

320: Complaint Addiction



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With Your Host

Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 320: Complaint Addiction.

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 320. I want to talk about complaining today. Now, some of you are like, "Oh good, I'm going to send this to my husband. He is a complainer." Just slow down before you do that. Here's what I want you to consider. We are all addicted to complaining, every one of us. Maybe we've always been this way. Maybe it's a human condition. Maybe it's gotten worse over time. I don't know. But I do believe that every one of us is addicted to complaining. And I think in the last couple of years it's gotten especially bad.

And I want to point it out to you to give you some leverage over it. And I want to talk to you about why it's a problem. What you can do about it and what to do with the people around you that are complaining as well. So, to begin with I made a list of all the things I complained about yesterday as far as I can recall. These are the things that I complained about out loud to someone else. Are you ready?

I complained about how the air is getting smokey again. We've had smoke off and on and it was rolling in again yesterday. I complained about how long winter is in Spokane. I complained about people who don't have a good reason and won't just get the COVID vaccine so we can get on with our lives. I complained about how the school had not updated the practice schedule for volleyball practice on their website. I complained about my little kids not bathing and washing their hair often enough.

I complained about how my computer was running too slow. And that led me to complaining about how overall I have bad luck with technology. Then I complained about how the sun is already going down so much earlier. I

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complained for a very long time to one of my dear friends about our church leaders with best of intentions saying really what I thought were offensive, hurtful, out of touch things in a recent talk. I complained about having to wear a mask again in stores. I complained about just the overall craziness of the world that we're living in right now.

I complained about my dog and how he wants to come in the house and every time I let him in he makes a mess or gets into trouble. I complained about being so tired which I have been complaining about all week and then continuing to stay up too late. I complained about my daughter having to wear a mask at volleyball practice. I complained about how I can never seem to find my phone when I need it. I complained about my hair looking weird and being hard to manage. And then I complained in the form of gossip about a friend of mine's hair and how I thought it looked weird.

Those are just the things I could think of. I bet there were more that I didn't even remember. And those, like I said, are just the things I complained about out loud. I wonder how many other things I complained about in my own head that I'm not even aware of. Isn't it fascinating how we're so addicted to complaining? The latest statistics say that the average person complains between 15 and 30 times a day. And this is a study based on again people complaining out loud.

I wonder if they were able to base that study on in our mind complaints what that number would be. It's a lot, you guys. Our brains think that it's very important to look for what's wrong and then it's really easy for us to share it out loud with other people. So why is this a problem? Well, first of all it's not super fun to be around people who are complaining. We all know this when we're the other person, when somebody else is complaining to us, none of us usually like it unless we want to join in and complain as well about the same thing and then we do some story fondling.

But we've all been at the receiving end of somebody just complaining about things that we think aren't necessary to complain about or we're just tired of hearing about. And we know what a drain that is. But the same study that

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said average person complains between 15 and 30 times a day also says that complaining literally shrinks your brain. It shrinks the hippocampus which is a very important part of the brain that is responsible for critical thinking, and problem solving, and intelligent thought. We do not want to be shrinking that part of the brain and complaining does that.

Now, in addition to that though, complaining is just a bunch of negative thoughts which create negative feelings. So, part of the reason we have so many people walking around feeling so bad is because of the amount of negative thoughts. And I can tell you that this week I have been a little bit heavier on complaining than other weeks partly because I've been staying up too late. And so, when I don't have enough sleep I'm not as good at directing my brain intentionally and so it wants to go to the negative place.

And I notice this low grade sort of negative feeling, I just feel sort of blah. So sometimes it can be that low grade negativity, other times it can really be a more escalated higher end anxiety or depression. So, here's the truth though. We do it because again our brains think looking out for what's wrong is important and useful even though it's not. But also, it is sort of one of our default ways of connecting with one another.

So, as I was thinking about this list that I wanted to make for you of all the ways I complained just yesterday. Some of the ones that came to mind that were really obvious, the ones that were the easiest for me to recall were because I had long conversations.

