

Ep 230. The Shame Blame Trap



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With Your Host

Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 230, The Shame Blame Trap.

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, everybody. Welcome to the podcast. It is the middle of December. We are coming up on Christmas. It always comes so quickly, right? But isn't this an amazing time of the year? I love this time of the year. I love the Christmas music and the Christmas lights and the parties and preparations and cookies and all of it. I love all of it. I hope you're enjoying the holiday season.

What are you asking for, for Christmas, by the way? Did you tell your spouse or your mother who keeps saying, "I want to get you something you like." Did you tell them what you want? Because what you want is an annual pass to Be Bold.

If you have not been in my coaching program and you like this podcast, then I'm telling you, you need to get in there. You need to come and check it out. Next year, we are going to be working on a life on purpose. And I have some amazing things to teach you.

So, go to jodymoore.com/gift to purchase the annual pass for someone you love or for yourself, or send your loved one there to get it for you for Christmas. You won't be sorry.

Okay, so I want to talk about the shame blame trap because it's something that I've been thinking about for a while and I've been working on, actually, this podcast for a while, fleshing it out, and I think I finally have an outline here where I'm ready to articulate what I've observed. And I'm excited to get this out to you. I think it's going to help a lot of you.

So, here's what happens. We get in this loop that I call the shame blame trap. And we sort of loop back and forth from shame to blame. And it feels

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terrible. And because it's a loop, we're not able to get out of it. We stay stuck in it.

And the way out of it is just awareness. The way out of it is to be onto yourself, like, "Okay, I see what I'm doing here. I see now why I'm so stuck and I can't move forward." And this loop that feels so terrible is all based in lies.

It's not based in truth at all, but it feels true. It feels important. It feels justified. It feels necessary. And none of those things are true, because you know what's really true in the end... The only thing that is true is things that feel loving, focused, kind, compassionate, and honest.

I'm really starting to understand this on a deeper level now that I'm working with a coach. Her name is Bev Aron. She is amazing. She's sort of a deep dive coach. She really goes into things that I don't even realize I'm saying. I don't even bring them to her saying, "This is a problem." She's just like, "I notice you say this. Let's explore that. I notice you keep thinking this. Let's explore that."

And she's sort of helping me see overall that there's brain chatter, there's what our brains say on the surface, and then there's truth that lives beneath that. And of course, as a member of the church, I feel like I have a lot of truth.

I feel like I've been taught true things that I've been believing my whole life, but my brain sometimes comes along and gets in the way of that truth and makes it hard to live from that truth all the time. And that's one of the things happening when you're in the shame blame trap. So let's talk about shame and let's talk about blame and then I'm going to give you some examples of what this looks like so you can try to identify it for yourself in your own life.

So, shame says, something is wrong with me. That's what shame is. Shame is an emotion, I should say, that we feel in our bodies. But it comes from some version of a story we believe that there's something wrong with us.

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So often, shame comes up when things don't go how we wanted them to go. Something in life goes differently than we thought it should, than we wanted it to.

And we may go, at times, oftentimes, we go to some version of shame, which is, this is my fault, I shouldn't have done this, or I should have done this other thing and this is because there's something wrong with me and if I were better or more complete or more whole, then I wouldn't have made this mistake, and then this terrible thing wouldn't have happened.

That is shame in a nutshell. It feels terrible, right? But we all entertain it at times. Now, one of the ways that we try to get out of shame is we go to blame, okay. So blame, instead of saying this is my fault, blame says this is your fault, or this is somebody else's fault.

This person shouldn't have done this thing. They did it wrong. They're the reason that I'm suffering and they're the reason that this thing went wrong in the world, and blame also feels terrible.

Many times, we blame another person or we blame situations outside of us. Maybe we blame an entire organization or a whole body of people. Or maybe it's a process or system that exists. Maybe we even try to blame God at times.

So, I notice, with my clients and with myself, when we're in this shame blame loop, we sort of go back and forth from shame to blame. We loop back and forth, seeking some peace. That's what our brains are seeking is how can I feel at peace, how can I feel better about this? And shame and blame, both of those feel terrible and neither of those will ever offer us the relief that we're looking for.

Now, I've been sort of making my own hypothesis about this. And I think that, for many of my clients, blame feels slightly better than shame. So what we do is we sort of notice, okay, I'm in shame. I'm beating myself up. I'm thinking that this is terrible. That doesn't feel good at all. So let me go to

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blame, let me make it someone else's fault and then we start looking for justification. We start building our case.

