

293. Marriage Dynamics



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With Your Host

Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is Better Than Happy, episode 293: Marriage Dynamics.

Did you know that you can live a life that's even better than happy? My name is Jody Moore. I'm a master certified life coach and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And if you're willing to go with me I can show you how. Let's go.

Hello everybody, welcome to episode 293. I'm going to talk about the dynamics of your marriage today. So if you're not married you can apply this I should say to any relationship that you want to. You have dynamics in any relationship that you have. And I love the word 'dynamics' because it implies that it changes.

A couple of my kids are taking piano lessons right now and they have an amazing beautiful teacher. And she teaches them that there are dynamics in a song and that's partly what makes the song interesting, and beautiful. And it helps the song tell the story it's trying to tell, is that certain parts of the song get louder and certain parts of the song gets softer. But it's dynamic meaning it changes throughout the song.

And your marriage or whatever relationship you're thinking about changes as well, but it has a certain dynamic, in other words a certain cadence, a certain feel, a certain rhythm, a certain pattern to it. And that's what I want to dive into today because my hope is to empower you to have more of the kinds of relationships that you want and less of the kind you don't want.

And if you focus in on one specific, and like I said I'm going to use the marriage relationship as the example today. If you think about the dynamics of that relationship I want to tell you what your brain may not always believe or recognize which is that you are able to impact the dynamics of your marriage far more than what you might think.

We tend to think it's our spouse that is creating the dynamics in our marriage or we disempower ourselves anyway. I think most of us

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understand that we're not perfect and that we have influence in our relationships. But what I want to offer to you is that if you change who you're being and how you're thinking, and feeling, and showing up, and what you're experiencing in your relationship then the dynamics change, period.

Let's go back to music for example. Let's say my marriage is like the waltz and the way my husband and I interact with each other, the way we talk to each other, our routines. The way we look at each other or avoid each other, the way we handle disagreements, whether or not we fight, whether or not we have conversations, whether or not we connect with one another, all of that I'm calling the waltz. So if I do the waltz with my husband and that's just our regular routine, which by the way as human beings we are creatures of routine, creatures of habit, creatures of pattern.

If I stop doing the waltz, if I suddenly start dancing hip hop my husband cannot keep waltzing, or he could but he's going to be waltzing on his own, it's going to be odd. It's not going to be the same. Something's going to change. So I always am trying to empower my clients to keep the focus on them because that is what you have control over. I say this all the time but it's genuinely how I feel, which is once I figure out how to control other people I will teach you that. But until I figure that out I'm going to keep teaching what I always teach, which is how to control yourself.

And naturally the things outside of you do change, they just will. Now, that's not always comfortable. Sometimes that's scary. Sometimes we know that's going to be the case and we're afraid of that change so we stay stuck in our current dynamics and then we blame our spouse for it. But it's always us, we always have a choice.

Alright, so first of all I want to talk about one of the most common dynamics that I see that in most cases creates problems. I try not to use absolutes here on the podcast. I'm sure I've done it before when I shouldn't have. I'm sure if I could go back and correct myself I would say, "Never say never,

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never say always.” I know I do sometimes use those words but I don’t mean to. What I mean is mostly. You could be like I’m the exception and no worries, I love you. You’re allowed to be the exception. You’re allowed to view it however you want.

But in most cases this dynamic is not serving people and that is the parent child dynamic, or maybe you want to call it the one up, one down dynamic. And I see this go both ways in terms of gender. I see it happen where the wife is like the child and the husband is acting like a father, typically not a super nurturing loving father. It’s usually a strict, I’m in charge here. I’m the authority type of father. And maybe it’s a really terrible abusive father even in some situations.

But the dynamic of wife being like the child asking permission of her husband, asking him if she is allowed to have money for something or whatever it looks like is probably not serving you if you’re in that situation. I see it happen the other way too. I see it where the husband is like the child who needs to ask his wife if he can go out and play. It sounds like, “Can I go hang out with the guys?”

Now, I’m not talking about having respectful conversations with one another where we understand that we share responsibilities and our schedules impact one another. So I want to have a discussion with you about what I would like to do and what is your schedule. I’m all for that. I’m talking about I need to ask her if it’s okay if I can do this. She said no. She won’t let me. She says I’m not allowed.

If you find yourself using words like that, again, whether you’re the male partner, the female partner or you’re in a same sex relationship or whatever it is, it can happen in any gender I guess is what I’m saying. But typically that dynamic is not going to serve you. It’s not very fun first of all, it’s really not. Let’s think back to when you first met and you started dating. Just think back to dating relationships because that’s when these types of

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relationships are the most fun usually is in the very beginning when we first meet and we're dating.

