

## Ep 224. Tell a Better Story with Matthew Dicks



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Jody Moore**

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## Ep 224. Tell a Better Story with Matthew Dicks

I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 224, Tell a Better Story with Matthew Dicks.

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, you guys. I am so excited to get this episode out to you. I recently learned about Matthew Dicks through Kurt Francom's podcast, Leading Saints. He had him on as a guest a little while ago. My mom actually mentioned him. And I listened and loved his episode there. And then I went and found his book called Storyworthy. And I bought it on Audible and listened to it twice so far because I loved it so much.

So this is sort of how I get sometimes when I find something I'm excited about, I get a little bit obsessive and dive right in. And that's how I felt when I learned what Matthew Dicks teaches about telling stories.

So, obviously, in the work that I do as a coach with you guys here on the podcast and in the speaking I do and things like that, being a better storyteller would be something that would be really useful to me. But even for all of you listening who don't have a business and don't have those things going on, storytelling is such an important part of how we connect as human beings.

It's an important part of how we share our history with one another, how we even pass along information and teach one another. Human beings learn best through stories. Stories are what engage our brains. They're what help us to connect dots. They're just so, so powerful. And I know most of you listening to this podcast are members of the church, and so you're giving talks and teaching lessons.

And we do lots of teaching of one another and guiding of one another and stories are the most powerful way to teach and inspire and leave a lasting impression on the people that you're working with. Most of us don't remember an outline that somebody goes through and their five points.

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What we remember is the story that they told, the story that connects the dots and illustrates the message in real life.

So, just by way of a little bit of background, Matthew Dicks is a teacher – and he'll talk a little bit about this in a minute, but he's a school teacher who got into storytelling sort of as a hobby and he is even more passionate about it than I am and dove right in and started entering storytelling competitions or performing at storytelling events, if you will, and got really good at that and has won a lot of those, and ultimately ended up starting his own storytelling organization where he now teaches other people how to tell stories.

So anyway, I'm really excited for you to hear my conversation with Matthew Dicks. Make sure you listen to the end where he tells the most amazing heart-warming story. And I'm just excited for you to hear that, so please enjoy this episode with Matthew Dicks, here we go.

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Jody: I'm so excited to talk to you, I feel kind of nervous because I've listened to your book like twice.

Matthew: Oh, don't be nervous. My 10-year-old students would tell you I'm an idiot, so you have nothing to worry about.

Jody: I need to figure out your life for a minute here. You're a school teacher, yes?

Matthew: Yes.

Jody: 10-year-olds are in, what, like fourth grade? Fifth grade, okay. You teach fifth grade, bless your heart.

Matthew: Thank you.

Jody: And then you also run this business with your wife, Speak Up.

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Matthew: Yep.

Jody: And when do you sleep?

Matthew: Well, when I'm writing my novels I'm sleeping.

Jody: And you've written a lot of books too.

Matthew: I'm actually writing a book that answers this question because it's the most frequently asked question. I have just optimized my life to be as absolutely productive as possible, while also at the same time, any time my children want to play, I drop everything and I play with them.

Jody: How old are your kids now?

Matthew: 10 and seven.

Jody: That's awesome.

Matthew: I played golf and went to the Patriots game this weekend. People assume I'm just working all the time, but it's not the case.

Jody: No, good. Well according to what I teach, that shows that you're good at managing your brain, and your schedule obviously.

Matthew: Yes, someone once asked me, how do you keep so many balls in the air at the same time, you know, juggling. And I said, that's the wrong way to think about it. I said, I have a whole bunch of balls in front of me and I just pick one up at a time and I go, I'm working on my book for a while, and then when I'm done, that ball gets put down and I go, I've got to work on the business for a while. So it's not juggling at all.

Jody: It's a lot better than keeping plates spinning, like they're going to fall and break.

Matthew: No, that's not the way it is.

Jody: Awesome, I love it. Well you're very inspiring and I loved your book.

