

## 406: Marriage Prep With Natalie Clay



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Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 406, Marriage Prep With Natalie Clay

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. I have such a treat in store for you today because I got my sister, Natalie Clay, to come on the podcast. She has been on a couple of times before but not for a very long time. And I'll tell you that Natalie is someone that people instantly are drawn to. Any time I've had her on the podcast or back in the day when she used to coach a little bit in *Be Bold* with me. It took me years to stop getting messages from people like, "We wish Natalie was still here." And the only reason she left is because she has her own coaching practice.

She does couples coaching and she's been doing that for many, many years. She's gained so much experience and wisdom as well as, she is someone who just soaks in this subject, she loves it so much. She's constantly reading, learning and growing her knowledge base in this area. And so she has wanted forever to create this marriage prep course which I am so excited about. If you are getting married soon or you have loved ones, friends, family members who are getting married, this course is going to be a game changer.

I'm so excited that she's finally putting it out into the world. Even if you aren't in that situation, maybe you've been married for a very long time. Natalie has so many nuggets that she shares with us in this episode about how to make your marriage better based on, again, all of the experience that she has coaching couples on everything from little things to really big serious problems. And I'm so excited for you to learn from her so let's turn it over to my interview with my sister, Natalie Clay.

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Jody: Natalie Clay. It's been a long time since you've been on the podcast.

Natalie: Too long. I'm glad to be here.

Jody: Too long. Thanks for coming back. I'm excited that you're here. Everybody loves hearing from you so much. So let me just do a brief introduction and you can add whatever you want or correct me if I get it wrong. Natalie Clay is one of my two sisters. And she has been a coach, how many years have you been a coach now?

Natalie: Five years.

Jody: Five years, a long time. And she specializes in coaching couples. I'll let her tell you about that. I'll just say that it was really fun when I first started my business, Natalie and I worked together a little bit. She kind of helped me and then she realized, wait a second, I could do this on my own. And so she started her own coaching practice and she's always been really passionate about marriage and relationships and it's a more complicated dynamic when you're coaching the couples. And you've always loved that.

And so it's been fun to watch you just help people through your business doing that. What do you want to say about this?

Natalie: No, I think that's all accurate. I love coaching couples. I just find it's an area that we cause ourselves so much pain and there's a lot of things that we don't understand about it. So it just feels like an area for obvious relief when it comes to coaching.

Jody: And you've coached, I don't know, I only know a little bit about the clients you've coached, so fill in the gaps. But it's my understanding that you've coached all the way from just little, hey, we're fine, but we feel like maybe we could be happier, more connected, or preventative type coaching all the way to really extreme. There have been betrayals and this is the last straw, we kind of hate each other. Kind of both ends of the continuum, right?

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Natalie: For sure. There's a lot of themes throughout and I mean I think everybody goes through periods of struggle at one time or another. But at the same time we have this idea that if I'm a good person and I marry a good person then we're going to have some struggles but it shouldn't be too intense because we're really good people that can communicate and work it out. And so that alone causes us extra trouble I'd say. But yeah, I mean there's common themes but certainly I've coached people on all sorts of things. I continue to coach people on all sorts of things.

I have a membership, Marriage Lab, I won't get into but in there we are talking about resentments. We're talking about frustrations and we're talking through infidelity. I mean it's really, I can't think of anything that's surprised me recently that has come to me that I think I've pretty much heard it all.

Jody: Yeah. And you've coached on some pretty extreme things. So anybody listening going, "I bet I could surprise her." I bet you couldn't.

Natalie: I bet you couldn't.

Jody: I bet you couldn't. And you, I know have been talking about doing this forever and I'm so glad that you're doing this because I agree. I think it's so needed, but you just created a new course that you're going to be offering, so tell us about that just a little bit because we want to dive into a little bit what's in that course. So tell us what it is and why you created it, if you would.

Natalie: Yes. So I am so excited, I'm launching my course, marriage backwards launched technically speaking.

Jody: Marriage prep.

Natalie: Marriage prep.

Jody: So this is before you get married. What a novel idea that before we get married maybe there are some things we need to learn. Okay, continue.

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Natalie: But that's exactly right. So what I found in coaching couples is oftentimes clients would say, "Why didn't anyone teach us this." Or, "I wish so badly I'd known this 20 years ago." And I just thought, yeah, it would be helpful to have a little bit of instruction or some tools going into this most important relationship where we just again go into it pretty naively thinking we should just be happy.

