

273. The Thought in Parentheses



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Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy* episode 273: The Thought in Parentheses.

Welcome to *Better Than Happy*. I'm your host, Jody Moore. I'm a mother to four children. I'm a huge Taylor Swift fan, and I'm a Master Certified Life Coach. I'm here to teach you how to manage your brain and manage your emotions so that you can create a life that's even better than happy. Are you ready? Let's go.

Hey everybody, welcome to the podcast. So happy that you're here and I'm excited to talk to you about this concept today. If you are brand new to the podcast, this is a little bit more advanced concept, so of course you're still welcome to listen in. But if I lose you, make sure you go get the podcast roadmap at jodymoore.com/map because this is again, a little bit deeper, more advanced concept, but I know a lot of you have been with me for a long time. A lot of you understand the model. And so I want to take you just a little bit deeper here on this particular tool and concept.

Before I dive into it, if you're a coach and you're interested in getting some advanced certification training from me with an emphasis in faith based coaching then make sure you go to jodymoore.com/coach and get on the interest list for that program. Because I will be opening up the seats in November, I'll be giving more information about it later this month in October. And last time it sold out in 45 seconds. I am opening up more seats this time than we did last time, but we have a pretty high demand for it. So you want to make sure you're on that interest list.

Now, you do have to be already certified by The Life Coach School to go through my program. I'm so sorry, but The Life Coach School is really where you need to begin if you're interested in becoming a coach. This program is for coaches who have already done that, are already certified and want to learn all the tools that I teach, take everything to the next level. Get lots of practice coaching, get feedback on your coaching and learn the faith based specific tools that I have created.

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Okay, so let's talk about the thought in parentheses. So when we are doing our self-coaching, when we are looking at what's going on in our lives and trying to either feel better or solve for a problem or challenge, or achieve a goal. Any time you're doing some work on your mental and emotional health, then one of the first steps I teach to everyone is to separate out the thoughts from the facts. We want to always begin there.

We want to get really clear with these things are facts, in other words these are things happening outside of me, they're outside my control. And the rest of these are thoughts that are happening inside of me that are within my control. Now, we often think that the facts are the problem, but they never are. Our thoughts are always the root of any problem for ourselves. So we just start separating out thoughts from facts or T's from C's in other words, C being circumstances.

Now, this sounds simple, it is kind of sometimes simple, but it's also not simple. It's also something complicated and layered and we always start with really simple examples to teach ourselves how to do this. But when it comes right down to it with our own problems and our own challenges, we all have blind spots, including those of us who are certified coaches, who are most in this work all the time. I still have blind spots myself in terms of what are thoughts and what are facts because there are some thoughts that just sound like facts.

Okay, let me give you one. He left me. Okay, if your relationship ended and your partner was the one who said, "I want to break up." Then it will be tempting to think that he left me, or he broke up with me is a fact. But I don't put that in the fact line. I put that in the thought line, because we can't prove it. It's usually very complicated and layered. And if we're talking to him he may say, "You left me long before I left you. You stopped talking to me. You stopped being intimate with me. You stopped connecting with me. You stopped," whatever.

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So do you see how it's not simple enough that we could call it a fact and put it in the C line? We could put his exact words in the circumstance line. He said the words, "I want to break up." That would be a fact. But he left me. He broke up with me. I always would put that in the thought line. Not to mention, it generates lots of emotion. Thoughts create our feelings. So if it's something that generates lots of emotion for you then I say, "Let's not put it in the circumstance line, let's put it in the thought line." There's a lot of reasons why we do that, that I'll just leave it at that for now on this podcast.

But just know that it can be tricky, separating out thoughts from circumstances. Other times we have thoughts that we can really easily see, yes, this is a thought, but we just believe that it's so true, that it feels like a fact. Our brains are putting in the circumstance line, even if we on paper know to put it in the thought line. Okay, so these are sometimes thoughts like it's really hard. I'm not very good at that. I just tend to always do this. I've never been able to do that thing.

Those are examples of thoughts that people when I say, "Was that a thought or a fact?" They usually can go, "Okay, it's a thought, I guess." But they believe it so strongly that to them it's a fact. To them, and in their brains, they're putting it in the circumstance line. That's important to know because part of the work we do in coaching is we show ourselves this is an optional thought. And it's powerful to understand that, and sometimes it takes a little time, a little finessing. We have to go about it in a certain way.

So that's the first thing that's kind of important to understand here, we separate out thoughts from facts.

Now, here's where we're going to take it all to the next level. Often, or at least sometimes I should say, when I'm coaching, or when I'm doing my own self-coaching even, the thought that I first identify about any particular circumstance isn't even really the problem thought, it's the one in parentheses that comes after that. And that's where many times a thought is sneaking into my circumstance line.