And I kind of mentioned briefly the one that I complained to a friend of mine about our church leader saying some things in a speech at BYU this week that I found to be really hurtful and I know a lot of people found to be really hurtful. And that one I complained about the longest because I happened to be at my class at the gym and ran into a dear friend of mine who I don't really see or talk to all that often. And she is also a member of my church. And I knew that she would know what was going on.

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And so, it was just a really effective easy way for me to connect with her as I brought up this topic and then I complained about it. And I am simply mentioning this because I want you to become aware of it because my awareness of it is probably one of the most powerful things that I have that I know helps to redirect me. It's going to help me not get stuck in a trap of constantly complaining, just being aware of it.

And in fact, if I would have done this yesterday, if I would have sat and made this list I probably would have interrupted my day and not continued with as much complaining. But I didn't do it till this morning so it's alright, we're all human. I'm not going to be perfect at this. But the awareness of it gives you so much leverage.

So anyway, back to what I was saying, it's the easiest way to connect. It was a really easy way for me to feel close to her for a moment. We happened to have some more opinions on the topic. We got to discuss it. We kind of flushed out what we're thinking or what we're not sure about. And all of that was really connecting. But that is not the way that I want to be my primary means of connecting. I don't. I want to feel like I saw my friend, I ran into her and left her feeling happier than before she saw me, instead of sort of down.

Even though she was well aware of what was going on, it wasn't I told her something she didn't know. But I left her a little bit more negative than I found her. I could have connected over something different and left her feeling more excited, more happy, more positive because I always find it so fascinating how our emotions linger even after we're not consciously aware of the thoughts that created them. Do you have this happen? I have it happen all the time, I especially notice it with negative emotion but with positive too.

It's that feeling where you're just like, I feel kind of down. Why am I down? Oh yeah, that thing that I'm worried about. Oh yeah, that thing that I read, Oh yeah, that thing going on in the world, that's why I'm kind of down. You might forget consciously what the thoughts are but the emotions are still

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there. I notice that happen all the time. It happens with positive things too especially when I wake-up.

If I wake-up feeling excited or happy about something, or again I just catch myself in the middle of the day. I notice myself pausing and going, wait, what is it again that I'm looking forward to? Oh yeah, this thing is going on. Oh yeah, I just got this good news about somebody that I love and something great that's happening in their lives. Oh yeah, this thing is headed in the direction that I hoped it would. This person is doing well or succeeding in that way. Oh yeah, that's why I'm feeling good.

So, the emotions last much, much, much longer than the thoughts or especially longer than the conversation. So, I want to connect with my friend in positive ways. I sort of think about this the same way I think about comedy. Stay with me. Some of you who know me know that I love a good standup comic. I love comedy. I love people who are creative who can make us laugh. And I think that the lowest and probably easiest way to make people laugh is through topics that are somewhat vulgar, or offensive, or with lots of language.

A lot of comedy is really pretty offensive. There's a lot of it that I just don't watch because it sort of hurts my spirit. But there are a handful who are able to make us laugh without being degrading, without being super offensive, without using lots of vulgar language. I think that those people are more skilled personally. I think the Nate Bargatze's, the Jim Gaffigan's, the Johnson Files, the Tray Kennedy's, those people it requires a higher level skill to keep it clean and not have it be cheesy, to still be funny, to still make people laugh. I really respect that. I really appreciate that.

I want to take my connection with other people to a higher level. It's going to require more of me. It's going to be harder to think of what I want to discuss that would be a positive topic with my friend but I'm up for it because that's who I want to be. I want to feel better and I want to leave other people feeling better. So again, this isn't to beat yourself up. The reason I'm sharing all my failures with you is because I want you to see

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how I observe them and go, "I see what I did there." And I don't start complaining to myself about myself.

I'm just really fascinated by it, this is how I get leverage over it much, much faster. But it is natural, again, for the negativity to feel like connection. This is why people that we go through a challenge with or a trial with, if we're able to get through it together, we solve a problem or overcome a challenge we feel very connected to those people.