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Matthew: Thank you very much.

Jody: I think you're a coach also, aren't you?

Matthew: Yeah.

Jody: Another ball in front of you.

Matthew: Reluctantly, people come to me and ask me to do it...

Jody: And you're like, alright...

Matthew: Yes, if you give me enough money, I'll help you fix your life.

Jody: So anyway, I first learned about you from Kurt Francom when you were on his podcast Leading Saints. So I just love the idea of you coming on and talking to us about the power of storytelling, because as you teach in your book Storyworthy, there can be a lot of ways that this can come in handy in our lives, certainly as parents and then as teachers and things like that. So I just really appreciate you being here.

Matthew: It's my pleasure. I'm honored to be here.

Jody: So, let's just begin, if you wouldn't mind, I was hoping that you could walk us through a little bit – obviously people need to read your book to get the whole message, but sort of the highlights of how to tell a good story, and then I was hoping you would also be willing to share a story with us today. Would that work?

Matthew: Sure.

Jody: I should have given you a heads up.

Matthew: No, no, I'm like, do I have one in my head? Yeah I do, okay.

Jody: I'd figured you do because you're a pro at this, let's be honest.

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Matthew: I usually have about 25 in my head, but you don't want a 12-minute story either, a five-minute story would probably be best for this.

Jody: Okay, so let's begin, if we could, with some of the most common mistakes that people make when they're telling a story.

Matthew: Sure, I mean, the problem that most people have is that they think that a story is stuff that happened to me told chronologically from beginning to end. And rather than looking for moments of realization or transformation, moments that are worth speaking about, they just basically tell you what happened over the course of some time. And that ends up being terrible because no one really cares about your life in that great detail. Even your spouse doesn't really want to hear about your whole day. They want to hear about the significant moments that took place during that day.

And so the understanding of what a story is, is often the fundamental problem that people begin with. So what we're really looking for are moments in our lives when something happened that changed us in some way. It doesn't have to be positive. It could be, I used to be a decent human being and it turns out I'm not so decent anymore, you know. But whatever it is, there has to be some change over time. Either I change, or I now see the world or see my spouse or see my children or see my friends or see myself in a new way. And that's what people want. That's the kind of stories that captivate people.

That's what movies are about and books are about too. They're not just stuff that happens over the course of the character's time. It's a specific day, it's a specific year, it's specific events that you get to watch your character develop in some way.

Jody: Yes, and I will say that, like you say in the book, that this will ruin movies for you. It does a little bit, but also I find it really intriguing to, at the beginning of a movie, try to guess, so what is the ending going to be then and how is that transformation going to take place?

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Matthew: Yeah, it happens for me too. I enjoy pulling movies apart as I'm watching them, but it doesn't mean that they're not entertaining to me.

Jody: That's right. Okay, so it's the transformation then, and I love how you talk about that it doesn't have to be necessarily. I think we think we need to tell a story about where we transformed in a way that's positive and we became a better version of us, and that sometimes those transformations where it's not necessarily as positive can be powerful for people to learn from, right?

Matthew: Yeah, I mean, I like to tell those stories best. On our podcast just this week, we were talking about a story that I might tell someday. And I said, the problem with the story is I come out looking too good. I really don't want to tell stories about Matt was a huge success and he found this clever solution to a difficult problem because that's really not terribly appealing to a lot of people, unless I'm teaching teachers how to be better with students or I'm trying to inspire a kid, but a lot of times when we're telling stories we're looking to connect to people and be vulnerable. There's no vulnerability in I did something great. That's an easy thing for me to say. What I'm looking for are the hard things to say.

I want to say I did - I made a mistake, I did a terrible thing, I was less than what I thought I could have been on that day. Maybe I learned something from it, maybe I changed in some way, but I don't want to tell the stories about my best days. I really look for my worst days.