So forever I've just thought, man, it would be really helpful and it would save us a lot of time when we're trying to problem solve and a lot of self-loathing and a lot of disconnection where instead of waiting until we get to the point of things are really terrible and we need help which tends to be a really shaming point. And fearful for both people tend to feel afraid, what's this person going to say because I know I'm also doing a lot of things wrong.

It gets to this pretty painful place before people get help where my thinking is if you just have some tools going into it and a better understanding of what to expect and how to navigate challenges that come up. Well, that's going to set us a lot further ahead.

Jody: I love it so much. And I remember when I actually read after I'd gotten married but I was pretty young. And I was working in corporate and one of the guys I worked with was engaged. And he was a member of another faith, I want to say maybe the Catholic faith, but anyway he was going through a marriage prep kind of course through his faith, through his religion. And he would come and talk to me about it. He'd be like, "Yeah, this week we talked about money and we had to disclose our debt. And then we talked about how many kids we want and we talked about sex."

And he was just kind of telling me and I was, again being newly married and just going through kind of the shock of this is great but also this is kind of a lot. I was like, "Why do we not have, that's such a good idea, why do we not have something like that?" So anyway, I'm just so glad that you're doing it.

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Natalie: Yes. And along that point, it makes me feel so bad for people because if you're going into it thinking, again, if I'm a good person or you are and we do have things available to us like prayer and the spirit can guide us and we can get to answers. I fully believe in all that and we want to leverage all of that. But also the way we get answers to things is through knowledge and through learning. You go to the doctor if you're sick, you don't just rely on inspiration to heal your bones.

So I think that can lead to a lot of shaming again if we feel like I must be doing something wrong, it shouldn't be this hard and I'm not finding relief. Well, yeah, let's prepare ourselves to make this a really great experience rather than everybody knows marriage is hard. It doesn't have to be that experience.

Jody: That's right, yeah. Okay, so this is a class that we'll tell everybody where to go grab. But I would highly recommend, if you're a young person who is engaged or just dating, or maybe you're even newly married or maybe you're like me. I have kids who aren't getting married yet but in the next little while they will. If you have kids who are dating or maybe getting married soon it's I think an amazing wedding gift. I think better than the towels. Towels are important but let's make sure they're set up for success. So let's go through and I know there are six main points and six classes.

And let's just have you touch briefly on the types of things that people will get out of this course.

Natalie: So I drew from the topics that I find are the most helpful in problem solving. Because really what I attempt to do is help empower you to know that you can figure things out, that you can get through challenges. My goal is not to get you to a place of marital bliss. It's funny, when I'm looking at things for marketing, I'm looking at stock photos. And if you type in couples, they're all piggyback writing and support. This is not what...

Jody: It doesn't look real.

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Natalie: That doesn't even seem romantic to me because this idea that if things are just easy, that that's romance. I'm like, "Isn't romance going through hard things and coming out stronger" To me that feels much more honest and authentic. So everything that I have put together for these courses are things that I feel are really helpful and provide tangible tools to navigate things that are inevitably going to come up in your situation. Yes, it's going to be varying in the degree of intensity based on our personality and a whole bunch of other things.

But there's certain things that you're going to be facing when you decide to join your life with another human, whether we're talking about just in the decisions we make. Even practically speaking, living with another person, a roommate, joining our finances, all these things that kind of make sense that we might need a little bit of help instead of just assuming we should just be off and running, it should be easy.

Jody: Okay. So first one you say is communication.

Natalie: Yes. So obviously...

Jody: That matters?

Natalie: Well, I think people know this. People know, and in fact when couples are struggling and they come to me for a consultation, every time hands down they'll say, "We're just terrible at communication." When in actuality we're all pretty good at communicating. It's the time we choose to communicate. If we're communicating when we're really upset and defensive and we think things should be different, then yeah, we're not going to be good at communicating. So that is the class that I feel is super important just to help manage so many different things.

But really I do offer some step-by-step tools for how to handle situations when there's a big explosion or when there's just maybe, we tend towards being passive aggressive or not. How to make our communication much more honest and authentic while also allowing for us to have our human struggles. So there's different ways that we go about that, one of those

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being we have to stop thinking that we should agree on everything, that communication doesn't have to look like we get to a place where my truth is your truth.

