podcast before because we talked about it at Better Than Happy live recently in Lehigh. Holy Cow. Can we just pause for a minute and can we talk about Lehigh? When I lived in Utah, which was, I don't know how long ago, 20 years ago probably, there were Lehigh roller mills and some rolling fields and a lot of nothingness. And Lehigh does not look like that at all anymore. It is a booming, thriving place with lots of fun restaurants and shopping and people in cars everywhere. And anyway, we had a fantastic day at Thanksgiving Point during the tulip festival. It couldn't have been more beautiful. We had amazing group of individuals there. If you were there, thank you for coming. I love you.

Anyway, I came home from that event and posted something on Instagram and everybody was sharing some of their takeaways from the event, and several people talked about learning about the river of misery and how it helped them shift the way that they're thinking about things they're going through. And then some people were like, "What's the river of misery? I want to know about that." So I thought, "Okay, let's do a podcast all about the river of misery." You asked for it. No, this is actually a really cool tool that I use with my clients.

So by the way, if you weren't at Better Than Happy live, you have another opportunity to come and hang out with me in Seattle. We have a few seats left for Seattle. It will be this summer. And if you just go to jodymoore.com/liveevents, you can grab yours. If you've been in Be Bold for a year or more, you're an elite member and you get to come for free, but you do need to go register. So go to that link and sign up. If you're not in Be

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Bold, you can still come, you've just got to buy a ticket. There's a few left, but go get them before they're gone.

All right, let's talk about the river of misery. So let me first of all just teach you the concept and then I'll just do tons of examples. The river of misery is a concept that we teach to help us gain some understanding when things get really hard. Because when we understand why things are hard, it makes them a lot more tolerable. It's that idea that we just want to know why. We want to know that there's a cause. We want to know that there's a possible end, and then we can actually tolerate quite a few things.

Think about when you get the flu. It's miserable having the flu. You feel terrible, you can't get out of bed. You can't function and live your life the way that you are used to, but you just know, oh, I have the flu. So you know that this is caused by something going on in your body and you know it's probably going to run its course and take maybe a couple of days, hopefully not too much longer than that. And then you're going to start feeling better because your immune system's going to kick in and you're going to get back to your life. So you can tolerate the flu because you know why, you know what's going on.

So with the river of misery, it works in much the same way. When we understand what's going on than we can tolerate quite a bit. And with the river of misery, these are things that we often are choosing to tolerate because of what we're trying to accomplish or who were trying to become. So you think about where you are now, and I like to apply this concept around maybe a goal that I have that I'm trying to accomplish. I'm just going to use weight loss because it's such an easy one and you can apply this to any area of your life. But let's say my body weighs a certain amount and I think it should weigh less. Maybe I'm not as healthy as I could be or for whatever reasons I want to weigh less than I weigh now. So I have where I'm currently at, which is sort of the pond of misery. I have thoughts like, "My body doesn't look right and I don't feel as energetic and as good as I could and my clothes don't fit the way they used to."

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And so that's what I call the pond of misery. It's kind of miserable, but it's also very familiar. It's not that deep. We just kind of splash around in that pond. Now all of that misery is created by our thinking. It's not true that anything's wrong with your body. You can just go buy some new clothes. There's a solution for the pond. And I'm not opposed to people just solving for the pond if they want to. But there's also this other model that's available where I get to my ideal weight. I change my eating habits, I change the amount of time I exercise and I change my body and I start feeling like yeah, I like the way my body looks. It looks how I think it should and I fit in my clothes the way I want to. And that's the place where people want to get to many times with their goals.

So between where we are now with the pond of misery and the dry land, which by the way, you'll feel great about your body then, but then you'll find something else to be miserable about, so please don't think that I'm saying just lose weight and then you're happy forever. That's what your brain might believe. It's not true at all. But there is the possibility of you losing weight and getting your body to the size you want it to be. So in between the pond of misery and that dry land is what I call the river of misery. In the river, things get worse than they were in the pond. It's much deeper and it's moving very quickly and the brain starts to think, "This is a terrible idea. Why are we doing this? We might die in this river. We should just go back to that pond. That was fine. There's nothing wrong with being a little miserable in the pond. Let's go back there." Your brain will try really, really hard to talk you out of being in the river of misery.

So again, back to my example of weight loss, the river often looks like me having to not eat the foods that I really want to eat. I might have to tolerate some deprivation. I'm going to have to learn to change my taste buds, which means I'm going to have to try to eat things that don't taste that great to me. I'm going to have to be disappointed because I don't get the foods that I want all the time. Maybe I'm going to have to start exercising and if I haven't exercised in a while, that's going to be pretty painful, especially in the beginning as I get my body in better shape. So this is the river of misery.

