

346: The School Bus



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is Better Than Happy, episode 346: The School Bus.

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 346. I'm going to try something a little bit different today than what I normally do on this podcast. Lately I've been really trying to learn more about storytelling. I'm fascinated with story. I find that stories are really inspiring. A teacher and mentor I should say that I worked with last year said to me one time, "If a picture is worth a 1,000 words, a story is worth a 1,000 pictures." And I couldn't agree more. And so today I'm going to tell you the story of the school bus.

This is a true story from mine and my children's lives and I want to share it with you today. And I hope that it will illustrate a point that I've found to be helpful in my life.

One – amazing. I have been driving my oldest kids, Isaac and Macy to school for five years when our family moves to Washington state. We moved here when my oldest son was in fifth grade. And in California where we came from there were no school buses, at least not from where we lived. And so, I drove them to school every day of school for five years.

I remember the first few days of taking my oldest son, Isaac, to school and dropping him off and then picking him up and realizing, wait a second, I have to do this every day that there's school. This is a serious commitment. I hope I don't forget. And also, I'm going to have to plan my day around this. But I did, I did it until we moved to Washington state. Now, when we lived in California also when I was driving the kids it was not uncommon for us to be running late. There were many stressful tense mornings.

There were many hurrying and jumping out of the cars and running to the line to get in line to try to make it before the bell rang moments. It was kind of crazy when I drove those kids to school but we moved to Washington

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where there were school buses. Now, when we moved here, Isaac was in middle school. So, their schools started about half an hour apart. So, for the first few days of a new school I drove my kids.

I would take Isaac, I would pick him up and take him about 15 minutes before school started, drop him off, get home about 15 minutes after school started, have about 10 or 15 minutes before I needed to then take Macy to her school which was again about another half an hour round trip. So roughly over an hour each morning of driving kids to school and then a little over an hour again at the end of the day with the same routine for coming home. So, about a few days to a week into their new school I said, "It's time to ride the bus."

And what an amazing relief that was. There were a little bit of nerves on their part but we figured out the bus routine and they did just fine. And not long after that on one of my Take Tuesday emails that I send out every week I wrote this. School buses, have you paused to consider them? Amazing. They pick my kids up a half a block away from our front door then they drop them off at school on time every day. And as if this wasn't enough, they're there waiting when the kids get out of school. They bring them back to me a half a block away from our front door again.

My kids get to ride to and from school with their friends and I get an extra two hours in my day. What a great country we live in that has school buses. What a fantastic world it is. Haven't you noticed? Now, in reply to this email I got a few messages from people that said things like this. I love your school bus email. Thank you for reminding moms that it's okay and good to want a break from our kids especially when that time away enables us to put more energy and love back into our kids. You're the best.

But I also got a few messages more like this one from a woman who we'll just call Karen. Dear Jody, I've enjoyed many of your podcasts. My daughter sends her favorite ones to me. This email about school buses was very upsetting to me. I find it very sad when I hear moms say things about getting two more hours without kids. I raised five kids, and yes,

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needed breaks but to add two more hours onto a long day for my kids seems very selfish and thoughtless concerning really what kids want.

I would ask myself really, would I want to ride on the bus every day? Would I be so excited to sit with friends on a bus every school day? I don't think so. In fact, my kids enjoyed being home. They were ready for downtime when school was over and enjoyed the break from the social to just relax. I think many women today fool themselves into thinking their kids enjoy this, seems very selfish. In conference we heard a while back about mothers, and time, and what time was given to us for on Earth.

I believe the most important work we can do is to bring children into the world and to love, and to teach them, and let them grow up in a healthy and loving home. Too many today continue to say and act as if kids can be pushed aside or not be taken into consideration above the moms' needs. It's a very selfish generation around us. I say, think of kids first. Don't talk yourself into thinking that kids don't mind being away from home because they have friends to play with and kids like being on a bus.

God's greatest creation is man, we have the opportunity to make them our highest priority for a very short period of time and then you can move on with your own desires. The balance seems way out of balance and not in favor of the kids. Love Karen. I have no words to reply to Karen.

