

## Ep 200. The Real Problem



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Jody Moore**

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## Ep 200. The Real Problem

I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 200, The Real Problem.

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.

Jody: Hey everybody, what's up? Welcome to episode number 200. That's a pretty exciting milestone for me and so I decided to bring my sister Natalie back on the podcast today. And also, let's be honest, Natalie and I are hanging out together this week, which we don't always get to do. And she's like, "I need to record a podcast." And I said, "I need to record a podcast too. Let's do one together." That's the truth, right, Natalie?

Natalie: That's the truth. Can we tell the truth?

Jody: Please. So anyway, Natalie is here. By the way, Natalie has a brand-new podcast you should check out called Couple's Coaching with Natalie Clay; excellent podcast. And today, what are we talking about, Natalie?

Natalie: Today, we're talking about the real problem.

Jody: The real problem. So, this is one of my favorite topics. We think we know what the real problem is, right?

Natalie: Yes, I think we are pretty certain most of the time.

Jody: Yeah, tell people what we think – what most people, not us, but what most people think the real problem is.

Natalie: Well it tends to be things like, the things our husband said to us or the things our wife didn't do, or definitely that thing the sister-in-law always does. I hear that one a lot.

Jody: I hear that one a lot too. So in other words, other people are the problem.

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

Natalie: For sure, other people or things outside of us, what about the president of the United States...

Jody: He's a problem for me, I'll be honest.

Natalie: We might have to steer clear of that topic. Yeah, and definitely the amount of money we have in our bank account. That can for sure be a real problem for us.

Jody: The number one the scale is a problem.

Natalie: Oftentimes, our kids, things they do and say cause me some problems.

Jody: And we're kind of joking and being lighthearted here because we like to and we're a little tired. I don't know where this is going to go.

Natalie: This is 8:45pm.

Jody: And we've been teaching all day, so you're getting us a little bit giddy. But in all seriousness, there are things that happen in the world that I think the majority of people in our lives agree with us is a problem. Like my child is sleeping with his girlfriend or my father is sick, things like this...

Natalie: Or my spouse is looking at pornography...

Jody: Yes, or something my spouse is doing, right? So there are things that we're not trying to make light of what feel like heavy serious things, but the truth is, those things are actually never the problem.

Natalie: Yeah, and this is confusing because I think most people would agree if you were telling them any of these things that obviously they are the problem. Obviously, if we don't have enough money, that's a problem.

Jody: Let's talk a little bit, Natalie, about – this topic was kind of your idea and it is a brilliant idea, I must say. Let's talk a little bit about why you wanted to introduce this idea because this is going to be, what, episode

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

number four, at the very beginning of your podcast, but even at episode number 200, and many of you have maybe been listening with me for quite a long time and some of you are new, I think it's still a really powerful concept to revisit. So explain to people why you wanted to really introduce this at this point.

Natalie: Well I really liked this for anybody, but in particular my audience of married couples because people come to me talking about the issues in their marriage, and when we think that it's these things that cause trouble for us, then it becomes really problematic because then we need to change that person, we need to change the things our husband is doing or that our wife is saying in order to feel better. So I love this idea when I learned this that really the circumstances don't have that much power over us, that it's the way we choose to think about these things in our life that really cause the experience that we're having.

So I feel like that's something so liberating when I talk through this with my clients to help them see that really, all these things that we think have to be in place for us to be able to enjoy our marriage or enjoy being a parent or life. Really, we don't have to change those things in order to change our experience, which for me felt huge and liberating when I learned that.

Jody: Okay, let's define it for people who might be new to these tools or, like, our brothers...

Natalie: Who, by the way, I learned today is not listening. Our older brother maybe, but our younger brother...

Jody: Probably not though.

Natalie: I'm just going to call him out. Can we call him out?

Jody: Yeah, I want to.

Natalie: Because he's not listening.

Jody: He's not going to listen.

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

Natalie: I was talking to his wife today, who is amazing, he married up, and I can say that because he's not going to listen.

Jody: Sarah, we love you.

Natalie: Yeah, he really married up. And she mentioned to me that she was talking to him and saying, "You should listen to your sisters' podcasts. They really have some good things to say." And he was like, "Yeah, they might, but they're my sisters and that's super annoying." So, Ben, we love you, but a little bit less after today.

