

Ep 210. Empathy



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Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 210, Empathy.

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.

Hey, what's happening? I am on the last of a series of podcasts I'm recording all in one day because I wanted to try doing some batch recording and see if I like that process better, so my voice is starting to go a little, but I think I've got it in me for one more episode. Are you ready? This might be the best one, I don't know, let's see how it goes.

So, first of all, I announced, a few episodes ago, that tickets are on sale for *Better Than Happy* Live in Utah. And because I'm recording this so far in advance and I'm batch recording, I have no idea if those tickets are sold out or not yet.

They might be gone. If they're not gone, I'm pretty sure they'll be gone soon because last time we did *Better Than Happy* Live in Utah, it sold out in, like, 10 days. So if you are coming, you've got to go get your ticket before they're gone because you're going to email us and you're going to say, "I really want to come and I didn't get a seat, can you get me in?" And we're going to say, "I love you but there's just only so many chairs that fit in that room."

Maybe next time we'll get a bigger room because I think we need a bigger room, or maybe we'll do two days, I don't know. But for this year, this is what we got. This is what's on the books. So if you want to come hang out with me for the day at Thanksgiving Point and go deep on some work and get coached or listen to coaching and really experience coaching in real life, then that's what we're going to do that day. So, go to live events on our webpage, jodymoore.com, click on live events, or we'll pop a link here in the show notes too for you.

Okay, so we're going to talk about empathy. Now, I have to tell you, have my good friend Dina, who manages my Instagram account, and I give her

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the content and then she posts it on Instagram and she kind of helps me monitor and make sure we're responding to comments and everything. And we posted a quote – I gave her a quote about empathy and she was like, “Uh-oh, add empathy to your list of topics that gets people really charged up.”

We have a list of topics that people tend to get some emotional reaction to, and empathy is one of them, why knew? Here's what I said on Instagram. I said – I don't remember exactly how I said I, but in a nutshell I said, you don't feel other people's feelings, you feel your own feelings. You can't feel another person's feelings.

And just like always, 99% of the people really attached to that and found it helpful, and then there's that 1% that was like, “I don't think you understand what it's like to be an empath and I am an empath, I'm highly empathic.” And here's what I want to tell you; I'm not trying to take anything away from you.

If you identifying as an empath – and I'm also not saying you just made that up in your head, that's not what I'm saying at all, I'm just saying, if you talking and thinking about yourself in this way, as an empath who feels other people's feelings, works well for you and it's providing you some relief and it gives you some understanding around what's going on in your life and it helps you to feel more confident or at peace with yourself or know how to care for yourself or manage yourself, or any of that, then I'm all for that. Keep that.

But if it's not serving you, if it's, in some way, limiting you in your life or causing a problem for you, you also don't have to keep that line of thinking. So, what I'm going to present to you today is the way I think about empathy, where I think empathy is really, really powerful and has a place.

I am going to speak to my understanding of what's going on for someone that might label themselves highly sensitive or as an empath, what I think is really going on. I could be totally wrong about all of it.

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I find the most peace in my life when I'm just willing to know I could be totally wrong about all of it. But I want you to just open your mind to trying on some of these ideas.

And for the majority of you, I think you're going to find that thinking about empathy and thinking about your own emotions and other people's emotions in this way is so freeing. It provides you so much more peace and helps you be a more compassionate person.

So, what is empathy anyway? What is empathy? I looked up some definitions. I didn't really find any definitions that I loved. They were okay. I didn't, like, disagree with them. I was just like, that's kind of boring. So I decided, I'm just going to write my own definition.

I believe that empathy is us feeling feelings because of our thoughts about what another person is experiencing. So, a lot of people think about empathy and they think they are feeling other people's sadness, they are feeling other people's grief or loss or heartache. And I don't believe that's what's happening anyway and I don't think that's what empathy is.