You know what's fun about it? Nobody is trying to boss anyone else around. Nobody thinks they have to ask permission of someone else to be themselves. In fact it feels the opposite, it feels very expansive. We feel like our agency has expanded and our ability to be ourselves feels expanded. This is where the not very useful term 'you complete me' comes from. No one else really can complete us but it feels that way in the beginning when we first fall in love because it feels like we expand in a way.

This other person, this is why opposites attract too, because it's expansive. This person has strengths that are my weaknesses. This person sees me in a way that I don't even always able to see myself. This person appreciates me when it's hard for me to appreciate me. And I appreciate them. So it feels like this other person is completing us because they make us feel more empowered, you might say. It increases your sense of self in the beginning. Can you remember this feeling? Can you relate to this feeling?

Now, after time goes on and we have to figure out how to live together, how to create a life together, how to raise children together, how to make money together, how to do all the things that we want to do in our lives together then often that dynamic shifts. And one person takes the lead as the more dominant person in the relationship and one person takes a back seat as the passive person. Now, I don't know that this is completely problematic. I think it's probably natural for one person to have certain strengths and others not.

But what I want you to do is seek to balance it out more because here's the truth, one of you is not any better than the other. One person's ideas or opinion are not more valuable than the other person's ideas or opinion. I promise you this is true. Both of you are worthy of desires and interest and both of you are capable of doing a lot of amazing things. And both of you

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have weaknesses or lack of skill, or experience, or education in certain areas. You just do. You're both, half good, strong, smart, wise and half hot mess I always say. You just are.

You're both human beings, you're both complicated. You both have equal agency, one person is not meant to be more controlling than the next and make more of the decisions than the next. You're both meant to make decisions in your life and both of your opinions matter equally so.

Now, sometimes here's the arguments that we hear, here's what keeps people stuck in this dynamic. Well, I make the money so I should be the one to decide how we spend the money. Alright, if that's working for you and your marriage by all means, keep doing that. But if not, if things aren't as fun as they used to be, if you're having a hard time feeling romantically attracted to that other person it might be because you've started to view them like a child or like a parent. We're not meant to have romantic feelings for our parents or our children.

So if you've created that dynamic for yourself it's probably not going to create what you want ultimately in your marriage. Again, we all have strengths and weaknesses and please don't let your head go to the extremes. I know some of you are like, okay, so if I have a husband that has a gambling problem I should just let him have control over the money if he wants. No, that's not what I'm saying at all. There are times when you might need to have appropriate boundaries.

There are times when you might need to be the one to say, "Listen, you're not good with money, you have a hard time not overspending, don't you think? Let's have a discussion about it. Do you see what I see? Do you see that it's a weakness for you to not overspend? Let's talk about our goals, our financial goals. How are we going to get to them? Wouldn't it make sense for me to regulate the money in a certain way because of this weakness that you have in this area? What should that look like? Let's decide together how we're going to manage that. I want your opinion."

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There's other times when I might say, "Listen, I'm not good at this area, I would love some help managing it. I want you to have more authority in this way about this thing than I do." But that's a conversation that a husband and wife who respect one another might have, not a controlling parent trying to control or manage a child even, because your spouse is not meant to be your parent you guys, they're not.

Now, maybe you're the spouse who is more in the child role, then you're saying, "Okay, could you please tell Jody, could you please tell my spouse to stop trying to parent me? Because I agree with you, I should have equal say. But he or she doesn't allow for that." And what I say is, "Yeah, it's simple. You simply have to stop being the child."

So if I go to my husband and say, "Hey, I really want to spend this money on this thing", I'm just using money as the example. It can show up in a lot of ways. It could be, "I want to go to this yoga class. I want to do this whatever. I want to do this thing with the kid. I want to make this decision with our child. Let's talk about it, I want to hear your opinion too because your opinion matters to me, but let's have a discussion." And my spouse says, "No, you're not doing that."

If they talk to me the way that my dad might have talked to me when I was 12, no, that's a no, we're not doing that. As a parent sometimes it's just we're not going to discuss it, that's a no. And I'm the authority here and I get to decide that. I personally like to have conversations with kids. I think it's helpful to talk through it. But there may be times when it's just a no. But with my spouse that is not as appropriate. This isn't an authority over me.

So if I'm being the child then what I do is I run away and pout, and sulk, and maybe I complain to my friends about it, "My dad is so stupid, he doesn't get anything. He doesn't understand me. It's not fair." I probably feel sorry for myself, I move to self-pity. I do lots of blaming. Maybe I have a little shame in there too. That's what a child might do in that situation. So in other words instead of trying to get my spouse to stop acting like a father

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I just simply get to stop acting like a child. Remember, I'm just going to stop doing the waltz.