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Now the brain does not like that river at all. The brain's like, "Why do we need to do this? Let's go back to the pond." So when you know that you're just in the river of misery, then you realize, okay, I can just be miserable for a while. It's not going to last forever because I'm going to wrestle with that in my head. I'm going to sort through it. I am going to make the changes. You will get in better shape if you just keep exercising. There's no two buts about it. Your body will eventually get healthier and more toned and more conditioned, and then that exercise will become easier. And if you keep eating foods that fuel your body, you will lose weight. So there is dry land on the other side of that river, but you've got to swim through the river to get there. You have to be willing to go through the river and you have to stay in the river long enough to get to the dry ground without going back to the pond. That is the key to success.

Now, my brain likes metaphors. I've always been pretty good at finding metaphors and teaching in metaphors, and I notice metaphors all over. And I notice metaphors for the river of misery all over. Here's one of my favorite ones. I like to take a bath. I like to get in a bathtub and relax, shut the door to try to keep out the kids and the pets. It doesn't always work, they can get in sometimes. But ideally, I'll get in the bath, I'll put on a podcast or something I want to listen to, and that's my time to relax. But have you ever gotten in the bath, get all undressed, get in the warm water, relax, and then realize that you kind of need to pee? I have. This is where now we're in the pond of misery.

I could just stay in the bath and be not as comfortable and not as relaxed because I kind of need to pee. Or I could get out of the bath, dripping wet, cold, totally uncomfortable, in the river of misery, and go to the bathroom with a wet bum and wet legs and slip around on the toilet and go through all of that. But then I get to get back in my bath and enjoy it and relax and not have the feeling of a full bladder. That is my favorite example of the river of misery that I came up with one day in the bath. Sorry if that's too much information for some of you.

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Another great example of the river of misery is when you decide to remodel, let's say, your kitchen. You're in the pond of misery because you're thinking thoughts like, "My kitchen is outdated and it just could be bigger and could be better. I really want to change the cabinets or the counters or the paint," or whatever it is, and you could just stay in that pond forever and that's fine. You're creating that misery in the first place. We could clean that up. Or you could go through the river of misery where someone's going to come in and they're going to rip out your kitchen. It's going to cost a lot of money. You're not even going to be able to make spaghetti because you're not going to have a sink, so you're going to have to eat out or figure out how that all works for a long time. But on the other side of that is a beautiful new kitchen. Are you willing to go through the river of misery? That's the question.

Another metaphor I notice of this because I have a dad who loves to golf, and he's explained to me that if you want to improve your golf swing you have to change what you've been doing, and in the short term your golf game is actually going to suffer because what you've been doing has worked to a certain extent. Maybe it's limiting you in some way, maybe you have room to improve that swing, but your game is going to get worse as you change that swing until you get the habit of the new swing when your game gets better. I probably am not using the right words, but anyway, there's a golf metaphor for those of you that likes sports.

I talked about weight loss being a time when we go through the river of misery, let me give you a few other examples with my clients when I see them in the river of misery. Sometimes I'll have a client who wants to stop fighting with their husband. They'll say, "We just fight all the time. We yell at each other. I really don't like it. It's really contentious. I feel awful. I want to solve for this." And what I teach them is that your husband might still get upset and he might still yell and he might still try to engage in a fight, but if you don't get upset and yell and argue back then there is no fight. There's just one person there who's angry and upset.

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So I coached them through how they're going to get to that state, how they're going to be calm, how they're not going to get upset, but do you know what often they come back and tell me is, "Oh my gosh, that made everything so much worse because now this time when my husband got upset, I didn't get upset. He was angry and yelling and I was just calm and he got even more mad. He's like, 'What's the matter with you? You don't even care about our relationship now.'" So I tell them, "Yeah, that's because you're in the river of misery." Your husband is used to the dance that you guys do and when you stopped doing your part of the dance, he's very confused and upset and he's making it mean all kinds of things and that's actually pretty normal.

Now, you can say, "Oh my gosh, husband, I love you. I just don't want to fight anymore, and I'm sorry you don't like it." And you can explain yourself, but it's going to be more uncomfortable than just falling back into your old routines and patterns of you getting upset and you and your husband fighting it out. The brain doesn't like change. The brain likes to rinse and repeat. We're pretty good at our old patterns. So to break the pattern is very uncomfortable, very challenging. That is the river of misery. On the other side is dry land. The same effect happens if you want to stop yelling at your kids. I'll talk to my clients about what they're going to need to think and what they're going to need to feel in order to not yell the next time. And that's going to be so much harder than just yelling.