Sometimes we even start getting supporters. We start telling the story to other people through our lens of blame and then they say, "Gosh, yeah, seems like that person was wrong. I'm so sorry that they wronged you in that way." And we start getting validation. We start building a case for our blame story.

And so eventually, we're believing it's true now. And interestingly enough, we don't feel better, but we just feel slightly better than when we were in shame. Still terrible, but not the same as shame is what we believe.

Sometimes, we start believing that when we're blaming, that we're in the power seat. I think it feels powerful. It feels like, "Look, all these people agree with me, I'm building this huge team. I have all these supporters. I have all this evidence. I'm right. This person shouldn't have done what they did. It's their fault that something went wrong."

And so even though it feels sort of powerful, I want to offer to you that it's actually the opposite of that because what blame does is it makes us the victim, and the victim is always powerless. Here's why. I say that a lot and I want to kind of dive into it.

The reason the victim is powerless is because if this problem I have, if this terrible emotion that I'm feeling, if this terrible event in my life is someone else's fault then I'm powerless because I have to change that person or go back in time and change the event in order to feel better. And I haven't figured out how to do either of those things.

So even though it sort of can feel powerful because you can build some momentum behind it, it really does leave you powerless. We can say, okay, it's that person's fault or it's that event's fault or it's that organization's fault, or it's God's fault that you feel terrible. But now what? What do we do about that? Maybe you can justify feeling terrible, but you still have to feel terrible in the end.

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So just be onto yourselves. They're both lies. Nothing that happens is your fault. It doesn't make you a problem. It doesn't make you any less complete or less amazing or less lovable, or less worthy of all the amazingness that's here in this life. And it's also nobody else's fault. It doesn't make anyone else less amazing or less lovable.

The truth is, nothing has gone wrong in the first place. Now, I know some of you are like, "Hold on a second, you don't know my life. You don't know what's happened. Clearly this is wrong." So stay with me.

I'm going to give you some examples. But I want you to know that the way out of the shame blame trap is to access truth and to, again, drop down beneath the brain chatter to what is really true, okay.

So, here's what's true. The truth is, we do make, quote en quote, mistakes and we're still good. We do, quote en quote, screw it all up. I'm putting these in air quotes because, yes, according to some of the values that we choose to live by and maybe some of the laws of our land or some of the commandments of our religion or whatever you want to measure it by, we could say that was a mistake, that was wrong, that was not you at your best.

But what doesn't change is your value. And you're supposed to make mistakes. You're supposed to do it, quote en quote wrong sometimes. We know that for sure. The only person who came here to Earth and did it all perfectly was Jesus Christ and he's the only one that ever will.

So that's what's true is that you do mess up sometimes. You do a terrible job sometimes and you're supposed to. And it doesn't make you any less amazing, any less good. Okay, you know what else is true? Other people are going to try their best and sometimes their best is going to be not very good.

And sometimes they're going to mess up and they're going to make, quote en quote, mistakes and do it wrong. And they're still amazing and whole. And the other thing that's true, my friends, is that what other people do or

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the mistakes they make or the events that just occur in the world due to a natural disaster or whatever else isn't anything going wrong.

Even though it's kind of going in air quotes wrong, it really hasn't gone wrong at all. And we are the creator of our own feelings and our own experience. Other people cannot and do not create that for us.

Now again, at times, we will want to feel bad. We will want to feel sad. We will want to feel scared or disappointed or hurt or any other emotion. But we are always the creator of it. That is what's true. No one's ever to blame for my experience and nothing is wrong with me either.

So, there's a woman I like to follow on Instagram. Her Instagram handle is @thejoywarrior. She's amazing. And she signs off a lot of her posts with, "I love me. I love you. I love us." That is where truth resides. That is how you get out of the shame blame trap, "I love me. I love you. I love us."

We're all good. We're all a terrible hot mess. And it's all fine. It's all the way it's meant to go, right? We're just going to keep trying. We're going to try to do a little bit better tomorrow. I'm going to try to do a little bit better. Some other people in my life are going to try to do better. Some of them aren't going to try to do better and it's all okay. I love me. I love you. I love us.

Okay, let's look at some examples now to try to make this a little bit more concrete. So, one of the examples that I share quite a bit when I talk about shame, we'll just start with me, I have a long list of mistakes. But let's start with one that's not super heavy, not super emotional, but still one where I felt a lot of shame, which was several years ago when I lived in California and I was giving a talk at sacrament meeting.