Two - Mr. Earl. Isaac and Macy are now riding the bus together. They're both in middle school. And they tell me stories of Mr. Earl. Mr. Earl is their bus driver. He is an older Black man. He is not like the people that they are used to being around. He has a season about him that it brings a wisdom. He plays music that the kids like on the bus. He respect those kids. Kids can tell when adults respect them or not. He is kind to these kids. Even Isaac talks about how much he likes Mr. Earl, and that's saying something. Isaac doesn't talk about liking very many things.

Three – anxiety. Oliver is my most anxious child. He is five years old now and he still gets upset if I'm not on the same floor of the house as him and haven't told him that I'm going upstairs or going downstairs. He is very

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nervous about the school bus. He's not nervous about going to school now that he's going to be starting kindergarten, he's only nervous about the school bus. He's nervous about knowing how to find his class line once he gets to school from the school bus.

He is nervous about getting on the right bus at the end of the day and getting off at the right bus stop once the bus gets to our neighborhood. I do a lot of research in order to try to handle Oliver's anxiety. I take him on a walkthrough at school of what it's like to get off the bus and get in your line, and get on the bus again, teachers help. My assistant, Melissa, even finds an opportunity where we can go and ride one of the school buses together to help him be comfortable and we do it.

The teachers at the school are prepared to help the kindergartners, they put a special tag on their backpacks that has the bus number, the stop they are to get off at and mom and dad's cellphone numbers just in case anything goes wrong. I even find people to help Oliver.

Four – jackpot. Not only do I find someone to help Oliver. I find three someone's to help Oliver. They are triplets. They are triplet girls who happen to be in our ward and they are in fifth grade. And they will be riding Oliver's same school bus if we just choose to ride the one they happen to ride. We go to the triplets house and meet the triplets. They are sweet girls and they're willing to help Oliver and make sure he gets off at the right stop. The only problem is the triplets are musically talented just like their amazing mother.

They begin playing the violin about a month into school. And several mornings a week there are no triplets to be found as we board the bus. The triplets have early morning violin practice. Fortunately, though, Oliver has made a buddy, his name is Mitt. Mitt is also in our ward at church and lives in our neighborhood and rides Oliver's bus. Mitt is short even for a kindergartner. He is a serious little boy. Mitt tells me often how excited he is for the golf lesson he has after school.

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He tells me that he thinks about golf all day. This reminds me of my dad whose considerably older than Mitt. Mitt's mom is also a friend of mine and shares with me that one day she asks Mitt, "How is Oliver doing on the bus?" And Mitt replies, "He's fine as long as I hold his hand." The next day I notice Oliver getting on the bus, reach for Mitt's hand and I noticed Mitt let him grab it. Thank you, Mitt.

Five – meeting with Brooke. Brooke Castillo is my teacher, and coach, and dear friend. She taught me everything I know about circumstances being neutral, about not trying to control the world outside of us and about choosing how we will think and feel instead. I have a meeting with Brooke a couple of months into Oliver's kindergarten year at school and she asks me about my family, she asks how they're doing. I tell her, "Everybody's fine except Oliver. He has to ride the school bus and he gets really anxious."

She asks me why I'm making him ride the bus. And I explain that in kindergarten they really give a lot of extra attention to those kids on the bus. And if he doesn't learn the routine now I'm afraid he won't get that kind of attention later and then he'll never be able to ride the bus and I need him to, to accommodate my work schedule. I tell Brooke, "It's fine, I'm running models on myself, I'm doing my self-coaching and I'm going to be fine with Oliver being anxious", to which she says, "Nonsense. Let's just get Oliver his own personal driver."

Six – late. Oliver is not on the same bus route that Isaac and Macy used to ride because again we had to accommodate being at the same bus stop as the triplets and Mitt. One day we're running late. I don't know Oliver's bus driver because it's not Mr. Earl but I've seen him. He seems nice. We're running late and all the kids have already boarded the bus and I'm feeling like a terrible mother because it's my fault for not getting Oliver out the door in time to get to the bus stop in time to calm his nerves. He's anxious and crying.