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So I'm going to give you examples in a minute that will help this to make sense. But I just want you to know that the importance of this is when you recognize, maybe the thought in my T line is a thought that I want to keep even. Or that I just have such a strong belief in that I can't really not believe it, I can't really let it go.

But it's not even really the problem, it's the one in parentheses afterwards that I haven't said out loud because it just seems so obvious that to even say it seems not necessary. And that's the one that we think is just true. That's the one really creating the real problem. So when you know this, what happens is you gain a deeper level of awareness of yourself, and of the problem thoughts that are creating problems for you. And then you get to play with just keeping that original thought, but changing the one in parentheses afterwards, which can be actually easier to do.

Okay, so in order to find out what the one in parentheses is, you're going to ask yourself some questions like – this is my favorite one, so what? And I don't mean so what as in the way we said it as kids to one another when our friends said something and we said, "So what?" As in who cares. And I mean who cares? I mean genuinely, so what? Another way to say this is, "What are you making it mean?" Or sometimes I'll ask myself, and what? I'm trying to find what comes after it. So let's look at examples.

Maybe a thought you have is my child doesn't respect me. So that's not a circumstance, is not a fact. Even though you can see how there are times when we just think that's just true. So let's get a fact first to tie this to. Let's imagine that your child said, "Mom, you're so stupid." That was my child's words that came out of my child, let's say it's my teenage daughter said those words. And then my thought was she doesn't respect me.

Now, I would argue that in this situation the real problem is not your thought that your child doesn't respect you. The real thought is what's in parentheses after that which is that she should. She should respect me. Maybe it's if I was a better mother she would. Do you see how we find this

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by asking, “So what?” if my thought is my child doesn’t respect me and then I say, “Okay, so what?” She should. If I was a better mother she would. I need to figure out how to get her to. Is that what we’re saying?

Most other teenagers respect their parents, is that what we’re saying? Kids should respect their elders, someone said long ago. And we all sort of nod our heads like, yeah, that sounds good, if we’re the elders especially. So notice these parenthetical thoughts are all versions of something’s gone wrong, there’s a problem here.

So do you notice how if we take a look at these thoughts in parentheses, it’s easier first of all to lighten up around it because it’s a little bit easier to see how ridiculous it sounds when we say, “Of course she should, all teenagers should respect their parents.” It sounds kind of silly when we say it, because we all know that it’s not uncommon for teenagers to not respect their parents.

So that’s the first thing that I think is powerful about noticing the thought in parentheses. Sometimes it just immediately gives you enough awareness that you realize okay, this is interesting what I’m creating here. But the other thing it does is give you some options. You can keep the thought my child doesn’t respect me because maybe you have so much evidence for it. Maybe at one point your child has even said, “I just don’t respect you mom.” We don’t have to disprove that thought. What we have to do is just loosen up the parenthetical thoughts, like something’s gone wrong here.

So we do that by finding some alternatives to think. So we’re going to keep my child doesn’t respect me, but maybe we’re also going to think sometimes kids don’t respect their parents. Maybe we’re going to think I respect me, and I respect her, because if I respect me and her it’s going to change the way I show up and the way I parent. Maybe I’m going to think a thought like it’s actually not that unusual for a child to not respect her mother.

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Maybe I'm going to think something like it's not about me. Even if it's true, she doesn't respect me, that doesn't say anything about me. That says something about her. And then here's my favorite, like the simplest one that you can pretty much always go to which is, and that's okay. My child doesn't respect me and that's okay. It's an option.

Now, I know I hear some of you saying, "Well, what if it's not okay? What if you want your child to respect you? What if you wouldn't want your child to say things like that and it's not appropriate and you don't allow for that in your home?" That's fine, I'm all for that. You get to manage your home however you want to. And I don't want you to allow people to mistreat you, whatever mistreatment is for you.

But thinking my child doesn't respect me and she should, if we put that into your model, is probably not going to drive your most effective parenting. It's probably not going to have you show up in a way where even you would respect you. We start becoming our least respectable versions of us from the thought she doesn't respect me and she should. We turn into a little bit crazy disrespectful versions of us. See what I'm saying?

So it's perfectly fine for you to say, "Sweetheart, listen, you're allowed to think whatever you want, but we don't call people stupid in our home, and in our family, and in this house. So if you need to talk to me that way this is the consequence or I'm going to go ahead and leave until you can be kind," or whatever. I want you to have boundaries. I want you to be the parent.

I want you to enforce what you expect and teach your kids how to be respectful. But that's going to come far easier, and it's going to be a lot less painful for you from the thought, my child doesn't respect me, which is not unusual for a teenager. Because now I've released all the resistance, all the frustration, I just moved into, okay, so now what? Sometimes children don't respect their parents. It doesn't have to be so heavy. It doesn't have to be so painful. Now I free up myself to be much more effective in this situation.