Jody: Yeah. So here's a question I have for you because like you said, if you're teaching teachers or a student or something, I've tried to apply what I've learned from you in my work as a coach. When I'm out speaking to a group or I'm teaching a tool and I don't want to force my story into the lessons of trying to teach, but my question was how do you sort of approach - because stories are the best way to teach obviously. How do you approach this is the story that seems to fit within it, and especially if you didn't handle it well and then started bridging the gap into the message you're trying to teach?

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Matthew: Well, I would encourage you to shove that story in, to force it in, in that way that you're not doing it, I would say do it. I think that if you watch a TED talk that I give or really any talk that I give, my first motivation is to get people to connect with me, to like me. Once they believe in me, once they feel close to me, I can almost say anything and they will follow me down that path.

Oftentimes we watch world leaders do this to terrible effect. It's sort of the way the world goes wrong when a charismatic leader convinces everyone that he or she is a genius, and suddenly we end up in a terrible place. But that's what I do. So if I'm trying to teach something, I often begin with here's me and here's the problem that I had, and here's either the solution I found for myself, or here's the solution I found in the world for my problem, and now I'm presenting it to you.

But I do believe in getting my own story into every lesson that I teach just about, especially when I'm dealing with people who don't know me well. Because otherwise, I'm just a clever talking head and there's a billion of those. But if I am a person who they feel suddenly connected with, they're understanding that I'm a vulnerable authentic person, they're just going to follow me and they're going to be more open to the message that I have.

Jody: Excellent. Okay, good. I like that. I can sort of force it in there a little bit if it makes sense. And I guess then you have to really check your reasons, right? Like you said, am I leading people in the direction that I feel good about going?

Matthew: Yeah. I mean, it's interesting what you said. For me, I spend an enormous amount of time trying to convince people that the story they have, their own story is worth telling. It's also extremely gendered. So I spend an enormous amount of time trying to convince women that what has happened to them, the story of their lives are worth sharing and people want to hear them, while at the same time trying to convince men that every single thing that has happened to them is not worth speaking about.



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And I'm constantly pushing those two to the middle and so I wasn't surprised when you said that because I work with CEOs of major companies - women who have perfect stories to go along with the pitch that they're making or the appeal that they're making, and yet I have to convince them that that story is going to be valuable to your pitch, that to get investors or stakeholders or customers to believe in you as the person who runs the company is just as important as believing in the product that you're selling or the service that you're offering.

Jody: Yes. So fascinating. We could do a whole study on that I'm sure. Okay, so a story is then a transformation. It's not just a chronological explanation of events that occurred. I know that I certainly related a lot to your point about a lot of us saying well, nothing really amazing has happened in my life. Like you have had some pretty major things that you've been through in your life. Some of us have led a more ordinary life, so would you mind talking a little bit about Homework for Life and how you help people find stories?

Matthew: Yeah. So when I started storytelling, my friends told me, you should take the stage because you've had the worst life of anyone we know.

Jody: And that's what I love about - by the way, we'll link to your book and your podcast and everything, but Matthew tells all these amazing stories in the book so as you're learning techniques, you're hearing these stories and it's fantastic.

Matthew: Thank you. What it turns out to be true though is that those stories, I've died twice and been brought back to life by CPR, I was arrested and tried for a crime I didn't commit, I was homeless for a period in my life. A whole list of nonsense that I've had to go through. They tend not to be my best stories.

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They're not the stories that people request the most. They're not the stories that people reference the most. And actually, when I tell those big stories, I have to find small nuggets within the big story because it turns out that no one can connect with me on a going through the windshield and dying on the side of the road level. That's not something that anyone goes yes, I know what that feels like.

It's pretty singular. So I have to find universal themes within these stories in order for them to have meaning for people. So the stories that I like to tell are the small stories. Little moments that I have. So Homework for Life was a desperate attempt on my part to find more stories. The list that I had of stories I had yet to tell was shrinking and I didn't want to become one of those storytellers who rolls out the same old chestnut every night.