This is why maybe your roommates that you had before you feel really close to because you guys overcame and figured out some things together. You went through life together and life's not always happy, sometimes there's challenges but you went through those things together.

This is why I think about a TV show like Lost, all those people in that show, and I know it's fictional but stay with me, they crashed on a desert island and then lived together for however long. I don't know how long that show supposedly took place. It felt like forever. But anyway, they lived together. They had to overcome tons of challenges and trials. And so, they grew very close to each other, that was very connecting. That is how we connect as human beings is overcoming challenges and problems together.

But good news, there will always be challenges and problems. And a simple way to redirect is to talk about solutions rather than to talk so much about problems. There's complaining which is just talking about problems. And then there's progression, and growth, and a deeper level of connection even which is talking about solutions. So, like I said, step one, you just have to become aware. You have to become aware of yourself. I'm not talking about becoming aware of everyone around you, that's really easy to do. That's just us complaining about their complaining.

Become aware of yourself. Start observing yourself. Start noticing. Do what I just did, just sit down and see if you can make a list of 15 things that you complained about yesterday. When I wrote that list I just wrote down one through 15 because the study says that average person complaint between

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15 and 30 times a day. So, I thought I bet that's true. I bet I complained at least 15 times. I ended up coming up with 17. It was not even hard to do.

So, make a list. And then have it if this is something you want to work on, have it sort of on your mind. Start trying to pay attention to yourself. Don't get mad at yourself. Don't think you even always have to interrupt it. But on occasion you will and the awareness alone, like I said, will give you tons of leverage. Then you have to choose to make that conscious effort.

Now, I'll tell you how this is easiest for me. And we're all different. But instead of thinking I'm going to make a conscious effort to think about different things or even telling myself I'm making a conscious effort to talk about different things. I begin with I'm going to make a conscious effort to feel good today, maybe not all day but in moments. I just want to feel liked right now. I just want to feel optimistic right now. I just want to feel happy right now. I just want to feel excited right now, whatever it is.

I'll chose an emotion and just sometimes thinking about that emotion I can sort of redirect myself and then my head comes with me. Of course, the thoughts create it. So, the thoughts start coming. I start thinking about things that I appreciate, that I love, that I'm grateful for, that I'm excited about. So, if you want to start with the thoughts, that's fine. If you want to start with the feelings, do what's the easiest for you.

Now, I know some of you are like, "Okay, but what about if I'm hanging out with a group of people and they're all complaining? Or what if my spouse comes home and he or she complains all the time, or my kids, they're the negative ones, they're complaining all the time?" So, I want to offer to you that someone's got to be the one to redirect things. And I think that you can do this and still be kind and empathetic.

And if you're doing it with judgment, if you're frustrated with them for complaining it's not going to have the same effect because now you're complaining about them complaining even if it's just in your head. So, you have to genuinely clean up your own emotions first. You have to be

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empathetic, and compassionate and understanding. That's why I like to start by reminding myself I'm addicted to complaining just like everyone else. I am. We all do it.

So, we don't need to judge them. We just think, alright, I get it. She is complaining, I complain, I understand. It's the easy route. It's like writing a joke with a swear word in the middle, easier to make it funny. So, we get why they do it. But then you can do a simple redirect.

So, imagine that you're out with a bunch of your girl friends and they're all complaining about their husbands. And you're thinking, I don't really want to contribute to that, I'm working on complaining less. Then you can just listen, you can just not contribute with your own story first of all, that's one option.

Second of all you might say, "Yeah, I totally get that. That is frustrating. But I will say this, here's one thing that my husband did that was so sweet. I couldn't believe when he did this." Or I will say though, I'm so grateful to be married. I have some friends that are single and in some ways it looks really fun but in other ways I see how lonely they sometimes seem. Do you see what I mean? It's just a simple redirect. You don't have to be the one that's pointing out how negative they are. You don't have to criticize or judge them. But you could do a simple redirect.