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Let's look at another example. Let's say you have a husband who has decided he likes to drink alcohol. And maybe you're both members of the church. And in our church we have a thing called the word of wisdom that says to abstain from alcohol. You might have the thought my husband is going against what we believe. I would put that in the thought line. I know some of you are like, "Wait a second, that's a fact." If we believe in the word of wisdom and he's not obeying the word of wisdom then it's a fact.

We could possibly argue it into a fact, but I would probably put it in your thought line, only because there's always subjectivity and grey area. And obviously if your husband's drinking alcohol then he doesn't, maybe we could say, really believe in the word of wisdom. He doesn't really believe that he shouldn't, if he's choosing to drink it. So do you see how it gets a little fuzzy, a little messy? Plus when you think the thought, my husband's breaking a commandment, probably brings up emotion for you. So I just like to – let's just put it in the thought line.

Now, the thought in parentheses is the real problem. It's not the thought he's going against what we believe, or he's breaking a commandment. The real problem is that he shouldn't be, that people shouldn't break commandments, that spouses should live what our church teaches. He's not supposed to do that, this means something has gone wrong. He's not honoring some sort of agreement that we have. That's the real problem, that he shouldn't be breaking the commandment.

Now, again, I know what you're thinking, like, well, yeah, that's true Jody, don't we hear that in talks, in conference and in church? And isn't that what we say, we shouldn't break commandments? Well, let's just really think about it for a minute, on the one hand, yes, but on the other hand, no. Here's what I mean. When Heavenly Father sent us here to Earth, what was the plan?

In the preexistence there were two plans offered up. Satan's plan was everyone's going to go to Earth and they're only going to be able to choose

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the right all the time. And then Jesus Christ's plan said, "No, I think everyone should have agency. I think agency is necessary for growth." Heavenly Father said, "Yes, that is the plan, agency is an important part of the plan." So when we remember that then it means that actually sometimes, we should break the commandments.

Actually every single one of us is going to. Do you see what I mean? Yes, we want to try not to, and I'm not talking about justifying it or anything. I'm just saying nothing's really gone wrong here. This was Heavenly Father's plan. This is why the atonement is the most important part and the centerpiece of our religion. The atonement, that Christ suffered for every one of us, compensated for our mistakes, is so valuable, and important, and necessary, because we're all going to make mistakes, break commandments, go against what we believe, however you want to say it.

So I always say this, it's like Heavenly Father sent us here and he said, "Okay you guys, here's a bunch of commandments. They're like strategies for success, if you want to have the best possible life, and return to live with me, and avoid all the things that are going to make it challenging, then live this way." But under his breath he's like, "They're not going to all the time anyway." Not that we're not capable of it. But he's just like, "They're just not going to be able to all the time, they're going to go down there and mess it up. They're going to make mistakes."

So when I'm walking around thinking my husband is breaking a commandment and he shouldn't be, I'm sort of arguing against Heavenly Father's plan and against agency. It seems like maybe he should be, because he is. So all these parenthetical thoughts are not serving me, so what might I want to think instead? My husband is breaking a commandment and he can, that's his right.

He has agency, he gets to choose. And maybe it's I can understand it because I'm not perfect either. Maybe it's I have agency too, and I get to

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choose what I want, and maybe I don't want to be married to someone whose living this way.

These are all fine things to explore, but we have to embrace what's going on first, we have to stop resisting what's happening first and thinking that it's a huge problem when something's gone wrong. And that it means that we should be upset and frustrated, and try to turn into control enthusiasts who try to manage the world outside of us. That's when we get into trouble.

My husband's breaking a commandment and that's okay, I mean he can, it's up to him what he's going to do. I can just choose to love him and be patient and compassionate. I can choose to leave. I can choose whatever I want to choose. The only thing I don't get to choose is to control him, which is the thing that we become the most fixated on in this situation. Do you see it?

Okay, let's look at one more example. Here is a thought that I'm hearing a lot of different versions of and I've noticed myself thinking too lately. Our country is so divided right now. I've been noticing this, I don't know about you. But probably the last four years at least, certainly this year 2020 is one for the books. And I'm noticing how it feels like everything is so divisive right now. Everybody is so on opposing sides and against one another. Now, that is a thought. That is not a fact.

Even though I've gathered lots of evidence for it, I could tell you lots of stories and examples. And I could line up 100 people and I bet 99 of them would agree with me on that thought, and they'd have their own evidence to add to my thought. It's still just a thought. It's not a fact. It's just an opinion, what does that even mean, we're divided, and how do we know? So it's always going to go in the thought line.