Jody: And you really should listen, Ben, I'm just saying.

Natalie: Listen to your wife, Ben.

Jody: Anyway, I pulled myself together, so here's what a circumstance is. A circumstance is a fact. It's the thing that is happening outside of us that is without opinion. Circumstances, when we are coaching people on this, can't include any adjectives or words that are subjective that could be translated in many different ways. And so they're actually like the really boring part of the story. And one of the things we talk about a lot is that circumstances in and of themselves are neutral. So they're just events or the thing a person said or maybe even the thing that they did, as long as you can articulate it factually.

Like, my husband was really rude to me – not a circumstance because it's not factual. We don't know what rude means. What you think is rude may not be rude to me. So the circumstance may be my husband said, quote, you're always late. So the circumstance is just the facts. Okay, anything I missed that's important?

Natalie: Nope, and you mentioned that everyone in the world would have to agree with this in order for it to be a circumstance.

Jody: Like everyone, which is a stretch for some things.

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

Natalie: Yeah, and just to elaborate on that a tiny bit, this idea that you take – I like to go to extreme examples because that's where our minds tend to go when we're talking to people about this, but the idea of, let's just say murder or, you know, somebody kills another person and that's just a circumstance. So when you've mentioned that the circumstances are neutral, we can decide, well how can murder be neutral? But then you can look and say, well the person that got murdered, it's maybe not neutral for them because they're having one experience with it...

Jody: Or maybe it is. Maybe they're like, this is a relief actually, this is kind of amazing.

Natalie: Yes, that's very true. But then the person doing the murdering, maybe they have a completely different experience about the murder that's happened.

Jody: Well, and let me just kind of clarify, and I know this is what you're trying to say, but I just want to make sure people understand that a murder, most of us don't make that neutral. Like, it's not neutral, even to the person committing the murder. Maybe to them it's positive or it's a success or something, and to other people, to most people, it's a negative thing. So it's not that we want to neutralize everything in our lives, but we just want to recognize that first of all, the circumstance is neutral until we have a thought about it, which is what you're going to define in just a minute.

So, I do find that clients misunderstand this sometimes. Like, we had somebody in our group this week, because we're teaching a class here together, somebody said, "My husband and I tried to go all day only saying circumstances out loud and never thoughts, and we couldn't really do it actually." I don't know if you were there, maybe you were gone when she said that. She's like, "Yeah we had like nothing to say." And like, the goal isn't to just stop having thoughts and stop sharing thoughts. We're not saying that you should neutralize everything in your life or keep it neutral, but it is neutral until we think a thought is the important part. So why don't you talk about thoughts?

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

Natalie: So, the thought is what comes after we hear of a circumstance. So it's how we think about this fact, this boring neutral fact that everyone in the world agrees on. We have a thought about it. So it's just what we think about that circumstance. So for example, if somebody says something to you, like I was talking to someone this week that said, "My husband told me I'm not thin enough." Then I think most of us hear that and we have a reaction to that and we think that's something that's not kind or he shouldn't have said that. All those things that follow, all of our opinions that follow are the thoughts that we have about that circumstance.

Jody: Yeah, so the sentence in your brain that is the part that has opinion or sometimes we'll say the meaning that you give to it, what you make it mean is the thought part. That's where the adjectives, that's where the subjectivity and the opinion all comes in.

Natalie: Now, the reason this is so important is because all we're ever wanting is to feel something, so when people come to me and they say, "I want to have more connection in my marriage," that tells me there's some circumstances happening and then they're having some thoughts about the circumstance, and only because of those thoughts, they are then feeling disconnected.

Jody: Yeah. So we tend to believe that our feelings are created by the circumstance, like we said in the beginning, that's what we think is the real problem. The real problem is the thought we're having about what they said, because what you're saying, Natalie, if I understand you correctly, is that thoughts create feelings, circumstances don't.

Natalie: That's right, they never do. And the illustration I give to people is there's these three tiers, so we have the circumstance and then there's the feeling and, like you said, the number in our bank account is causing us to feel stress or worry, but there's always that something in the middle, and that's the thought, always in between those two things. And the reason it's really great to know that is because then we can start looking at that thought to decide, is that helping us feel what we want to feel about that circumstance? And that's where we gain some leverage over these facts in

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

our life, over the dollar amount in our bank account, over the things that our spouse says to us.