He doesn't know who he's going to sit by on the bus. The triplets have already boarded and so has Mitt. We run up to the bus and Mr. Al is waiting with the door open. He leans out and sees Oliver's tear streaked face and

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says, “Oliver, don’t worry, I saved you a seat right here behind me, right by one of your friends.” That’s the day I learned this bus driver was named Mr. Al. That’s the day I learned that Mr. Al knew Oliver well. I mean, of course he knew Oliver well, Oliver’s the one who cries on the bus but I didn’t realize how Mr. Al was looking out for Oliver.

In that moment I realized I could tell Brooke, “Oliver does have his own personal driver.”

Seven – Hayden. One day when I go to pick Oliver up from the bus I notice he’s getting off next to a fifth grade girl who’s quite a bit older than him. I recognized her, she goes to our church as well. I notice her helping Oliver off the bus, making sure he’s okay. He says goodbye to her. I have never introduced Oliver to this girl. I recognize her but I’m not even positive I know her name. I ask Oliver, “Who’s that girl?” He says, “That’s my friend, Hayden.”

I say, “How did you meet Hayden?” He says, “Recently, mom, I was at school. I was waiting for the bus and I was scared. I was crying. One of the teachers saw me crying and asked what was wrong and I told her I was nervous about riding the bus. She said, “Well, Oliver, this is my friend, Hayden, it looks like she rides your bus too, I bet she’ll sit by you.” Hayden sits by me when I’m scared, mom.”

Eight – Taylor. Taylor is Oliver’s younger sister, she’s two years younger than him. She goes with me each day as I take Oliver to the bus stop and then pick him up again at the end of the day. She often likes to sit in the stroller even though it’s just a few blocks away. She watches the whole charade. She sees Oliver often in tears as he gets on the bus. She sees him overjoyed to be home when he gets off the bus. She hears our discussions about the bus.

Taylor sees that each day Oliver seems to get on the bus safely, and then return home safely. After a while of observing she says to me, “Mom, when I go to school I’m going to ride the bus.” And I say, “Yes, you will.” She

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says, “I’m not going to cry, mom, when I get on the bus.” And I say, “I know, Taylor.”

Nine – coronacation. It’s March of 2020 and our governor has just announced that school will be cancelled at least for the next month. My kids don’t really understand what a pandemic is at this point. They only know that school is cancelled for at least a month. At this time nobody calls it COVID, everybody calls it coronavirus. My kids name it coronacation, no school, no school bus. As the year goes on of course we don’t return to school. And the following fall we’re all surprised to learn that there is still no school happening.

Some people though are thrilled about this, namely Oliver, no school bus. Everyone is praying that we will get to end Zoom school soon and go back to regular school, everyone but Oliver that is. Oliver’s a good student. He reads at a higher level than most of the kids in his first grade class now. I see him on Zoom and he participates quite a lot. He is excited about a new Spiderman book he’s gotten and he keeps telling Miss Owens one day about his new book asking, “When will it be silent reading time?” So, he can read his Spiderman book.

Miss Owens announces to the class that there’s been a development in the pandemic. And the governor has said that first graders will be able to return to school just before the holidays. Everyone cheers, everyone except Oliver. Tears stream down Oliver’s face. Miss Owen sees this even on Zoom. She dismisses everyone about 10 minutes early that day and asks Oliver if he’ll just stay on Zoom with her for a little longer. As I do the dishes nearby in the kitchen I listen as this sweet teacher spends an extra 20 minutes on Zoom with my Oliver.

She asks him to read to her from his Spiderman book. He reads for a while and eventually she interrupts him and says, “Oliver, you are such a great reader. Some of the words you just read are third and fourth grade words. I can’t believe you can read those. You’re going to do so well when we come back to school. I can’t wait to see you.” Then she asks Oliver to stand up

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and repeat the class motto with her. I am strong, I am brave, I am loved, I can do hard things. Bless you, Mrs. Owens.