And maybe it's not even on the same subject. Maybe they're all complaining about their husbands and you're like, "Okay you guys, wait. Sorry to change the subject but I saw the funniest thing online today, let me tell you about it. You guys have to see this video. Have you seen this video? Oh my gosh, it's hilarious." Do you see what I mean? You could redirect to something else especially if I have someone in my life who has a pattern of complaining even more than others. I just know they're going to want to complain. That's their natural default.

I'm going to hear them out a little bit, empathize, validate them a little bit. And then I'm going to redirect. I'm going to be like, "Oh my gosh, did I tell

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you last month I went to Nashville and it was so beautiful? I don't know if I told you about that. Have you ever been there? Have you seen how beautiful it is? Have you ever been down south before? Just a simple redirect can go a long way. And you can do it with empathy and respect.

Now, there may even be times when you need to have more of a boundary. If you have somebody that you see maybe every day, this person is very negative for whatever reason, maybe they've always been, maybe they've just become that way because something's going on in their life. There comes a point at which it's really hard to manage your head and stay positive when somebody is constantly sharing all their negative thoughts with you.

So, it is okay to say, "Oh man, you know what? I love you so much but I just can't listen to this every day. It's making me feel really bad and I'm so sorry that you're struggling with it but I just can't be the one." You can do that. Again, if the redirect doesn't work or doesn't feel natural or loving to you, be honest, tell the truth. Sometimes people's brains go negative for a period of time.

I noticed this, my daughter started telling me last year in the middle of the school year about one of her teachers who she really loves, who's been a great teacher. And she's like, "Mom, I don't know what's going on with her but she just comes in every day and she tells us about how she's looking for another job, she doesn't want to be a teacher. She tells us all about the fights she gets in with her husband. And she takes a lot of time talking about that stuff every day and she's been really less patient with us. She's been yelling at us more and she gets frustrated with us and I don't know what's going on."

I was like, "Huh, sounds like her brain's gone negative." And I don't say that with judgment, I really don't. My brain goes negative sometimes too. But if you notice that you're complaining more and if you pay attention you'll notice when it happens, you'll realize, wait, my brain's gone negative. And now it's really good at noticing everything that's wrong. And then it wants to

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talk about it out loud. And that is not serving you or the world in any way my friends. So, it's a simple redirect back to positivity. Gratitude practices, journaling, a gratitude journal.

All these things that are all over the internet, these are not new ideas that I'm giving you here. I have a brother who's really positive, his name is Ben, he's the youngest in the family and he's really good at positivity, not that he never complains or anything but overall, he's really good at positivity. We actually just went up to the lake with our family and we just got a card in the mail, a thank you card that he mailed to us. He was just thanking my husband and I for making that lake trip happen.

I was like, "What, who does that? What mid 30 year old man takes the time to mail a thank you card to his sister." I mean that's exceptional. And that's super kind of him to do for us but I'll tell you, that benefits him so tremendously. His head is so positive. He has this really bizarrely optimistic view of the world because he does things like that. He takes the time to thank somebody. He takes the time to notice things that he likes. He takes the time to notice how amazing people are.

He's always looking for what's good about a situation. I remember when he was younger, I want to say he was even in high school, he would send emails in to The Frozen Pizza Company and say, "I just wanted to tell you that I just made one of your frozen pizzas for lunch and it was amazing. Thanks for what you do." He purposely takes the time to focus on what he loves and what's good in the world. And as a result, his brain is so positive. And he gets to feel the effects of that. He is happy and he creates what he wants in his life as a result.

So, you can do whatever feels good, and natural, and fun to you, write thank you notes, gratitude journals, just make a list of what you're thankful for. Send a DM to somebody. Send a text message to someone. Interrupt that negative pattern in your brain with something positive, with gratitude and you will get yourself pointed in a different direction. Let's try to break our addiction to complaining. I'm vowing to break it myself. Who wants to

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join me? Alright, thanks for joining me you guys. I'll see you next time. Have a great week.

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