We have to remember we're not dealing at the level of eternal truth and most of these things that we're trying to implement. So when we keep in mind that we're usually both aligned on the thing that matters most, which is how we parent our child, that we feel some financial freedom. And we have very different approaches to that. So this class really aims to offer you a step-by-step to account for us getting triggered in a moment, sometimes reacting and having some of those moments that aren't pretty and that's okay.

What do we do next to recover so that we can come closer together and find resolve maybe in a way we didn't anticipate?

Jody: Love it. So good. What is your thought on, before we go to the next one, what is your thought on the advice of don't go to bed angry?

Natalie: Yeah, I think that's maybe the worst advice ever.

Jody: Why?

Natalie: Well, I think that works for some people. And again this is a really individualized approach because I don't like this idea that someone tells you this is how it should go. I think that gets us into more trouble than anything. But for some people that really works and they're able to get to a resolve and they don't like going to bed angry, great. But I think for the vast majority of couples, if you're feeling upset, that's really not a great time to try and talk through things because you're really feeling pretty defensive.

And then you're basically like two attorneys trying to argue who's the bigger jerk or who's the one that was insensitive. And we don't really want to win that argument. And that doesn't do much to get us to better communication because communication is really a give and take. And if we're just trying to feel better quickly, well, we can get there but that's going to be usually through intimidation, manipulation, giving in which leads to resentment.



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So I think sometimes the best thing you can do is give it some time, sleep on it, see how things look tomorrow. And again it's not a big deal if we decided, that's going to happen sometimes instead of thinking it's a problem because we're both angry going to sleep. That's more problematic.

Jody: Yeah. And I feel like at night when I'm more tired, everything is more dramatic and I'm more emotional. And sometimes I think, no, we just need to go to bed and sleep and then we can revisit this when we're rested and calm and yeah.

Natalie: Isn't that so true? If you're having those arguments that are really long and go hours long, you're not helping your situation any.

Jody: 2:00am is not the time to discuss it.

Natalie: No, you are not getting closer to better communication with each other, I can tell you right now.

Jody: No, okay, good, I'm glad I'm doing that one right. I always go to bed angry. No, I'm just kidding. Okay, let's talk about number two, autonomy.

Natalie: Now, that's a strange one, a strange topic for a class.

Jody: On marriage.

Natalie: On marriage. But here's why I think it's so important. So it kind of negates the idea that certainly, thank you, Tom Cruise, we've all heard of, You Complete Me.

Jody: Gosh, I still love that movie, but you're right, that is not a good [crosstalk].

Natalie: It's a fun idea, and gosh, [crosstalk].

Jody: I wish Jake could complete me. I love him but he does not complete me.

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Natalie: It would be so much easier, it would be good. I'm going to do it right now. So if you find that, man, enjoy that and just be grateful that you've found it.

Jody: Ride that out if you find it.

Natalie: Because bless you, you win.

Jody: But if you're not married yet, don't expect that.

Natalie: Maybe don't expect it, if it happens it'll be a bonus. But that idea of you complete me is super problematic. So this is my way of undoing the damage Tom Cruise has inadvertently done to marriage because truly when we think that, hey, if I'm insecure and now I've found this person that's going to help me feel like I'm loved all the time, that's so great and it feels that way often when you're dating so that's the trick. But then guess what, when my insecurity bumps up against your insecurity and someone has to give in there, we're kind of at odds.

So we're not going to be able to complete each other just in that moment, maybe other times, but let's let it go in that moment. So I just think it's so important to remember that we are individuals and in fact we were originally attracted to one another for a lot of our differences. And it's great to be unique and it's really freeing to be unique. So I teach ways to work within a couple so that it doesn't feel like selfishness. It doesn't feel like stonewalling or ignoring one another and separating when you allow yourself to be different.

It's actually hugely freeing and it makes us even that much more attractive to one another.

Jody: That's so good. There's an older couple who I won't name their name because I didn't get permission to tell this story but they're someone that I met through some of my work. And they're very well known in the church. I'll just say that.

Natalie: You have my mind going.

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Jody: Let your imagination run wild. But they have been married for a very long time and they appear to be relatively happy, I'm sure they have bad days. But I asked them, "What's the secret, tell us, to being married this long and you guys seem like you still like each other?" And the woman said, "I just let him do whatever he wants and he lets me do whatever I want." And then she kind of gave some examples of one time she wanted to travel somewhere and she told him, "I want to go on this trip." And he was like, "Alright."