And so all I did was give myself a homework assignment, being a fifth-grade teacher, it's sort of natural to do that. I said that at the end of every day, I'm going to ask myself what is the most story-worthy moment from this day. Even if the moment that I find is not story worthy at all, if it's not worth ever telling anyone, whatever it is, the moment that made this day different than any other day, I'm going to write it down.

And I don't write it down as a story because I believe in small repeatable habits. And so I use an Excel spreadsheet. I have two columns. I have the date column and then I stretch that B column all the way across the screen and in the B column, that's all I allow to record the moment. So it's a few sentences at best.

And over the course of time, something sort of remarkable happened. What I thought I was going to do was find maybe one story per month that I could then take to the stage. But instead, what I discovered is when you turn the lens on your life in this way, when you start asking yourself where are moments of realization and transformation in my day, what is the most story-worthy moment of my day, once you start doing that, you discover your life is filled with them.

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That you have more stories to tell than you could ever imagine, and what happens is we just sort of walk by these moments. And in the rare instances when we actually note them, we make no attempt to remember them in any way. It's the same thing when a parent hears a child say, oh my gosh, you can't believe what my kid said, it was so hilarious, I'm going to write it down. And they never write it down.

And then their kid is 23 and they can't remember a damn thing the kid said. Homework for Life is the acknowledgment that we have moments and we're actually going to write them down. We're going to capture them and then look at them through the lens of storytelling so that we have stories to tell.

Jody: Yeah. So amazing. So I have been doing Homework for Life. I have to admit, I haven't been doing it every day. So I'm starting slow, Matthew. I'm going to get there.

Matthew: Well, you have to do it every day because the important thing is to do it on the days when it's the hardest. People skip it on the day when they say nothing happened today, but that's the day that you work the muscle. It's easy to do Homework for Life on a day when something spectacular happens. Of course you're doing it on that day.

But it's on the day that you look and go, god, there's nothing, that you force yourself to find something, even if it's not ever going to be the story, that's the muscle that you work. That's the lens you slowly sharpen.

Jody: Yes, I love that. And I love - you talked about I think on one of your podcasts too how it sort of slows time down. And when I was talking about how it goes so fast, someone gave you a quote like it made a year go by in the speed of a year. That was so brilliant.

Matthew: Exactly. So beautifully just - we let our week go by and we don't take note of a single thing from that week. We have to look at our calendar

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to see what we did. But if at the end of every year you're reflective about your day, five minutes is all it takes and you think about the things.

Now, for me now, I have multiple entries on most days because I find things all over the place. And I'm not always finding stories. I'm finding moments that will fit into stories someday. Even if it's not a story, if it's a thing that my daughter told me that is never going to be a story, but is something that she said that I never want to forget, it goes into my Homework for Life.

The other thing that happens is memories will start to bubble up from your past. You sort of crack open. Because once you start applying that lens to your life and you start seeing these things, it connects to your past instantly. And memories that you can't believe you allowed yourself to forget will suddenly reappear, and they will become part of your Homework for Life too.

Jody: Excellent. Okay, so once you have an idea or something that - like I've heard you say before, okay, this I think is going to turn into a story at some point. Is that the next phase then is to identify the transformation point of that story?

Matthew: Yeah, I say that with storytelling we start at the end. We start with the moment. That moment when we changed in some way. And that's always the end of the story. The end of the movie is the moment that hero transforms in some way. So we start at the end knowing oh, this is the moment I changed. This is the end of my story.

A lot of people don't end their story there. They keep talking. My father-in-law is probably telling me a story right now and the only reason I'm not there to hear it is because I eventually walked away. But he never stops. But if you identify the moment, then you have a great end to your story and that's a good thing to find.

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And then the beginning is simply the opposite of the end. So if you ask yourself on this day I suddenly realized this thing, the beginning of your story is going to be the moment when you didn't know that thing. And sometimes it's hard to choose because you have multiple options.