I think that we are feeling our own feelings because of our own thoughts about what we believe that other person is experiencing. So you may understand their feelings. You may be able to relate to their feelings. And you may even be feeling some of the same feelings that they are feeling, but it's still you feeling your own feelings, not feeling other people's feelings.

Because if we go back to just the basic definition we use for what feelings are in the first place – and by the way, I use the words feelings and emotions interchangeably, so I'm talking about emotions, I'm not talking about sensations like hot or cold.

By the way, little side note, sidebar conversation here, we went to a theme park here local the other day called Silverwood and they have these big rollercoasters. And I am all for, like, a medium sized rollercoaster. I'm not

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really crazy about a big rollercoaster. And none of my kids likes to ride those. But my husband does.

So anyway, my son and I later were talking about, you know that part on the rollercoaster when you go up the hill really slowly, up, up, up and you're just climbing and you know what's coming on the other side of that is a huge drop. So we were talking about, isn't it fascinating how going up the hill is almost scarier than the drop? And there's no sensation happening physiologically in the body.

You're moving really slow. It's no different than, like, riding on those little cars that my little kids like to ride that go so slow you're totally bored, right? You're going really, really slowly up this hill, but you're feeling all this fear because of your thinking, which is, after this is going to come a huge drop and that's going to be so scary.

And then you go down the drop and then you have some sensation happening as your body moves at a high speed, dropping, whatever goes on in your body, in your stomach and everything else that causes that sensation. But then you have the emotion on top of it of fear, which is created by your thinking. So anyway, my son and I were having this discussion about sensations versus emotions and I thought it was interesting. But, back to empathy now, let's bring it back on track.

Empathy is a feeling, so it's not a sensation, like dropping on a rollercoaster. It's an emotion like climbing up the rollercoaster and your brain is creating it. And feelings, in and of themselves, or emotions, are just vibrations in the body due to a chemical or hormone being released by a certain organ in your body when your brain thinks a thought.

The whole body works together. The brain works with all the other parts of the body. It's the central command part of the body, and it says, "Hey, we're going to be afraid now because we're thinking this is going to be scary or we might die, so let's release the appropriate hormone or chemical that makes us feel fear." And then the body does so. It's very good at obeying the brain's orders.

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So that is what an emotion is, is a chemical or hormone released in the body that then you feel the vibration of. So it's impossible for you to feel somebody else's chemicals or hormones. They don't jump out of their body into your body.

What does happen is you think a thought about what they're experiencing and then your body releases your own chemicals or hormones with you. So this is why I say you're not feeling someone else's feelings, you're feeling your own feelings.

Now, the reason that some people want to argue with me on this, the reason it feels like we're feeling other people's feelings is because of how amazing human beings are and all the things that happen unconsciously without us even realizing it that make it feel like it's just happening and this other person and their grief or sorrow or whatever they're feeling seems to be the trigger of it. But that's never the case.

Human beings are amazing at reading other human beings. We really are. Like, we think that animals are so intuitive. They can pick up on danger, they can pick up on whatever, and many of them are. But we are even better at it than any other animal that exists.

Maybe you want to call it instinct, maybe you want to call it something like that, that feels a little bit more mysterious and keeps it in the unconscious realm, which is totally fine. But we are noticing cues in other people and that is what makes us think thoughts that makes us feel our own emotions.

So, if somebody around me feels sad, I can pick up on their sadness, but it's not because their sadness jumps out of their body into my body. It's because I am able to read cues in that person, in their body language, in their tone, in their facial expression, in their eye contact or lack thereof, not just the words they say, not just the things they do, but the words they don't say, the things they don't do, and the ways in which they say them.

All of these little nuances of human behavior send messages to someone outside of us about what we might be thinking and feeling. And then we

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instantly, and without being consciously aware, think our own thoughts about what they're thinking and feeling and then feel our own emotions.