The circumstance is just our country and there's people in it, and maybe the words that they say, we can put in quotes in the circumstance line. But our country is so divided, just a thought. Now, again, I don't think we

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necessarily have to change that thought to do some effective self-coaching. The real problem is the thought in parentheses, which is either it shouldn't be divided. It's really sad that we're so divided. We should be united. It would be better for us all if we were united.

Do you see how these thoughts, we don't even usually say out loud, we just say, "Our country is so divided," and then we all look at each other and go, "I know," and shake our heads and feel the emotions that we have created. Because it's just assumed, we all have bought into that it's just a fact that we should be united, it would be so much better if we were. So let's just play with some alternatives.

This is where I go when I notice, if that thought, my country is so divided is creating a problem for me, then I would start playing with it like this. I would identify so what. I'd answer the question, so what? What am I making that mean? And then I would start playing with some alternatives, like our country is so divided right now but maybe that's a necessary part of our evolution. Maybe us being divided right now is going to take us exactly where we need to be, to a little bit better version of us.

Maybe we're not really divided. Maybe we're actually a lot more alike than different. There are good people on both sides of any debate. And everybody wants to see our country be stronger, and healthier. Everybody wants to help people. Maybe everybody wants more of the same things than we want different things. Do you see what I'm saying? I've kept the thought that we're so divided, but it's sort of playing with the parentheses thought afterwards. I'm starting to loosen up the thought, I guess, with that last one.

But for the most part we're all divided right now and that's okay. That's my favorite quick answer, maybe it is okay. What if it's okay that we're divided? What if it's okay that my husband is going against what we believe? What if it's okay that my teenager doesn't respect me? If it were just okay then what? Then how would I feel about it and what would I do now?

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So I hope that you've kind of seen. I tried to give you a variety of examples there. But I hope you've seen that thoughts in parentheses are the ones that just seem like truths. Again, we don't even say them because we assume that everyone agrees, and most people do. And you don't have to let go of them, but I like to be open to it.

I will just say this is what makes me a little bit of a crazy person, because I've gotten really good over the years at not holding on too tightly to any of those thoughts in parentheses. I like to play with them. I can see the possibility behind other thoughts in parentheses. And again, this doesn't mean I'm justifying bad behavior. It means that I'm choosing intentionally who I want to be in any given circumstance when I do this.

I was listening earlier to Abraham Hicks who said that, "Our lives would just be so much easier if we'd stop being so mad that it wasn't easy, and just relax and allow for the ease that is there."

Another way I've heard this taught is that there are upstream thoughts and downstream thoughts. And we're in a stream and everything we want is downstream. All we have to do is relax and stop rowing and let the river just take us downstream. But instead we row so hard against the current and we just kind of complain that we can't get upstream. But everything we want is downstream. So what does downstream look like?

I'm not saying that it's allowing people to mistreat us. It's not being stagnant and lazy, which is what many people hear when I say, "What if we just relax into downstream? What if we let it be easy? What if we say, "And that's okay?" They think I'm saying, "Well, then we'll just allow people to mistreat us, and to swear at us, and to hit us and we'll become stagnant and lazy. We'll just watch Netflix and eat warm chocolate chip cookies all day long. We'll separate ourselves from God, and Christ, and the Spirit and start living a selfish life of gluttony."

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But the truth is that is not what you want. It's not what you really want. It's what you want when you're exhausted from rowing upstream. But when you relax into downstream what we actually really want is respect, to respect ourselves and respect others, to be curious, and grow, and to contribute, and to have a spiritual connection. That's what we want and that's what lives downstream.

How many times do you hear people say, "I have this passion, this goal, this interest, this drive because I just want to help other people?" Not like I'm supposed to or should, but when we genuinely have this desire to help other people, that's when we're getting into a healthy space, because that is innate within us. Downstream is fulfillment, and peace, and comfort. And it comes from noticing those little parenthetical thoughts that just seemed like obvious facts. So don't be mad at them or tell yourself, I know I shouldn't think that. That doesn't work.

You have to just take those little thoughts and hold them in your hand and examine them, be kind to them, be gentle with them, be patient with them, but as you do that you can loosen their grip on you and change your life.

Alright you guys, thank you for joining me today. Have a beautiful rest of your week. Make sure that you have subscribed to the podcast so you don't miss a beat. And I would love it if you would share it. If you like this episode, make sure you tag me, Jody Moore Coaching so I can give you a shout out. Have a good one.

Who is your life coach? If you don't have one I would be so honored to be your coach. I created a virtual coaching program called Be Bold that I want to invite you to join me in. We can address challenges, we can work on goals, and we can do it in so many different ways.

We have group coaching, individual private coaching, and online chats along with hundreds of hours of courses and content that I've created just for you. When you're ready to really take what you're learning on the

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podcast to the 10x level, then come check out Be Bold at JodyMoore.com/membership.