And then she said, "Will you come with me?" And he said, "No, I don't want to go there." But he's like, "But you can go." And so kind of like you said, obviously we're not saying, let somebody mistreat you, let somebody, there are limits and boundaries I know. But I think what you're saying is so key. And then here's what the man in the couple said. He said, "Yeah, we do, we just kind of let each other do what the other person wants but also", he said, "If I get really frustrated with her I just pray to God to change me in the way that I need to be changed."

And I was like, "Yes, this is what I'm trying to tell you." He was like, "And it works, 100% of the time. I just pray to God, change me to not be frustrated." Anyway, it's like you said, that autonomy, I know, I've observed this too in other couples that seem to be doing well in their marriage. And they both have things that they value. They have things they do together but they also have things or are doing on their own and they respect that in one another.

Natalie: Yes. And it makes so much more sense because there's not one other person in the world that we really want to spend every minute with. We haven't had that experience our entire life. If you think about even your closest friend who has been the most natural in terms of friendship for you. There's still things that you don't necessarily go to them for or you don't want with them. We still need our whole tribe, we need. Different people bring out different things in us. And we accept that that's okay.

It's just that we have this false idea in marriage that if it's a good relationship, that we should be able to find all that in one another, which

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unfortunately, that does lead to a lot of dumbing down of what we might want to prevent contention and things. And all that gets pretty messy.

Jody: And it puts so much pressure on that one relationship. It's just impossible, yeah. That's good, I like that. Third thing is you talk about roles. The woman's role is in the home. I'm assuming that's what you mean.

Natalie: That's where it begins, the woman's role is in the home and the man is to be in charge. He's the man. You're the woman. Where's the breakdown, people? Kidding, everyone, kidding. I hope that soundbite gets used minus the kidding part.

Jody: Yeah, we'll just put that then we'll quote Natalie Clay.

Natalie: That's right, Natalie Clay Coaching.

Jody: Some people would really appreciate it actually, they'd be like, "Yeah."

Natalie: Yeah, I'll get a lot more male clients [crosstalk]. So yeah, roles is just an interesting one because I think it's interesting and worthwhile for us to have a class where we take some time to kind of think through some of the roles that maybe we're anticipating. Or that we want or we think we'll want, but that will likely change too over time. We don't always want the role we wanted yesterday or we might think that we want this and then not and all that's okay.

But just kind of understanding roles a little bit differently where this isn't a political discussion. I'm not trying to push anyone to align with anything that works for me. But being open to, you're going to have a specific way and it's going to be different than maybe your parents and your fiancé's parents and that's okay. That we're not trying to conform to a specific way, but we're allowing your relationship to be as unique as the two of you. And roles definitely play into that.

So even just taking some time to really think through what we're anticipating with that is kind of helpful just to see if some things come up.

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And it's like, well, I thought that it was going to be much more of a team effort in childcare or in earning money, or I thought it's really important to me to be the breadwinner and you want to earn money. Where I think we talk about these things in a much less threatening way before they have triggered some of our insecurities, it can head off a lot of pain.

Jody: Do you think in this section, because I think back to when I was engaged, if I'm picturing Jake and I going through this course and talking about roles. And I think I would have said, "I really want to be a stay at home mom and raise the kids." And then once I had kids and everything and worked for a while out of necessity first of all, but then I ended up loving it, then my ideas about that changed. And with all of these we're going to be married hopefully for eternity. So there's got to be room for people to change and grow and even change their minds, right?

Natalie: For sure. So it's kind of the point of all of this is we're going to talk through what some of our ideas are. And then we're going to talk through how to navigate situations where there are changes in what we anticipated in ourself or each other because that is going to likely happen, it just does. And how we choose to view that and how we make things work instead of again, the point of all this, going to a place of just deciding, we're just a bad match, or this is a big problem. That's never the case.

Jody: And I feel like it's dangerous territory when people misunderstand that we're not like, "Okay, we're going to get married, I'm promising." You and I have a mutual friend who promised when they got married that she would never cut her hair. And what is it, 40 years later she has the exact same Marcia Brady style hair. And we're just like, "Seriously?"

Natalie: I think that works for them, she loves it and he loves it.