My daughter who is three, she's going to be four this fall, but still, she's three. She's very young. And she will say to me – this just happened the other day, I was like, "That's awesome." I was getting ready to go somewhere and the house was a mess and I wasn't feeling good and I hadn't had enough sleep and I was grumpy, okay. I know this is surprising, but it happens sometimes. I get grumpy.

Okay, so I 'm totally grumpy and I'm like, "Come on, Taylor, get in the car," and I put her in the car and I buckle her up. And I wasn't yelling at her. I wasn't, like, overtly angry in any way, I was just a little grumpy. And I put her in the car and I get in the car and she says, "Mom, are you happy?"

I was like, see, Taylor knows that I am not happy and she kind of prefers that I be happy because even at age three, when she can't articulate it and she can't explain it, she can pick up on me and the way I'm behaving or the things that I'm saying or the force in which I put her in her car seat that tells her, mom is not happy.

And then she starts thinking a thought that she's not completely consciously aware of either which is, uh-oh, mom's not happy and that's not good. Life's better when mom's happy. Maybe we should try to make her happy. Maybe we should just ask her a question. The only question she can think to ask is, "Mom, are you happy?"

So, that is how amazing we are as human beings. I didn't teach Taylor how to do that. We never sat down and had a lesson about how to read other people and how to tell what they're feeling. She just knows to do it intuitively. Heavenly Father created her that way. She couldn't even articulate what's going on.

And so you can imagine that as we get older and as our brains develop more and we get smarter and we get more intuitive and we get better at

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reading other people, that all of that is going to be magnified. And so it feels like we're feeling other people's feelings.

Now, here's the other component I want to bring in; I believe there is such a thing as different levels of sensitivity within different people. So according to the books I've read on highly sensitive people, about a third of the population is what they would consider, quote en quote, highly sensitive.

And all that means is that the way your nervous system is wired results in you experiencing things more intensely than someone who is less highly sensitive. So this tends to include physiological things as well as emotion.

So you know those people who are like, "Oh there's a tag in the back of my shirt and it's bugging me..." Now, sometimes a tag would bother any of us, but there are some people who can't handle a tag in their shirt at all ever. That's probably a more highly sensitive person.

If you cry easily, you're more highly sensitive because crying is just a really intense emotion that the body has to release in some way and tears are one way in which it tries to do that. So all that means is that you feel emotion more intensely than someone that doesn't cry as easily, they don't feel it as intensely.

So that's all that's happening, and again, a third of the population is this way. So there's no right or wrong way, there's no better or worse. There are pros and cons to either. If you're highly sensitive, then yes, that means you experience negative emotion more intensely, but you also experience the positive more intensely.

There are definite benefits to both, but if you are highly sensitive, maybe you identify as an empath. Not all highly sensitive people identify as empaths, but most likely, according to the research I did, anyone who is an empath or considers themselves an empath is probably going to be highly sensitive.

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So they're going to experience things more intensely, but they're still experiencing their own feelings by their own thoughts. They're not experiencing other people's feelings. They don't jump out of their bodies.

So why is this useful to know? Well, if other people can create our feelings by their feelings, then we're sort of at the effect of trying to control other people in the world. We have to start people-pleasing or we have to be afraid to be around people who are feeling a certain way, and that's just not true, my friends.

Now, is it going to be more challenging to feel happy around somebody who's mad? Of course. And should you need to or want to all the time? No. Do you want to sometimes set boundaries and say, I don't want to be around that person a whole lot because it requires a lot of me to feel how I want to feel around them? Yes, completely, nothing wrong with doing that.

But still, you're the creator of all your feelings, and that's just good to know because there may be situations when you want to feel good around someone who doesn't feel good, and knowing that it's of course possible and available to you keeps you in the driver's seat.

Now, here's the last thing I want to say about empathy; empathy is a beautiful thing. Being empathic or empathetic with someone else is a beautiful thing. Sometimes, because when I'm coaching you guys empathy actually is not part of the role I play as a coach, I'm a very empathetic person in my personal life and in other areas.