So instead of running away sulking, complaining, all of those things, I would have to ask myself what does an adult woman who is an equal partner to her spouse do or say in this situation? It's going to feel strange. You're going to say, "I don't know." Because you've been doing the waltz for so long that that's the music you hear and that's the dance you do. And you're going to have a hard time possibly figuring out what that looks like, but it's not impossible, I promise you.

Ask yourself, okay, what would somebody, and maybe you know somebody, maybe you have a couple whose dynamic you really like. Get into that woman's shoes, ask yourself if her husband said this to her what might she say, or think, or do? Who would she be in that situation?

She will probably say, "Oh, okay, I hear that you have a really strong opinion about this. And I want to hear your opinion but I also have an opinion that's equally valid. So we need to have a discussion about this or I'll just go ahead and do what I want because I'm perfectly able to do that too but that's not my desire, I really want to have a discussion about this. And I would appreciate if you could have some respect and hear me out."

Now, whether or not your spouse chooses to is not up to you. So here's the part you've got to know. A lot of times when I coach people in this way, like what if you stop being the child, what if you be the responsible adult, equal that you want to be? The fear is that it's going to get worse actually before it's going to get better. And I've got to tell you that might be true.

Your spouse is used to doing the waltz and expects you to just do the waltz like you've been doing. But if you stop then he or she is going to be very confused and maybe upset. Maybe they like the dance you guys have been doing. Maybe they prefer it because they get to be in control in this way. So

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they're not going to like it, in some cases anyway. And it might create some contention and that's not what we're trying to do by any means.

But oftentimes on the other side of that contention is the dynamic you want in your marriage. And if not then you have to ask yourself do I want to just keep living and pretending that everything's okay, and resenting? Or do I want to see what would happen if I step up and I be the version of me that I want to be?

Do you know what happens, you guys if you stay aligned with being the person you want to be? Then your spouse either changes and comes with you and once you get through the discomfort of that, of what do we do now, we don't even know what this new dance looks like, we have to learn the new dance. That will be uncomfortable but you'll figure it out. Once you get through that you'll have such a better marriage. Or that doesn't happen and then it goes down a different path. But what's the alternative?

By the way, nothing wrong with just living the rest of your life navigating it the way you have. So a lot of people choose that. I don't have any judgment for anyone that chooses that. But what I want you to know is that if you're waiting around for your spouse to decide to do it, you might be waiting forever, you might, it's not impossible, he or she might choose to change. But your odds go up significantly if you go first, you change first. You be the version of you that you want to be in your marriage.

Now, I want to say also that this is why I'm such a huge fan of not having expectations of your spouse. I have expectations of my children, in other words I have things that I'm like, "Listen, this is what we do in our home, this is what's allowed, this is what I expect of you and you can choose to do it or you can choose not to do it.

If you choose not to do it I am the mom and I've got to be the mom, and I've got to enforce my expectations, otherwise I'm not doing my job. And this I because I love you and enforcing negative consequences is the least

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favorite part of my mom job so I hope I don't have to do it. But if I need to do it I will because I love you and because I'm going to do the best job I can as the mom." But that is not my role in my marriage, it's not. I don't want to be a mom to my husband. I don't need to be his mom, he already has a mom. And not to mention, he's an adult.

And he and his mom have an adult relationship now so it's different than it was when he was a kid. But as his wife I don't want to hold him accountable to things. Now, listen, if necessary I will. If he says to me, "Listen, I'm really struggling with this thing. I really would love if you could help hold me accountable." I'm willing to do it.

But I'm not going to do it because I'm mad and I'm waiting for him to change, and because if he doesn't then I can't be happy. I'm going to make requests of my spouse, "Hey, could you please not talk to me that way, could you please," especially if you're in an emotionally, or a physically, or whatever, abusive situation, by all means ask them to stop. But you can't make someone stop. So instead of expecting that they will, I like to expect that they're just going to be them.

And then I have expectations of myself, what will I do? Who will I be? If I have a spouse that calls me terrible names that I'm not okay with, I will ask them kindly to stop. But I will know in the back of my head that they may or may not stop because that's the dance they're used to doing. But I'll change my side of the dance which is I won't sit around and take it and let them talk to me that way. I will remove myself from the situation, from the room or from the relationship. My expectation is of me.