Jody: And that works for them and that's great. I'm just saying, I also coach a lot of people who are like, "Well, my husband thinks when we got married." Or even sometimes one partner chooses to leave the church. And I know that's challenging and emotional and don't get me wrong, but it's seen as a betrayal. When we got married this is what we agreed to. And

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there has to be room. I love this conversation about roles in general, that it's not like, "Okay, let's spit and shake hands on it. This is how it's going to be."

It's more like, we get to define our roles is what you're saying. And it's up to us and we get to redefine them any time that's necessary. And ideally we want to try to get to common ground on them but we've got to be open to redefining as necessary.

Natalie: Yes, that's exactly right. And I think the point of all of this, what are we hoping for? Well, most people hope that when they choose to marry someone that they're going to go through life with a partner that they feel is supportive, that they're also able to support. That they grow happier through and stronger through life's experiences. So when we keep in mind that that's our objective, then when we talk about this it's, "Okay, are we handling it in a way that's attacking that foundation or are we using it to grow and become stronger?" Which ultimately often requires vulnerability.

Is this a threat to my ego if my partner's making more money than me? Or is this a threat to my ego that I always envisioned I could like myself if I'm in this role. So just attacking it from a different angle and knowing, okay, but if the point of this is for us to grow closer together then we have to allow for some flexibility. One thing I always like to say is, I really feel the best case scenario is if we think of our marriage not as a relationship where we can avoid all the hardships of life because that would forego all of our opportunities for growth.

But if instead we view this partnership as I'm going to try and make my role to remind them that they're doing better than their brain always tells them they're doing. And if that's for the most part their take for me too, we're in a pretty good situation to be able to navigate our human sides and our ups and our downs. And yeah, we're going to have some moments that conflict and we're going to feel at odds and we have to allow for that. And again, we're going to provide tools to help you navigate those situations instead of just have to eliminate them all and just be piggyback riding all the time but I just like that approach a lot better.

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Jody: That's so good. I feel like I need to take that on. I'm going to make it my job to try to make Jake feel like he's doing a little bit better than he thinks he is.

Natalie: And it's so counterintuitive.

Jody: It is because I'm like, "I should just point out to him how it would be a little better if he did this."

Natalie: I can't tell you all the times this happens when I'm pointing this out with my private clients. And someone will say, "But he's not spending enough time with the kids." I'm like, "I know it seems so natural to want to correct him on that because you're afraid of what's going to happen for the kids and this and this and this. But if you let go of that, that he's just going to give into it and never spend time with the kids. But really if you make it your job to remind him when he said, "You know what, I just don't want to be there with the kids tonight to put them down, is that alright?"

If you're like, "Yeah, of course, you had a rough day, everything is fine, go relax." It feels so counterintuitive, we feel like we're losing control and it's just he's never going to spend time.

Jody: It's not fair, I have to do it now.

Natalie: Yes, but it's the opposite because when we set things up and someone knows we're critical of their behavior, it takes on a lot more weight.

Jody: I love that. Wow. I'm going to have to think about that one. Even to be like, "Hey, listen, I know you love those kids and those kids know you love them and you needing a break from tonight doesn't change that." And then because in their minds we all do this. We all beat ourselves up, I'm a terrible mom. If I love my kids more I would want to be with them. And when you can help try to overcome that for them, that's when they become better, that's when they become more their best version of themselves.

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Natalie: There's so many benefits to it because not only, yes, exactly what you said. But also then what are we modeling for our kids? That there's not an exact way to be a good parent and I see this all the time where people grow up and they say, "Well, my parents always did this so I should be doing this." So it's how we're moving that and saying, no. Showing that we can support one another, whether we're showing up the way we want them to or not or we think they should or not, all of that.

But also even if you just think of it in a different context of, we don't want to do anything from manipulation. Everything that I teach is really based on having a more honest dynamic and getting out of the natural instinct to manipulate through fear and intimidation or making them feel sorry for us. That's just how we've naturally trained ourselves to be unfortunately. Take the example, you mentioned if somebody decides, their spouse decides to leave the church.

Well, what does fear and judgment do? It puts them in a position where they have to make a hard and fast decision about that whereas if it's like, "Listen, this is your journey, you've figured things out and it's okay that I have my opinions about it." But if my job is still to remind you, you're doing better than you think that instantly sets you up to support them in such a more honest way and support you and say it's okay that I'm struggling with this, I'm going to assume the best about me also and it's okay I'm having a hard time with it.