Jody: Yeah, okay, let's give a couple of examples to make sure we're not losing anybody that might be new especially, and then I think it would be awesome if maybe we could share some of the common questions we hear from people when we teach this because I'm sure people are having some of those questions. So, do you want to give an example that relates to what we talked about earlier?

Natalie: Sure, so for example, let's just use that same thought I just gave you where the woman's husband said to her, you should lose weight.

Jody: So those have to be the exact words for us to call that the circumstance because sometimes clients will say, "My husband thinks I should lose weight." And I'm like, "Why do you think that?" And it's because husband said, "How many calories are in this meal?"

Natalie: Or he looked at me while I was eating the ice cream and I could just tell by his look.

Jody: Yes, so make sure, don't try to trick us, we're not going to fall for it. The circumstance has to be the facts. So if he literally said, "You should lose weight," we'll put that in the C-line.

Natalie: And that's what this client told me that he did say to her. So when my client told me, my husband said the words, you need to lose weight, then what happened is a bunch of thoughts. Now, her thought in the moment when I asked her what that was is, "He's so cruel." Now, that's one thought that her brain offered her, but again, the thoughts are something that we have some control over, so other options could be something like, "Wow, I wonder why he said that. Maybe he had a rough day and he's sure short with me." Or, "I completely disagree, I like the way I look."

But in that moment when we think that his words are causing us to feel something, then it feels like, when my husband tells me, you need to lose



## Ep 200. The Real Problem

weight, I have to feel whatever it is she's feeling in that moment, which was bad.

Jody: I love this example because sometimes clients will tell me something like this and after a while I'll ask her, "Well do you want to lose weight?" and she'll say, "Yeah." I'm like, okay so you agree with him that you should lose weight? Now, please don't think that we're saying that it's okay for your husband to talk to you in a way that is unkind or judgmental or any of that. That's not what we're saying at all. But what's really key here is just to notice that you think you're feeling bad because your husband said you need to lose weight. You're really just feeling bad because you're thinking that was so mean.

Natalie: That's right.

Jody: And it triggered in you the part of you that judges yourself for your weight, which is also not necessary, and that's what's really going on here, which means that all problems are thought problems in the end. Now, some of you listening have heard us talk about this before and you're like, yeah I get it, I totally understand that, I'm on board. Others of you are like, really, all problems are thought problems? So if you're thinking that, it's fine, stay with us. Let's go back to some other examples and let's talk about some of the common questions that we get in this situation.

I'll start with one, okay? I hear a lot of clients say, "Okay, so you're just telling me I should think positively about everything?" How would you answer that, Natalie?

Natalie: I would say definitely not. I think, again, going back to some of our earlier examples, often we want to keep the thoughts that we have. So when we were talking about murder and we think murder is wrong, that's a thought I want to keep. I don't want to feel positive about murder. But in a situation where I want to stay married to my husband and I want to love my husband and I want to love myself and not hand that power over to him, that's when I would decide, not for him but for you, in that situation, it might be worth looking at that thought and realizing, maybe that thought isn't

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

helping me because it's making me feel bad and maybe there is a different thought I can choose so that it's not up to my husband to change. He can have whatever opinion he has. He can say whatever he has, but I want to choose how I feel. So, for that reason, I can choose to think something different.

Jody: Right, and I think when we tell people that, they think we're saying, again, okay so just let people say unkind things to you, which we're really not saying. But you can have a conversation with your husband about, look, I really don't want to be spoken to in that way. I'm not okay with that. It's not okay to talk to me that way. That conversation, like you first of all being willing to have that conversation in the first place, but second of all, being willing to have it from a place where you're not upset. And this is what's fascinating, right, we're like, husbands shouldn't say those things to me. He shouldn't be so mean. And then we start being mean to husband.

So the solution is to decide I don't have to get upset and be mean back and I can still have boundaries for myself, and if I choose, I can say, "Listen, if you say that to me, I'm leaving the room, I'm not going to tolerate somebody talking to me that way." So this doesn't mean, when we say all problems are thought problems, that's when people misinterpret and they think we're saying, so just sit back and let people take advantage of you or walk all over you or however they say it. And that's not what we're saying at all. But standing up for yourself with confidence and not then starting to emulate the exact behavior you don't like in your spouse only comes from first thinking a different thought.