My husband and I were fairly new to the ward and we'd been asked to speak that day, like they do many times when you move into a ward. And so they had a couple of youth speakers and the usual things that we do at the beginning of a sacrament meeting; we had sacrament, we had announcements, all of that. And then, after the youth speakers, it was my

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turn. I got up, I gave my talk, and after me was supposed to be a musical number, and then my husband.

But my talk went long. And so they said, “You know what, we’re going to just have our musical number, and then we’re going to close, and we’re going to hear from Brother Moore on a different day.”

So I immediately went into shame. Like, oh my goodness, I’m that person who took all of sacrament meeting and didn’t leave time for the other speaker. I went over. This is terrible. You should be embarrassed. You should be ashamed, okay. I felt that come over my body, the shame, and I’m aware of all of the thinking in my head that caused it.

That didn’t feel very good. So this all happened like as the musical number was going on. I tried to go to blame. I told myself, “Okay, this is not your fault. They shouldn’t have had two youth speakers. They had too many things scheduled. Did you notice how long the announcements went? By the time you got up to give your talk, everything was already way behind. You didn’t do anything wrong. Somebody else did. Whoever planned the sacrament meeting or whoever gave the announcements or whatever, it’s their fault, they went long, that’s what really happened here.”

And I sort of wrestled with that and I tried to believe that and afterwards a couple of the district group members came up to me and they were so nice. They said, “You know what, your talk was so good, everybody was so engaged. I’m glad that you kept talking because I think people really liked it.”

So I was like, “Yeah, see, brain, this isn’t our fault. We were supposed to talk that long. We were just following the spirit and we needed to keep talking. We had more to say,” which I always have more to say.

So, anyway, I remember, for some reason, I had to drive home after sacrament meeting. I think I must have forgotten something that one of my kids or myself needed for the next meeting or something. But I just

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remember being in my car, driving home. The rest of my family was still at church. I was just running home to grab something and then coming back.

And I remember watching myself do this shame blame. Because as soon as I tried to believe this is fine and it wasn't my fault, my head came back with, like, "Well not really. I mean, the youth only spoke for like three minutes each and how could it be that it went that far over? Really this kind of must have been you. You must have messed up."

And I would go back into shame. And then I would try to go back to blame again. So here I am stuck in this loop, right? Now, how did I get out of it? Well, I'm a coach, so I coached myself while I was at home quickly before I went back to church.

Here's what I told myself. Here's what was true. Here was the truth I was able to drop into. The truth I landed on was, "Yeah, I spoke too long. I spoke longer than what I was supposed to speak."

And I know myself. The day before that, we had had something we'd been at all day and so I had prepared my talk pretty quickly. I hadn't put as much time into it as I normally would. And for me, lack of preparation means I tend to go long. Some people maybe go short. Not me. I'm like, "I'll just keep talking."

And so I was like, "Yeah, you know what, maybe you weren't as prepared as you should have been. Maybe you spoke too long. And guess what? It's okay. I love you anyway. You're just as amazing as you were yesterday before you gave this talk. You're just as amazing as you are when you give a talk that's the perfect length of time where you say all the perfect things, which by the way, you never do. But any other talk that maybe you would feel really good about, you're the same person. You're good and whole and valuable and you're a mess and you're ill-prepared and you do it wrong, and I love you."

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And Heavenly Father loves me just the same. And yes, I did something, quote en quote wrong, differently than I would have wanted to do it, and I love me anyway. That was where I got to peace, right?

So it got me out of the shame blame trap. It got me into truth. It dropped me into peace. Now, I had to make peace with what everybody else might be thinking, because my head was like, “Oh, you’re new in this ward and now people are going to think blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.” And I got to peace by, like, yes they might, and it’s okay.

It’s okay for people to think whatever they want to about me. I love me. I got me. It’s all good. And they’re right about some of it, right? If they think I’m kind of a mess, they’re kind of right. And if they think I’m great, they’re kind of right about that too. So it’s all fine.

Okay, let’s go to another example. Have you ever had this happen? You guys, this is sort of an example I just pulled out of thin air. I’m not thinking of any particular time in my mind, but I know I’ve had it happen myself. I’m sure many of you can relate to this, where you’re talking about someone and you’re sort of saying something that maybe you shouldn’t be saying.