Ten – dreams do come true. As Oliver returns to school there's a new protocol in place. There are a lot of new protocols in place, one such protocol has to do with drop off and pick up from school. The parents have been asked to please drive children to school if you can as we don't want too many kids sitting too closely on the buses. My husband and I both work from home and we can drive Oliver to school if we simply plan for it and are willing to be inconvenienced a little, so we do.

The protocol is that we pull into a drop off line in the morning, and we wait our turn. When it's our turn, a teacher comes to the car and opens the car door. Oliver has his mask on, an attestation form in hand verifying that he doesn't have any COVID symptoms, and he gets his temperature taken by a teacher who then gets him out of the car, walks him to the door of the school and sends him to his classroom.

When it's time to come home a similar routine happens. I have a number associated with Oliver that goes in the windshield of my car. I pull into the pick up lane and a teacher on an iPad sends my number back into some magical land within the school. Oliver is notified that his number is up and he is escorted once again by a teacher from the school building to the door of my car where he is helped in. Oliver couldn't be happier. It's not even the bus itself that Oliver is scared of, it's the chaos of getting from the bus to school and from school back to the bus.

All Oliver has ever wanted is a personal escort from me to the next adult responsible for him. Is that so much to ask?

Eleven – sister. It's a new school year now and Taylor is beginning kindergarten. Oliver now in second grade will have his sister with him on the bus. I am glad that they will have each other. I am glad Taylor will have Oliver and I'm glad Oliver will have Taylor. I'm hopeful this year will be better. it doesn't start out that way. Oliver's nerves seem to bleed into

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Taylor. She becomes nervous about the bus. But at least they have each other.

They're little nervous Nellies but they get on that bus together. They sit together every day. They have an assigned seat so they know exactly where they'll sit, right behind Mr. Earl whose now their bus driver. Isaac and Macy's Mr. Earl, the same one. They're excited to have Mr. Earl and they're doing this bus thing together. We can do hard things.

Twelve – late. It's winter now and winter in Spokane means snow. And snow means that buses tend to run late. If the bus is running late in the morning everyone's happy, this means school will start later and we will have a shorter school day. This is good news for all of my children. But if the bus is running late in the afternoon everyone is disappointed and Oliver and Taylor are nervous. Icy roads will slow down buses and sometimes buses have to pull over and chain up causing them to run even later.

It's not uncommon now for night time prayers said by one of my littles to include the line, "Please bless that the bus doesn't have to chain up." It's December 16th now and the sun in Spokane, Washington is setting at approximately 4:05pm. The bus normally drops my kids off at 3:45 which means it's nearly dark by the time we get home. On December 16th, the roads are icier than I have ever seen in my entire life. A new snowstorm happens to hit just before the sun goes down, leaving a layer of water on the road that then instantly freezes.

Every spot on every road that I could see was covered in ice. I get a text message as I wait at the bus stop saying that the buses are running late. Then 15 minutes later another text, buses are running even later. 15 minutes later another text, the bus will be at least two hours late, please come and get your kids if you can. It's dark now, I get in my car and start driving to the school. I am driving slowly, everyone is driving slowly. The roads are so icy I nearly slip off one.

I have fear racing through my heart and all the while I know my kids are at school also in fear but for a different reason. It's past five o'clock by the

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time I get to the school and pitch dark. As far as my little kids know, it might as well be bedtime. They feel they've been at school all night. It's almost seven o'clock by the time we get home. My children are somewhat traumatized although ironically enough once I pick them up and they get in the car they're suddenly not scared at all. They were only scared waiting for me in the office.

I think to myself how crazy it is, they were perfectly safe in the office. On these icy roads this is when they should be scared, but they're not, they're with me now but they're traumatized about riding the bus. There's only one day of school left until Christmas break and I tell my kids, "We're not going to school tomorrow." In protest of the icy roads, we just stay home.