I'm not here to hold my husband accountable to anything unless like I said, I'm doing him a favor because he asked me to, or we both agree that this is an area he's working on and we set it up so that I have his permission to hold him accountable. Otherwise I'm going to hold myself accountable, to respecting myself enough to not allow anyone to mistreat me. That's where I have a 100% control. That's where I stay empowered.

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So I get that relationships are complicated, people are complicated. I'm not trying to imply that there's a one size fits all to anything. But I want you to think about the dynamic in your relationship. And if you're being the parent and it's not serving you, you can stop being the parent any time you want. And you know what that means? Your spouse isn't going to be able to just be the child anymore. So things are either going to get better or they're going to get worse. But movement is healthy, remember, dynamics.

We don't want to just play a song and have it be stagnant. We want movement, especially if your marriage is not what you want it to be. Movement is good you guys, I promise you. Sometimes movement towards harder gets you into better, and sometimes not, but movement I promise you is healthier in most cases than stagnation.

And if you're the child in your relationship and you're tired of being treated like a child then don't act like a child. You've got to start acting like an adult. That's going to be uncomfortable at first. It's going to take you some practice. You're not going to be perfect at it. That's alright.

Now, the final thing I want to say about this is I find it to be very healthy to have conversations about this with your spouse if you're working on changing yourself, and your role, and the dance you're doing. Have conversations when you're not in the thick of it, in other words don't wait until a disagreement or a situation where you normally slip into your normal roles. Have the conversation when things aren't emotionally charged.

It might sound like this, "Hey honey, I really love you, and I'm working on showing up more like the wife I want to be, and enjoying our marriage more, and having more fun. And so I'm going to try thinking about things a little differently and doing things a little differently. And it might feel weird because I don't even know how to do it yet and I'm not going to be very good at it yet. But I just want to give you a heads up, if you sense something feels weird, it's not about you, it's about me working on me.

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So for example we tend to fight a lot and I don't like fighting with you. So next time we get heated either one of us, I'm going to try to just cool down and not be mad. I'm going to try not to get mad at you. And I'm going to try not to argue with you. And I don't know how to do that yet, I'm not very good at it, but I'm going to try. So if you're upset about something and I don't argue back, just know that's because I love you."

See what I mean, you give him a heads up. You say, "This might feel weird, it feels weird to me, know it's because I love you and I value our relationship and I'm working on it." Now, again, I don't know how my spouse would respond to that. He may not like it. She may not like it. But we can't control them, we can only control us being the highest version of us, we're capable of being at any given time. Are you with me?

This even goes back to boundary setting where I remember talking to a woman years ago, she said, "My husband's been unfaithful to me. And people are saying I should kick him out but he doesn't have anywhere to go. And if I kick him out I don't know what he's going to do, he's going to be living in his car or something. And so I just don't know what to do in this situation."

And I said, "Listen, you're not deciding to put your husband out homeless or in his car, he's the one that will decide that. You just have to decide what you're willing to tolerate or not. And if you decide I'm totally willing to tolerate him being unfaithful you can decide that. Don't let other people tell you what you should decide."

But also if you're not then you say, "Listen, I love you, I don't want to see you homeless but I'm not okay with being in a marriage where you're unfaithful to me. So I'd love to keep working on it, this is what I'm willing to do. But this is where I draw the line. If this happens again then I'm going to have you move out." That's it, you set a clear boundary then he'll be the one to decide if he's staying there or moving out." See what I mean? You

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don't have to decide that. You don't have to predict that. You don't have to know that.

You just have to decide who you want to be. And I get it's not simple to decide that, it's really not. That's why I highly recommend you have a coach, or a therapist, or somebody that can help you sort through that from a clean space. But it is doable. And then the other person decides what's going to happen next. Are you with me?

Alright you guys, I promise you that you can have a more amazing marriage than you ever dreamed possible. And it's not you have to be the one to do the work, it's thank goodness, only you have to do any work on yourself. And then the rest of it plays out naturally the way it will. I see it happen over and over again where the spouse comes with you and your marriage gets better. I get letters every day from you guys telling me about how much better your marriage is.

And I also see it happen where the spouse doesn't come with you, but ultimately you get to respect you and you get to go towards the better life that's waiting for you. So please don't be afraid of the movement, if you need some help with it, I'd be happy to help you with it in my coaching program, or there's lots of coaches on my homepage that I recommend who can help you with it. You can find a therapist if you prefer therapy. There's lots of help available, you don't have to do it alone. But please don't settle for stagnation if you're in a difficult situation in your marriage.

Alright you guys, thanks so much for joining me today. Have a beautiful rest of your week. And I'll see you next time. Bye bye.

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.

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