It’s a little bit gossipy. You’re talking about them behind their back and all of a sudden you realize that they’re standing right there and that they overhear you. Or maybe it’s happened the other way around, somebody’s talking about you and you overhear it. Or you mean to text your sister saying something kind of trite about your mother to her, but then you accidentally sent it to your mother instead of your sister, right? That would be a more blatant probably super embarrassing one.

But if this has ever happened to you, then I want you to remember what it feels like. It feels like immediate shame. Shame is hot and fast and it feels terrible. And where does your brain try to go after that? When you feel the same, does your brain then try to go to blame?

Like, “Well it’s true. I mean, she is kind of a mess. She should be a little bit different. She shouldn’t be so difficult or judgmental or rude,” or whatever it

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was that you were complaining about. Do you try to go to blame to get out of shame to justify and make yourself feel better? Do you maybe even seek a little bit of support from people outside of you or at least try to justify it in your own head?

That's a shame blame trap. It doesn't feel good, right? Neither one feels good. So what's the way out of it? We have to drop into what's true. You know what's true? What's true is I was talking badly about someone else. I was sort of gossiping. And that's not really who I want to be.

It's not very loving. It's not very kind. It's not me at my best. And at the same time, I love me. Sometimes, I'm not my best. Sometimes, I'm not loving and kind. But I am good. I am loving and I am kind and that's why this feel so out of alignment for me because it's not who I am. But I love me. I love them. I love us, remember.

So, the truth is, some days, we do this human thing so well. And some days, we're terrible and we're just as amazing on those days. And that other person that we're interacting with or is involved in this story is sometimes a mess. And then we become a mess when we think and notice that. And it's okay. We're all good. We're all a mess. We're all just doing our best.

So I'm sorry to me and I'm sorry to my friend. That's the truth, right? I see spouses fall into this shame blame trap a lot. Maybe your spouse is critical of you. Maybe you're critical of your spouse. Maybe you're critical of your spouse's criticism. Maybe it's, "They should accept me." That's you blaming them, right?

It's based in the shame of you not accepting you but then you not accepting them and even their criticism is where we go to blame. Now, I want to be clear, this is not the same thing as allowing mistreatment. If someone tells you that you are not right in some way, that you're not enough, that you're not good, that you're not complete, then shame might kick in and fear that they could be right.

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Blame might kick in and say that they shouldn't think about you or talk about you in some way. And both of these are not true. They're not right about you not being enough. Because you are. You're good. You're whole, you're complete.

But you are also all of the other things. We're the complete package, all of us, and we're 100% lovable just as we are. So I always recommend, with my clients, that we separate out the facts from our interpretation of the facts.

So there's the client that I coach who says, my wife doesn't make me feel valuable and loved. That's not a fact. That's your interpretation of her behavior or words. What are the facts? The facts might be she doesn't enjoy sex, she says no, she doesn't initiate sex. When we do have sex, she doesn't show up in the way I want her to.

So that is not your spouse making you feel not valuable or not loved. You're believing that if you were more valuable or lovable then her experience of sex would be different. You're believing that if she valued you and loved you then she would enjoy sex more. And I said that twice on purpose because I want you to hear how it doesn't make any sense at all.

I think it would actually be nice if it were that simple, but it's not. It's very complicated. Someone's desire level or their interest level in sex is about themselves. It's about their ability to be vulnerable and it's about their thoughts and their relationship with themselves. It's not about you, my friend. I promise you, this is the truth.

The truth might be, I want to be more intimate with her and it's tough when she doesn't want that. This is a challenge and I'm not bad for wanting that. And she's not bad for wanting it. This isn't a her problem or a his problem. This is an us circumstance that we're working on. This is the tough stuff of being married and I'm up for it. That's the truth for this particular client.

I may have a client who says, "My husband thinks I'm not doing a good job as a mom." And when my client tells me this, I'll say, well how do you

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know? What are the facts? And she'll tell me, "Well he says why don't the kids have their homework done? What are you going to do about Julia's short skirt?" things like this, right?

So what my client is making it mean is that he thinks you're not doing a good job as a mom. Or maybe he says, "This floor is filthy," and then you make it mean you're not doing a good job and that it's your responsibility. But is it? What's really true?

Because when you drop into truth, which is your husband's thoughts and comments about the children, about the house, about their grades, about all of it, just tells us a lot about them, then you can stop taking it on in shame and you can stop trying to project it to him in blame.