Because you know what happens when we yell at our kids sometimes? They finally do what we've been asking them to do. So notice that the yelling, while it's not something that you want to continue if you're coming to me with this problem, it's serving you in some way. So now you're having to manage your emotions, try to stay calm and patient, and the kids aren't doing what you wanted them to do. Welcome to the river of misery.

Maybe you want to get up early in the mornings. I was just coaching several people this week who said to me, "I want to get up early. I want to have time to meditate and start my day and have a morning practice, but I just can't get myself to get out of bed." So they're in the pond right now,

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where they're like feeling bad, they're thinking how much more productive and peaceful their day could be. And they're thinking about all those things that they want.

But in order to get to that point, they're going to have to be willing to jump in the river, which is where they're going to get up out of bed and be cranky and tired and not want to get up, and do it anyway. And the brain is not going to like that. The brain's going to say, this is silly. We don't really need to do this anyway. I see this with people who want to become a life coach, or whatever your goal or dream is. I'm just going to use life coaching because a lot of people tell me, "I really want to do what you do, Jody. I want to be a life coach." I'm like, "Awesome, do it." But then I think we think, "Oh, that's going to be so much fun learning to be a life coach." And I do find a lot of it to be fun, but do you know what else happens? The river of misery happens.

Because if you've heard people coach before, it probably sounds pretty easy and it looks pretty easy. But then you go through life coach training or you go to a class or you start trying to coach someone, you realize, actually this is really hard. And the brain will start telling you, wait a second, maybe I'm not good at this. Maybe I can't do this. All of that doubt that comes up once we get past the excitement into the reality of understanding what we really don't know with our goals, that is the river of misery. I see this in both myself and other entrepreneurs every time we try to scale our business. Your business gets to a certain level and you realize, okay, I've got to scale everything in order to grow.

Maybe that means that you raise your prices. Maybe it means that you start hiring staff. For me, it's a combination of hiring staff and documenting processes and really taking my business from being me as a mostly solopreneur, to having a team. And I never woke up one day and was like, "You know what I want to do? Be an employer, employ people. That sounds like a dream come true." Now, I like being able to employ people, but that wasn't my main objective.

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So I'm having to learn a skillset that I'm not as excited about as coaching. I'm having to do things like document processes and things in the business so that I can scale and grow. Not my favorite thing. This is the river of misery. I could stay in the pond and just stay where I am and stay stagnant, nothing wrong with that. My business is doing great. But if I want to set a goal and I want to grow, I have to be willing to get in the river of misery where it's going to feel worse than just being stagnant.

So, I've given you tons of examples. I hope this is helping you. I hope that your brain is going to start looking out for like, "Oh, this is the river of misery." And then what I want you to know is it's okay. It's just like having the flu. It's going to last for a little while. I don't know how long, it depends on what's creating it. But if you can be willing to stay in it and wrestle with it, your brain will sift through it.

Here's what I find. We're not willing to tolerate discomfort for too long, so we'll either go back to the pond or we will solve for the things creating that river of misery in the first place. We'll do the thought work. So coaching is so powerful. If you're going to go through a river of misery, I highly recommend a coach, or at the very least do some self-coaching. But we start solving for what's creating that pain in the first place and we adjust to the new normal. Things start to settle out again and you will get back to the emotional state you were in before, but you've got to be willing to stay in that river as long as necessary to get there. You've got to be willing to feel all of the emotions that come along with it. So much fun, right?

Let's all do some swimming in the river. I will meet you there. I'm all in for it. I love the person that we become as we are willing to cross the river. That is really why I'm so passionate about what I do. That's why I love helping people lose weight or grow a business or get up early in the morning or whatever it is they want to do. It's not because of the achievement of that thing.

I don't really care about you weighing any certain amount or having any certain amount of money. That part's irrelevant. It's the river of misery that I care about. It's you understanding your brain and overcoming your brain

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and managing your brain and learning how to feel negative emotion and improving your relationship with yourself. All of those things are required to get through the river of misery. That's the part I care about. That's where we evolve as a species and as a society and as a culture. So, see you there. See you in the river.

Thanks for joining me today, you guys. Have a beautiful rest of your week and I'll see you next time. Bye Bye.

If you have a question about something you've heard me talk about on this podcast or anything else going on in your life, I want to invite you to a free public call. Ask Jody Anything. I will teach you the main coaching tool I use with all of my clients and the way to solve any problem in your life, and we will plug in real life examples. Come to the call and ask me a question anonymously or just listen in. Go to jodymoore.com/askjody and register before you miss it. I'll see you there.