But then it means you can come and go as feels honest to you and is what you want to do. It doesn't have to be this, well, if I decide to come back, now I have to explain that I'm back or I'm in or out. So we don't want to manipulate. But if we're trying to encourage people in any direction you're going to have the most success doing that in a really honest, supportive way.

Jody: So good. Okay, the fourth thing they're going to learn is money. I already know what this one is about. The man is in charge.

Natalie: That's right, yeah, and the woman spends too much. Next.



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Jody: The woman spends too much, alright, got that one down. What else might people learn though?

Natalie: And just to be very clear on that, I work with couples where they feel the man spends too much. It's not always the woman. But also, yes, money, I think people always hear, "Money is something that needs to be talked about." Because this is one of the main reasons people divorce. People love to say that, it's either for sex or for money. Is it because, and I've worked with hundreds of couples and money comes up on occasion but much less frequently than most other topics.

Jody: That's interesting.

Natalie: Yeah, but I do still think it's important to talk through because it can be a point of contention. And I think it can be really freeing to know, let's just assume the best about both of us instead of deciding who's doing it right, meaning who wants to save and who's doing it wrong, meaning they want to spend. That's really missing out on the nuance of our habits and why we choose each other and what we can bring out in one another and what we have the opportunity to teach each other. So there is a lot there that I do think is helpful to know.

And again, going into marriage I think it can be helpful to have this conversation so that you don't go into it either assuming something and being stressed out if the spending's not happening the way you want, or go into it always feeling guilty and kind of hiding, I shouldn't be spending this. Neither of those are needed.

Jody: Yeah, that's true. Do you get into specifics about, I know there's not a one size fits all of how to manage your money as a couple, but do you give ideas and options in this part?

Natalie: Yes, I do because different things work for different people. So again the premise of everything is let's not try to conform to any one way because it's only the right way if it gets you the results you want.

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And if the results we're wanting are allowing ourselves to be human and supporting one another and developing a more honest and closer relationship then we have to let go of this idea that there's a right and a wrong way to handle money and things. But yes, we do talk through some practical ideas that maybe we didn't think through before, where if our idea is we're married so we have one account and all our money goes into that account and we both spend responsibly. That works for some people and it doesn't work for others. So we will talk about other ways.

Jody: That did not work for me and my husband, I'll just say. But we felt, I think both Jake and I felt you're not supposed to have separate accounts.

Natalie: Like you're keeping secrets.

Jody: Like you're keeping secrets or you're not together or whatever. And having separate accounts saved us financially and in many other ways. So yeah, I love what you're saying. That doesn't mean separate accounts, that's for everyone, but there's not a one size fits all. And it might take some time of living together and figuring out, we have this weakness, this problem to really land on how you want to manage your money.

Natalie: That's right. And it's so interesting because we do choose people who are very different from us in key areas, that's what we're drawn to and we'll get into all of that. But it is really interesting but that's really great because it can round us out and it is better if we're functioning as a team. We want different strengths, we want people to play different roles, that's really important.

But it becomes a problem and a challenge only when we feel that ours is being attacked, that maybe it's not okay and then we go into that shame, blame trap which is I have to make a case against why you're not considerate or why I'm just never going to get this right. And all of that is really destructive. So yeah, we just want to talk about it as who we are is just information and how do we make things work. So all this is much more, and this is coaching in general, is much more solutions focused rather than trying to solve for your temperament or anything like that.

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Jody: Okay, that's good, I like that. Money, I'm always fascinated at how much emotion and shame and drama we have around money. So I think that's a really important one. As well as the next one which is sex and intimacy.

Natalie: Yes. This is so important because there's a lot of things that go along with this. I put it separate sex and intimacy because it doesn't just have to be intimacy comes from sex. Yes, sex can create deeper intimacy. It also has the potential to really decrease our level of intimacy.

Jody: So how do you define intimacy?

Natalie: Yeah, intimacy, I would think of that as closeness to vulnerability. So I think the sexual relationship really provides a great opportunity for that but maybe not in the way we think. Again, if our idea is I'm trying my best and they're trying their best, we're good people, therefore this should be a thing that just comes together naturally. Well, it might and there are some couples it does come together naturally for. But the vast, vast majority of couples I work with, this is an issue, because there's almost always a higher and a lower desire partner.