You have many moments in your life where you didn't know something and then you did. So the beginning is actually more tricky to find because it's more flexible. The end is always going to be solidly that moment when I had that realization.

I call them five-second moments because I really do think that most of these changes happen over the course of five seconds. There was a moment we were one thing and now we're another thing. And I think the process to get there can take a very long time, but the actual moment is often instantaneous.

Jody: Fantastic. Okay. And then in terms of what happens in the middle, again, you give lots of different strategies in the book, but how would you describe to someone - I think for me I struggle with is this a detail that adds to the story that I should leave in or is this just taking people's brains on a tangent that isn't necessary. Does that just come with practice? How do you know that?

Matthew: What I do is I keep the end of my story in mind. I say to myself, at the end of my story, I need my listeners to be here and this is what they need to know to have this moment have the same meaning for them as it had for me, or something close to it.

And therefore, every detail I put in the story must serve the end of the story. And if it doesn't serve the end, if it's there because it's funny, if it's there because it's just important to me and I want everyone to know it, all of those things go away.

Jody: But funny is so fun.

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Matthew: I know, but if you like funny, I do stand-up comedy. You can do that. You can just be funny. I don't like it as much because people don't remember you for your stand-up comedy. I tell jokes and the next day they'll remember that I was funny but they won't remember what I actually said.

Whereas if I tell a great story, people can tell that story again and again for years. That story will live inside them. So funny is great and humor has a place in storytelling, but if you're just being funny for the sake of being funny, that's not serving the story and needs to come out.

Jody: Okay. So do you find that after you craft a story, do you generally go back and do a lot of editing? What's your timeline for something like this?

Matthew: It's very different, depending on the story. So some stories just make sense instantly and I can have them ready in 15 minutes probably. I don't write my stories out. Everything is done orally. I'm the only person I know who does it this way though.

Everyone writes them out. I just speak them. Probably because I'm a novelist and so when I'm writing novels, that narrative voice on the page is different than my own. And so writing on the page is weird for me if I'm writing about myself. So it's oral but it can take 15 minutes. I can have a story pretty well crafted in 15 minutes.

And I have a story that I've been working on for five years and I've yet to crack that story. I've yet to figure out the best way to tell it. So it just depends on the story, the complications involved. I tell people when they're starting to tell stories, choose the easiest ones to tell. And that's usually a story that you can tell chronologically. You don't have to sort of jump time.

Tell a story that takes place over the course of a very short period of time. Lots of our stories can take place over the course of 15 minutes of our life.

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That's a much easier story to tell. Try to choose stories that have fewer people in them and fewer locations. All of that will simplify the process.

Jody: Okay, nice. And then last thing if we could speak to it because I have you share a story is I love the idea that when you're telling a story, you need to describe the setting to help people sort of visually in their minds be there. I think - I know I tended to before I read your book, never really do that. And just anchoring it to a place or a time really makes people be in that story with you.

Matthew: Yeah. My goal is to activate imagination. I want people to sort of forget I exist. I want them to not pay attention to me in my physical form. I want them to be in their mind. And the only way to really do that consistently in someone's brain is to give them a location to imagine me standing within.

Otherwise, they're going to be looking at me standing on a stage, standing in front of a classroom. And so I tell my story in scenes. So every moment, there has to be a place that they can imagine me standing in. And the great thing about using scenes, using location is it requires almost no adjectives.

I can tell you I'm standing in a garden on a summer day and you have now created a garden for me on a summer day. And if the type of garden and the size of the garden are irrelevant to my story, then I'm going to let you choose whatever garden you want because the power of your imagination is better than the power of my words.

Now, if it needs to be a flower garden, I will tell you that. But otherwise, I try to be as adjective-free as possible in my stories because I want your brain to do the work for me. And so I give you a hint about what you should see and you will see it for me.