Thirteen – kids are the best. The kids at our bus stop are seriously so nice. There is another set of triplet girls that rides our bus, not the same ones from kindergarten, a different set that also goes to our church. They're the nicest girls. They're Oliver's same age but they aren't afraid of riding the bus. One morning as we're waiting at the bus stop and Oliver is feeling a little anxious, he's fighting back tears and one of these sweet triplets says, "Oliver, what's the matter?" He says, "I'm just a little nervous about the bus."

She puts her hand on his shoulder and says, "Oliver, the bus isn't scary, it's just a little bit bumpy." There's another girl who rides the bus, a fifth grader, she's one of the older girls of the group and she knows it. One morning as all the kids are boarding the bus I notice she stands aside, she watches each kid get on, making sure they all get on safely, almost patting their backs as they walked by like an adult would. I love these kids. They all wave goodbye to me as the bus pulls away. Oliver and Taylor are not crying now as they ride the bus.

Mr. Earl has been gone since thanksgiving. We've had substitute bus drivers. We think he's coming back. We're not sure.

Fourteen – early. The bus normally takes home the high schoolers and then goes back and gets the middle schoolers, and then goes back and

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gets the elementary school students. At the end of the semester the high school students have finals which means they have two half days of school. This means the bus gets to the middle school a little earlier than it normally would. Therefore, it gets back to the elementary school a little bit earlier than it normally would. I do not realize the high school early out day is going to affect the drop off time of the elementary students.

And when Oliver and Taylor get home that day, I am not there waiting at the bus stop. They panic. They begin crying. One of the triplets says, “Oliver, Taylor, you can come to my house and then my mom will call your mom and she’ll come and get you.” They do. I get a call from the triplet’s mother, “I have Oliver and Taylor here and they’re just fine. We’re making some popcorn but if you want to come and get them, they’re here.” I rush to their house. The kids are fine, in fact the popcorn smells delicious and they kind of want to stay but they’re also a little traumatized so we go home.

They can’t stop talking about the fact that I wasn’t there to get them when the bus brought them home. Mind you, you can see our house from the bus stop. I remind them that everything worked out fine, that they did it. That the thing they were most afraid of happened and they were fine. And that they know all those kids at their bus stop and we know so many families in this neighborhood. And if worst came to worst they could just walk home, they can see our house from the bus stop. They don’t care. They’re still nervous.

They say to me, “Mom, tomorrow after you drop us off at the bus stop can you just wait there all day to make sure you’re there in time?” I say, “No.”

Fifteen – Mr. Earl. One morning as I take my kids for the bus, I say, “Kids, Mr. Earl’s been gone a long time. He’s definitely not on vacation. I thought maybe he’d had surgery or something but that doesn’t seem likely either. I think maybe he’s not coming back.” Taylor says to me, “No, mom, he’s coming back.” I say, “He is, how do you know?” She says, “Mom, they told us, he’s coming back. His wife just died. He’s looking at pictures of her and crying but when he’s done he’ll be back.”

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Sixteen – not cool. Isaac and Macy are in high school now and riding the school bus is not cool when you're in high school. They're totally over it. Next year, Isaac will be able to drive them to school. They say they can't wait. I think secretly they might miss the school bus or maybe not. Moral of the story, most things in life that are good are also sometimes bad. Most things we love will be annoying, sometimes the things we fear create the most comfort.

The experience of 50/50 is what makes this life the rich vehicle for expansion, joy and growth that it is. If your marriage is 50/50, you're right on track. Being a parent is equal parts amazing and terrible. You yourself are half light and half darkness. Just as the planet spins on its axis and revolves around the sun, we too will have seasons of selflessness and serving combined with times of needing to be served and to rest. This is the way of it, with school buses, with families, with careers, with you and with me.

Thanks for joining me today everyone. I'll see you next week. Bye bye.

Hey there, if you enjoy this podcast or even if you just find that it sort of piques your curiosity, or it makes you think, you're going to love the book that I wrote. It's called *Better Than Happy: Connecting with Divinity Through Conscious Thinking*. And it's available now at Amazon in print or kindle version. Or if you want me to read it to you, head over to audible and grab the audio version. And why not grab a copy for your sister, your best friend, or your mom while you're there too. Just saying.