And then dealing with that in such shaming and blaming ways, it really attacks the level of emotional intimacy also that we're experiencing. So I like to think of the sexual relationship as something that, yeah, if it comes together for you naturally, great, that's fantastic. I'm glad you have that as a strength in your relationship. If it doesn't, just know that you're in the majority actually.

And maybe this is something that we can as we work through different ways to be honest with one another and better support ourselves and each other, it's actually something that we can think of it as, it's like a prize to be earned. Where you have to get through some vulnerability and hard times together and you're still there for each other and then you can improve that relationship. That has the potential to be such a more rewarding experience than going to a club and finding someone on a base physical attraction and having a night of physical whatever.

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So it's really keeping perspective because again, this one maybe more than any other topic that we're going over in this class, I think has such potential to cause disconnection because of what we make it mean when it's not just up and running from day one.

Jody: It's not like, again, in the movies, Tom Cruise, thanks. This is all Tom Cruise's fault.

Natalie: So much is Tom Cruise's fault.

Jody: I love Tom Cruise, for the record, but we're going to give him the blame.

Natalie: One other thing too I want to say about this is we also go into this idea of attraction and where attraction really comes, physical attraction, what actually causes physical attraction is we have this idea of I feel safe and secure in the relationship, then I'll want to have sex. And that is not true. It can be true but for most people it's not. In fact Esther Perel describes this really well. She says, "If there was a verb to describe love it would be to have. And if there was a verb to describe desire it's to want." It's just out of reach or I shouldn't want it.

So we do talk briefly also about what happens when someone's attracted to someone outside their partnership and the realities of that can happen and it doesn't have to mean anything about your relationship but also what to do. Knowing that can happen, what do we do next with that? Because I also want to try and spare people from that pain as well, of not knowing that and just thinking, well, maybe this is my soulmate and pursuing that. And that [crosstalk] a lot of devastation.

Jody: Yeah. And then oops, I married the wrong person. Yeah. Well, okay, that's also fascinating. Okay, the last one is connection. How is this different from intimacy?

Natalie: Yeah. So it's similar but along with connection, I'm including a class on that because again, when couples come to me for a consultation when they're really struggling, those are the two things they mention most.

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That we're really struggling with our communication and we want more connection. So I think that's kind of a catch all term that we tend to use to describe that partnership, that we feel supported. It might mean something a little bit different to each couple, but I think a lot of us can resonate with that term.

Connection feels like we are functioning as a team and we like that partnership. So this is just talking about things are going to come up in life, unexpected situations we think or we hope that we're going to align on when we want to have kids and how many kids to have. And then how to parent those kids or all those different things. But we are going to run into situations that are going to feel disconnecting. So how do we use any situation that comes up in life to actually grow closer together and increase that connection on the other side.

Jody: Yeah. And this is a tricky one. I'm finding that right now in my marriage, I'll just get really vulnerable right now. Sorry, Jake. But that Jake and I we work together in the business, in the thick of raising our four kids and just managing life. And so we are together a lot and we're making a lot of decisions and we're talking a lot and we see each other a lot. And yet that doesn't necessarily mean that either of us feels connected.

And I'm having to really think through, wait a second, because neither of us wants our marriage to just be a transactional, who's going to pick up the kids and do you need anything at the grocery store. I mean that's a part of it. I don't think there is anything wrong with that. But I'm like, "We have to make intentional effort." We've been married what? 18 years now. But to have fun together. And that's actually hard for us to do right now. And I think it's because we are together so much that we sort of just relied on, yeah, we're connected.

Natalie: But I love that you're bringing that up because I think everything you said is true. And we have to be careful about how we interpret that because a lot of times people will say, "But we're supposed to be having date night every week and we just haven't been." Well, there's a reason you haven't and date night every night works for some couples. And people

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love to tell that as the 11<sup>th</sup> commandment, wait 10 commandments, 11<sup>th</sup> commandment, but it's not true.

Jody: The 14<sup>th</sup> article of faith.

Natalie: Yeah. But guess what, that isn't the best thing for connection for all couples. So it's recognizing, first of all, there probably is a lot more connection between you and Jake right now than you had realized.

Jody: Than what I'm telling myself, that's probably true.

Natalie: Yes. But also if you're recognizing that you want to have more fun together, you're wanting more connection, great, perfect, how do we solve that from a non-shaming place and not saying, "We haven't been putting in effort." But even, this is where the love languages come in, people have to bring that up. But my love language is quality time. So I need more quality time. I'm like, "Yes, I'm all for that, but theirs isn't, they like gifts. So who should we go with?"