Jody: So good. Do you think it can work - because I recently gave a talk at a coaching conference to a bunch of life coaches and I was trying to tell a

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story and teach some points along the way, and I think I sort of - I don't know. I don't know that this story was as powerful because I stopped and said this is like this and taught this thing and then tried to wrap up the story. Do you do that? Or do you generally tell the story and teach a point and keep them sort of separate?

Matthew: Right. I do it two ways. One way is I tell a story, I stop it, I teach the point, and then I finish the story. Now, the story has to be suited to that. It has to have a natural stopping spot. But it also has to have a natural stopping spot that creates enough suspense that people will still want to hear the end of it.

The other way I do it, I think my preferred way is I tell a story, I teach something from that story, and then I tell a second very short story to close out, which sort of reinforces the idea that I just taught. I do always begin and end with story because that is what people remember. That is what people are attracted to. The meat in the middle, so to speak, is my lesson, is my takeaway, but I have to start and end with story.

Jody: I love that point that the story has to be engaging enough that they wonder what's going to happen next.

Matthew: Yes. But it can't be one of those cliffhanger-y where we're really annoyed with you for making us wait. It's going to often be a story like a good example would be you see someone you love, you find the courage to ask them out, you have your first date, everything goes beautifully, and then the end of the story is by the way, we got married. So there's a natural conclusion to it but you can also punch it up at the end with by the way, today he's my husband.

Jody: But they're not so distracted with like, did she say yes to the date or not?



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Matthew: Exactly, yes. You can't leave them annoyed while you're trying to teach.

Jody: Right. Okay, brilliant. Well, if we wanted - you guys do workshops, right? You and your wife, Elysha.

Matthew: Yes.

Jody: So what happens at these workshops? You're helping us craft stories?

Matthew: It depends what kind you take. So I teach a beginner's workshop, which is one of these extremely low stakes. You can come in and say nothing. I will be entertaining and give you lots of foundational material and you'll leave and never have to say a word to me if you don't want.

Because a lot of people find themselves beginning in that state. They don't want to share a truth with anyone yet. They're not ready to talk to strangers. So those are very popular because they don't require much commitment.

And then I teach advanced workshops where it's eight people in a room with me and you are sharing stories. You are standing up and telling a story, or maybe you come and you have nothing, which is great. I love that. I sit you in a chair and I start asking you about your life. And I have an ear for what's going to work and I know where to go for stories so I will find a story from your life that's worth telling and we'll sort of get it up on its feet.

We'll create a skeleton for it, something that you can begin working on on your own. We do improv in those workshops too so that you're telling stories on the fly, so you can start applying some of the skills that I teach. The goal is we don't want you to go to dinner with your friends and feel like you have prep stories before you go to dinner.

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Or today, I haven't seen my wife yet. She's going to come home from work, she's going to ask how my day was. I'm going to tell her a couple of things. I'm going to tell them as a story. It's become so natural for me that I know what the moment is. I start somewhere in the beginning. I tell it as a story but not without requiring me to think about it on the way home so that I can be entertaining for my family. It just comes out normally now. That's what I want people to eventually reach.

Jody: I just want to send all the people in my life to that workshop. Can we do that? So good.

Matthew: I'll tell you, I always ask people in those workshops, why are you here? And the reasons are so incredibly various and the jobs they have, but there's always one or two people in a workshop that say I'm here because someone told me I needed to come here. It's often a husband whose wife has told him he needs to come to this workshop.

Jody: I love it. And kudos to the husband for being willing.

Matthew: Yes, absolutely.

Jody: Okay, so to come to the advanced workshop, we don't have to be an experienced storyteller. We just have to be willing to really be participating and go to the advanced level, yeah?

Matthew: Precisely. You just have to be willing. People come with nothing. They'll say, I've got nothing, and oftentimes they think they're going to get off the hook with nothing. What I do is I listen to the stories through the day and I help to improve the story, but each story becomes the material from which I can teach a lesson about storytelling as well. So it's constant feedback and lessons throughout the day.