So, for example, regarding Julia's skirt, it sort of ends up sounding like, "I don't know, what are you going to do? What do you think we should do?" Or maybe it's, "Nothing, it doesn't bother me, her skirt." But usually we don't respond this way because of all the drama in our heads, because of the shame blame trap that we're in.

Remember, shame is, "I'm not good. If I were, he wouldn't think or say that." Blame is, "He's not good. He shouldn't think or say that. Good husbands don't do that." But what's true, you guys, let's drop into truth again. Truth is, I am good. And any disapproval my spouse has is okay and is also true in some ways. The floor is dirty. The kids are struggling. Sometimes I'm great at handling it all, and sometimes I'm not. Sometime I'm not a good mom. Sometimes I'm not a great housekeeper, now what? The kids are both of our responsibilities and so is the house. Some days I'm not good at it and I love me anyway."

Now, again, if your spouse is speaking to you in a truly inappropriate way that crosses a boundary for you, which you get to decide what that is, then it is appropriate to take care of yourself. And the easiest and best way is to remove yourself either temporarily or permanently. Temporarily as in, "I'll be back in a few hours or a few days." Or maybe permanently, as in, "I

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don't want to be married to someone who talks to me or treats me in this way. I don't treat myself in that way and I don't allow others to."

But all of that is available, you guys, without falling into the shame blame trap. In fact, all of that is challenging to get to when you're in the shame blame trap. The truth is, your spouse is a human doing their best. Sometimes their best is disappointing. Sometimes it's great and fun. And on occasion, for some humans, their best is toxic and you need to get away from it.

Here's the last example I want to give you. I was just speaking at a conference this past weekend in Salt Lake, the Leading Saints Live Conference. Super fun, Thank you to Kurt Francom for putting that on and inviting me.

And afterwards, a woman approached me and she said, "I've listened to you." She understood what I taught. She said, "I don't know what to do though because here's my situation, Jody. My third child passed away and my husband blames me."

Now remember, this is after a conference, there's people coming and going. I just have a few minutes to talk to this woman. But when I asked her a few questions, here's what we found. Her husband says things like, "If you had been watching the children, if you had been whatever, doing it differently in this way then this accident wouldn't have occurred and our child wouldn't have died."

And I asked her what she thinks. And there's a part of her that says, "No, that's wrong, this isn't my fault." And then there's another part of her that says, "What if it's true? What if it was my fault? What if I did neglect something and this is my fault?"

And then she told me about how she sometimes gets angry at God. She says, "How could you let this happen? I know that you are able to stop things like this and I know there are all kinds of situations that don't seem

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fair at all, where children are saved or various things that happen, this doesn't seem fair, how could God let this happen?"

Then there's another part of her that says, "I fear the day I meet God. I fear that this is my fault and that I'm going to be held accountable for it." So what I told her is you're just in the same blame trap.

This problem is about you thinking that maybe something's wrong with you. And that maybe your husband sees it and maybe God sees it and is going to hold you accountable to it, and that feels terrible, and so then you want to go to blame. Like maybe this is God's fault. And maybe my husband shouldn't be blaming me in this way and maybe it's his fault that I feel so terrible.

And you're going back and forth between shame and blame, shame and blame because you're believing that something's gone terribly wrong. But what's true, my friend, and what's available to you is that all of that is nonsense, that nothing has gone wrong here, that whatever happened that resulted in this child's early death, even though we want to be sad about it, we want to be maybe even mad about it some days, but she said this was several years ago and she's tired of feeling that way.

And so the way out is peace, that nothing's gone wrong at all and that this was always meant to happen this way and that everybody dies right on time, and that even if this is our fault, we love us, and that we were doing the best that we can. And this isn't my fault. This isn't my husband's fault. And this isn't God's fault because nothing has actually gone wrong, even though something's gone wrong, nothing's gone wrong, are you with me?

We're all just a bunch of messy humans. We're doing our best to be here on Earth and there's so much joy available. There's so much good to focus on. There's so much love. There's so much to be excited for. There's so much goodness to pursue. There's so much good within you that you have to give.

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Focus on that. Don't stay in the shame blame trap because it blocks all of that. Don't focus on the negative. Most of it is made up in our heads. It's unnecessary. It's not even real danger. Remember, I love me, I love you, I love us. There's no shame and there's no blame because we're all in this together.

Thanks for joining me today, you guys. Have a beautiful amazing week. I'll be back next week. Make sure you subscribe in your favorite podcast app and I will see you then.

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