Natalie: That's right, and it's funny because we think we have to feel bad or else we're letting them walk all over us, but really, that's such a disempowering stance where if you just decide he's going to say that, and first of all, that means nothing about you or whether or not you need to lose weight, that tells you about him and some of the experiences he's having or wherever he's coming from. So we can just let him own all of that, and then you get to decide, I disagree, if you want to. And you don't even have to make that mean anything about you.

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

And again, like you said, you can decide to have a conversation with them and say, you know what, you don't need to tell me if I need to lose weight or not and he may or may not listen, but you don't have to let him decide how you're going to feel in that conversation.

Jody: Yeah, that's right. So let's give some ideas of, again, in that situation, what might be some more useful thoughts. So you have one, which is like he's wrong...

Natalie: Or this has nothing to do with me, it's all about him.

Jody: Because it's hard, right, especially if this is a woman who has sensitivity about her body image, as most women do, it's very challenging to hear someone that you care about whose opinion you maybe care about say that to you and just deflect it with, I don't care. So we get that that's hard, but I love the thought, like you said, this isn't about me, this is about him.

Natalie: That's right.

Jody: It genuinely is though about him, right? That's hard for some people to wrap their heads around, but it really, really is. Like, what is it about for him? What might be going on for him do you think?

Natalie: So that's always interesting to take a look at because it's funny, we almost think in our minds, well he is being really cruel to me, but really, if we were to take a look at what's going on in his circumstance in that moment, what would make somebody possibly think to say something like you need to lose weight? So where that's coming from, it truly is all about him, so it has something to do with maybe – I'm going to use this just for to lighten this a bit...

Jody: Let's laugh again...

Natalie: But in one of my favorite 30 Rock episodes was Jack hires a private investigator whose – I love that guy, what's his name? Steve Buscemi. I love Steve Buscemi. Anyway, he's the private investigator and

[Better Than Happy](#) with Jody Moore

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

he makes the comment, “It’s like I always tell my assistant, your weight is a reflection on me.” And I just love that, I think because I felt I could relate to it having been a personal assistant for a while. Anyway, I just love that joke. But relating that back to this, there’s something in your husband that made him decide to say these words, and it’s not coming from your weight, remember, your weight is his circumstance...

Jody: A reflection of him. I’m kidding, it’s really not.

Natalie: I’m kidding, it’s not a reflection on him. So your weight is the circumstance and now he’s having thoughts about it. Now his thoughts have everything to do with him. So his thoughts are telling us something like maybe she’s unhealthy, maybe she’s going to get sick, who knows? And it doesn’t necessarily mean it is coming from a caring kind place. He might be thinking that, your weight is a reflection on me. But even if that was his thought, something like I’m not attracted to you and so you need to lose weight, if it was something like that, then that still only tells us about him and that tells us nothing about whether or not you actually need to lose weight.

Jody: That’s right, and attraction is such an interesting one because we think it’s about something physiological or physical outside of us. We think it’s about the circumstance, right? Like the other person, how they look, what their body looks like or whatever, and that’s really not true.

Natalie: Have you ever had that experience or do you remember when you were dating and you met someone and you were like, this guy is so hot. And then you got to know him a little bit and you completely lost all attraction to him.

Jody: He got so much less attractive once you got to know him, or I’ve had the opposite to where I’m like, eh, and then suddenly you get to know them and there’s something about their personality. I think women tend to be more that way, drawn towards personality traits.

Natalie: I think men as well though.

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

Jody: I do too, you're right, I do too. But you know...

Natalie: And there's so much that goes into attraction, but when we decide, first of all coming from your perspective or this woman's perspective, if she thinks, I do need to be a different weight in order to be attractive, that's going to feel one way. But remember, that's about him and that really doesn't have anything to do with you. So the only thing that determines whether or not you need to lose weight is how you feel about it.

Jody: That's right, and you can't really hate yourself into losing weight, it's really hard, I've tried.

Natalie: It does not work.

Jody: Like you can't tell yourself I'm ugly and I need to lose weight. you may get a little bit of motivation temporarily, but not like long term healthy weight loss.