Jody: Okay, I'm in, I'm coming this year. You're going to see me. Alright, tell us a story.

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Matthew: Alright, this is a story I just recently told at Speak Up, our company. We produce shows and I tell a story at every show, so it's fairly new. And it goes like this. The first line is always tricky for me. It's like the door, got to unlock the door. Okay, I got it.

So I'm walking across a large empty parking lot on a Saturday morning. I'm walking in the direction of this awful edifice of a building. It is poured concrete, it is brown and grey. It's this brutalist architecture from the 1970s that makes it apparent to me that the people of the 70s hated themselves and hated everything around them.

And I hate this building too. Not for the way it looks though, but for what is happening inside. Somewhere on the third floor, down a narrow hallway, in a small room, right now a person is sticking a needle into another person's arm and extracting blood. It's why I'm here. It's a blood draw. A simple blood extraction for a cholesterol test that I need to take and yet, it is the most difficult thing I will do probably all year long,

I've known about the test for a week. I've been thinking about it for a week. There hasn't been an hour that I have not thought about this test. How I have to go here and do this terrible thing. Before we had children, my wife would normally be coming along with me. She'd be walking across this parking lot holding my hand, squeezing it at the appropriate moments.

But something terrible happened about a year ago. We had a daughter. A child. And now to ask your wife to wake up early on a Saturday morning and to get out of bed, and then to wake the baby up and to get the baby out of the crib and to dress the baby and put the baby in the carseat, and to drive down here to do this thing that most people do without thinking about it, I asked her. I did all that.

I begged her to come with me and she said no, which is fine. I know that she only has so much love to offer and it's now divided, at least in half between me and my daughter and so now I must suffer here by myself.

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Before I was married, when I'd go to a blood draw like this, I would ask the nurse or the doctor or the lobotomist if another person could come into the room to hold my hand.

And that worked out for a long time. They would get someone to come in and squeeze at the appropriate moments and help me through this. But since I became a father, the nurses aren't as nice to me anymore. They say things to me like, you're a grown ass man. You're a father with a baby now. You need to get over this. You need to be tougher.

And I wanted to tell them I'm tough and that is true. I'm a tough person. I go through New England winters wearing nothing but sneakers and a hoodie, and nothing ever happens to me and I never complain a bit. I grew up learning how to punch people in the face and beat them up and I never lost a fight because as many times as I am hit in the face, I will always get up and eventually kill you.

And every morning when my son wants a waffle, I put it in the toaster oven and when the toaster oven goes off, there is wooden tongs that I could use to extract the waffle from the toaster but I don't use that. I put my hands in the toaster and take it out. I am a tough person, but this is something else. This blood draw is entirely something else.

And so I finish the parking lot, I enter the building, I come to the elevator, I press the button, I wait for the carriage of death to arrive. And while I'm waiting, I think about the first time my wife and I went to a blood draw. It was at Sloan Kettering in New York. I had a student who was suffering from cancer and she needed platelets, which is worse than a blood draw.

It is two needles and they basically pull all the blood out of you, extract the platelets, and then put the blood back in you. It takes 45 minutes. It's awful. And they try to make it good. They give you a TV, they put you in a comfortable chair, but once it was all done and I was sitting in a little room eating a cookie and drinking juice, the nurse came in and she said to my

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wife, she said, “I’ve been doing this job for 35 years and your husband is the worse patient I’ve ever had in my career.”

And I was just horrified by the fact that she’d been doing this for 35 years. Like, who chooses to stick needles in people’s arms and suck out blood for all of your life? I know someone has to press the button on the nuclear weapons someday, if that is what needs to be done. I know there are people who have to go clean up toxic sludge and I know there are people who have to put kittens to sleep because there’s too many of them, but I don’t want to be friends with any of these people.