But when you come to me for coaching, what you need and want is not for me to be empathetic. That would be like if I hired an interior designer and she just came in and said, "I think you've done a great job; I love what you've done here, you should be more confident about the way you've decorated your house."

That's nice and all. That's what I want my friend to say. That's what I want my sister to say. But that's not what I want my interior designer to say. I want her to say, "I think we can really enhance this area. I think we could

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improve this part in this way. I think we should consider redoing this.” That’s why I hired my interior designer, if I am going to hire one, which I would like to do one day.

So the same is true in a coach. When you hire me to coach you, I’m not there to validate and empathize with you. That’s just not what you need in that scenario. So sometimes, because people see that and they understand that, they think, well I should be like Jody with my friends.

I’m like, no. Don’t be like Jody the coach when you’re with your friends. That’s going to be weird. And I’m not Jody the coach when I’m with my friends either. I’m empathetic. I’m like, oh my gosh, that sounds so hard. And now I’m feeling emotions like empathy with my friend. But I can’t do that when I’m coaching. It just doesn’t work.

So empathy is a beautiful thing. There’s lots of opportunity and appropriate space for empathy. It’s basically a version of, I see you, I hear you. And I want you to keep doing that.

When you’re going to create a problem for yourself is when you don’t manage your own energy and then you deplete yourself emotionally, when you don’t choose how you want to feel, when you don’t have boundaries and limits, when you story-fondle. And sometimes, you’re going to want to story-fondle, by the way.

Story-fondling is a funny term that we use to talk about – you know how it goes, right? Your friend comes to me and says, “Oh my gosh, guess what happened,” and you’re like, “What? Oh and guess what else, I heard this too...” And you kind of fondle the story and you both, together, grow the story.

And maybe there’s time when that’s necessary and appropriate, but also, you don’t have to do that, right? When your friend is coming to you with a complaint or a problem and you’re thinking, “Okay, this is ridiculous, you don’t need to be this upset over it,” you can still be empathetic. You can still say, “I see you, I hear you, that sounds hard.” And you don’t have to move

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into story-fondling if you don't want to and that doesn't feel like who you want to be.

Another tactic I find to be really helpful, which my husband is really good at this with our kids, is sort of a redirect. So our kids are maybe upset about something or maybe they got hurt or something and he'll get down at their level, he'll comfort them, he'll hug them. He'll say, "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. That sounded like it hurt so bad."

And then he'll say, "Do you know what happened to me one time?" And he'll start telling them a story about when he was hurt or something else that he knows they're going to find funny, and next thing you know, they're laughing. Maybe there's still tears, but there's also laughter.

My three-year-old is also good at this. Her favorite words right now are all the inappropriate words that three-year-olds learn. So the other day, my son, who's five, was crying about something. I think he'd gotten hurt. And my husband was there talking to him and saying, "Oh it's okay, you're going to be alright." And Taylor said, "Hey, Oliver, guess what." And he said, "What?" among his tears. And she said, "Poop."

And they just both started laughing. And I was like, "Taylor, that's some good coaching right there. That's called a redirect." You redirect to something kind of light, something kind of funny.

Now, I personally don't use poop as the redirect very often, but I may say something like, "Oh my gosh, but isn't it an awesome day today and look at our life and this is what's going on with me." And I just kind of redirect to something else in an appropriate way. You can still show empathy and kind of use a redirect, if it's not a subject that you want to engage in a lot of story-fondling with.

Alright, so I hope that that just kind of clears up, first of all, my thoughts on empathy. You're allowed to think whatever you want to, but I just wanted to offer it to some of you as a way to think about how to be empathetic and still manage your own emotions and be who you want to be and apply all

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this work I'm teaching you here. It is 100% possible. Let's keep working on it together. And thanks again for joining me for another episode. I will see you next week. Take care.

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.