Natalie: And I love that you said that because in marriage especially what I've noticed with my clients is that we tend to think, when we don't like the way somebody is acting in marriage, we have to really disagree with them and we have to separate ourselves and we have to be somewhat critical or else they're just going to really give in and do whatever they want, which is so funny, and we'll talk about that on another podcast. But that's really interesting because that's really not the case.

Jody: The opposite is true actually. But I have like 200 episodes on that. Okay, so this is just really good to know, you guys. The real problem is our thinking and sometimes we want to think a thought that causes an emotion that doesn't feel good. Look, I'm just going to go a tiny bit deeper here for a minute, if we lose someone, just come back again next week, we'll pick you up again there, I promise. But emotions – and we're not going to spend a long time talking about emotions, but emotions or feelings, which are created by our thoughts, really are the motivator for us in our lives.

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

We're all trying to feel better in the end. But, here's a deep question, how do we know what emotions are positive and which ones are negative? Like, is there even such a thing as a negative, quote en quote, emotion?

Because we could go to a movie – like if you think about typically what we think are negative emotions like fear or sadness, overwhelm, anxiety, all of those emotions that don't feel good in our bodies and yet, we go to movies – like your husband for example loves, like the scarier the movie, the better.

Natalie: He loves horror films, yes.

Jody: Yeah, like if he could feel fear or terror, that's what he's trying to do by seeing a movie.

Natalie: That's right, yep.

Jody: Why? I don't really get it with those, to be honest.

Natalie: He thinks it's fun in that controlled environment where you can step outside of reality for a minute and just be – that's his way of feeling entertained and I think he really feels alive in that moment.

Jody: And even for those of us that don't like horror films, I do like a movie where I love, especially if I can feel a little bit sad and excited and anticipating something and then maybe feel happy and joyful and light and laughing, that's what we like when we feel a lot of emotion. If I go to a movie and I don't feel a lot of emotion, we're like, it wasn't that good.

Natalie: That's right, if you follow the plot of a lot of television programs, you'll notice, we love that whole process to get to the end. So it feels drawn out, sometimes it even feels a little slow, but there's some anticipation that feels a little bit uncomfortable. But without that uncomfortable feeling, your story is really flat.

Jody: That's right, so that's why I'm saying, are negative emotions, quote en quote, negative emotions, are they even really negative? Or is it just the fact that we think, in our life, when they're created by circumstances that

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

are real as opposed to on a movie screen, then we feel like we need to try and manipulate and control those circumstances and try to escape those emotions. Whereas if we were just willing to feel them and know that we're the creator of them with our thoughts anyway, then maybe, like you said with your husband, it feels like a controlled environment. What if it's all a controlled environment because it's really only our thoughts creating it?

Natalie: Well that's pretty deep, sis.

Jody: I told you. I told you I was going to lose some people.

Natalie: That's pretty deep for 9:13 at night.

Jody: I don't know, I'm getting a second wind. Okay, anything else you want to say here, Nat?

Natalie: So the one point I would like to add to this is, after we start really experiencing this, once we've learned it and we start noticing this in our life, then what we tend to do next is use it against ourselves. And so what I hear from a lot of my clients after we've talked through this a bit is, I know this is just a thought, but. So then we start thinking, well this doesn't feel good and I shouldn't be thinking this because I know this is making me feel that. Now, I would say that's not necessary because really this is good news and this is something that should only be used to help you feel whatever you want to feel, not to be used against you because it's just this idea that you have so much more control over what you feel in your life.

And again, all we're usually wanting, all we're ever wanting, is to feel something. We're wanting to escape negative emotion, we're wanting to feel something good. And so when we know that it just comes back to our thoughts, that just puts the power in our hands to really decide more deliberately what we want our experience to be.

Jody: Amen, sister Clay. I mean, it really is true that the goal isn't to stop having thoughts. I always tell my clients, just imagine it's like you're observing an animal on the nature channel, right, and you're just watching

## Ep 200. The Real Problem

yourself and watching your brain. And it doesn't mean you have to judge it, but just the observance of it will shift it for you right away. Like, it gives you a different perspective anyway. It doesn't mean it will solve it, but it will just give you some awareness that we don't have when we're just at the effect of our thoughts. Alright, that's the real problem.

Natalie: That's the real problem every time.

Jody: Thanks for joining us. See you next time.

Natalie: See you next time.

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](http://jodymoore.com/askjody) and register before you miss it. I'll see you there.