And this woman does this all the time. She’s like a vampire without teeth and now that’s who I’m visiting. That’s who I am going to see today. And so the elevator doors open and I walk down that hallway and I enter the room. And it’s filled. It’s always filled with people and they’re doing things like reading Red Book and playing games on their phones, like this is nothing to them. Like a horrible thing isn’t about to happen to them.

They’re all so disturbingly calm. And so I enter my name on the list and I sit down and I wait and eventually, my name is called. It’s a young guy who comes to get me. And we go back into the room together and as I sit down and he prepared, I have a speech I always give.

I say, “Listen, I’m sorry but I know this is unfortunate for you but this is going to be really hard for me. I want you to know I’m a terrible patient and I’m apologizing ahead of time for all of the difficulties I’m about to cause you.” And for the first time in my life, the man stops what he’s doing and he sits down on a stool with wheels and he rolls up to me, and he puts his hands on my thighs and he says to me, “Why is this hard for you?”

And so I tell him. I say that when I was 12 years ago, I was stung by a bee and I was riding my bike home when I started to have a reaction. But I didn’t know what it was because it was the 1980s. No one was allergic to anything. We were all eating peanut butter sandwiches on gluten-packed

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toast and walking through secondhand smoke. Nobody was bothered by anything, so I had no idea what was going on with me.

By the time I got home, I could barely breathe and there was no one home to help me. I was alone. I called my mother in a hospital. She was having back surgery. From her hospital room, her next bed neighbor called 911 for her and by the time the paramedics arrived, I wasn't breathing anymore and my heart wasn't beating.

And they brought me back to life. And then for the next week, every night, the venom that was in me reactivated and I had a reaction all over again, and I would have to be rushed to the hospital again and more needles would have to be injected into me.

And eventually I had to learn to inject myself and it was in a time before auto-injectors. So I had to actually shoot needles with sterilized water, which burns like hell, into my arms every summer to practice. And ever since then, I have been terrified of needles.

And the man looks at me and he says, "I understand." He says, "That is called a negative feedback look. You have a reason to be afraid of needles. I get it." And then he points to his chin. There's this tiny white line on his chin that I would have not seen if he hadn't pointed to it. And he says, "Do you see this?"

He tells me when he was eight years old, he went over his friend's house and his friend's dog bit him in the face and he had to be rushed to the hospital. And ever since then, he can't be around dogs without being afraid. He tells me that when he goes to his friend's house, the dogs either have to be put outside or in another room or he can never be comfortable.

He tells me that and suddenly I am relaxed in a way I have never felt relaxed before. It is the best blood draw I have in my life. And when I get to my car, I cry behind the wheel over what has just happened. And what I

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know now is that when I take my 10-year-old students camping and a little girl tells me she's afraid of the dark, I don't laugh at her for being afraid. I help her.

And when my wife tells me she can't see a movie because she's afraid of aliens and that movie has aliens in it, I don't mock her anymore because it's real for her. And when my peanut-allergic daughter tells me that she's afraid to try a new food because she once had a reaction to something she ate, I don't complain and I don't force her to eat it. I understand. I understand because a man in a small room understood me once in a way no one else had taken the time to understand. Thank you.

Jody: So good. Thank you so much.

Matthew: That's not much though. People always say I have a crazy life but that's really just me having a conversation with a man about a blood draw.

Jody: But all the details that you pull in to build it up and what I love about your stories is that they always generate emotion for me because like you said, the transformation and the way that we view the world or the way that we view ourselves is so powerful. I think it's the human experience and it's awesome. It's very inspiring.

Matthew: Thanks. Thanks for giving me a chance to tell it. I like to tell that story. I'm not sick of it yet.

Jody: Good, me neither. Well, thank you so much Matthew Dicks for coming on. Like I said, we'll link to all of your stuff for everybody in the show notes. If I can ever be of service to you, please don't hesitate to let me know.

Matthew: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Jody: Alright, take care.

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