And I don't like that idea of, well, we're supposed to be being selfish, so whoever's quickest to say no, "We don't have to spend time together." We do, [inaudible]. I'm like, "No, we can't try to attack it at that level." But all of that is still really good information to us to know about ourselves. It is good for me to know that quality time is really important for me and I have to allow for maybe my husband's different in this way. Now, how do I get that need fulfilled, maybe in different ways than I thought? So how do I support myself and him?

Jody: Yeah, it's complicated, that's why coaching helps.

Natalie: And having some understanding going into it.

Jody: Too much, yeah. It's so good. Okay, so I want to end by asking you this question unless you have any other, feel free to add anything after this. But I think especially in the LDS church for anybody who might be LDS or probably in a lot of other, anyone who's religious or even spiritual, there is this, am I marrying the right person or what if I marry the wrong person? I

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don't even know if God's telling me yes or no. We put so much pressure on marrying the right person. What are your thoughts about that?

Natalie: I think pressure doesn't usually lead to better outcomes or even better action on our part, it really doesn't. So I do like the idea that we want to be thoughtful in our approach for sure. We want to take time, do our due diligence, make sure that we're feeling okay about making this decision. Beyond that, we can't know what we don't know. And thinking we should have is problematic. And if we want to go to the extreme on that, I've coached many people that have said, "You know what, I felt like I had an answer that was, no, I shouldn't marry this person and I married them."

I always feel so bad for those people because they've caused themselves so much suffering in the sense that I can't go to God because I didn't listen or there's something wrong with me. I'm like, "Okay, but if we're coming from a faith based perspective that God knows perfectly how to speak to you in a way that He knows exactly what choice you're going to make. That means you were given this message and you made the choice He knew you were going to make." So if that's true and He's loving and not this punitive God, then what does that mean?

Maybe that gives you permission to feel like it's okay to leave now and I needed to go through that to learn some hard lessons or whatever. So anyway, that's a tangent. But just this idea, I think to go into it also afraid of what if I got it wrong, then what? That when we have some tools and things we can now, okay, as long as our objective isn't, the way we're defining whether or not we made the right choice or not isn't based on are we going to struggle or not, then we don't have to be afraid of anything.

If you, regardless of anything that happens, if you want to stay, you can stay. And regardless of anything that happens if it feels right for you to leave, you can leave. And I think it's super important to teach that.

Jody: I like that. And I'm not trying to put you on the spot and there's no right or wrong answer to this, I'm just curious, your thoughts. Is there, I know you don't think there's one right person for everyone to marry, but are

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there a handful of right people or are there wrong people for us to marry? What do you think about that?

Natalie: I don't think we can know that. And so my brain just likes to focus on things of if I can't know this then there's no point in spending a lot of time thinking that. Where if somebody's saying that to me, a client and they're saying, "But I'm just wondering if I married the wrong person." Okay, what benefit would it be for you to know that, if you were told, "Yes, you did marry the wrong person", what does that give you permission for? Or if your answer was you married the wrong person, what does that give you permission for?

That's really what we're trying to figure out when we're asking those questions.

Jody: That's so interesting.

Natalie: So I'm just trying to figure out what are they trying to make a case for and why are they telling themselves they shouldn't? And that always comes back to some man-made constructed idea of how things should go.

Jody: Or even when you're engaged. It's interesting, what I hear you saying is the answer's kind of irrelevant. It's what's beyond the answer and you're allowed to believe any of those things that you want to believe or take any of those actions or steps that you want to take.

Natalie: And it's all about the fruits of our decisions. So what answer for you gives you permission to keep moving forward and trust that there's always hope. That's what we're trying to get to. So that's all we need to know.

Jody: Yeah. I just find it brings me a lot of peace to know, and this is just the way I choose to think about it is there isn't a right or wrong person for me to marry. There are people that would probably be harder for me to be married to and people that it'll be easier for me to be married to. But in the end it's going to be hard and great probably either way unless I just randomly picked a name out of a hat. There's going to be pros and cons.



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And then like you said, so what does that mean? That means, what do I want to do now?

Natalie: Well, and to prove that point, I mean there's all these studies that show that arranged marriages, people not only tend to stay married longer which we could argue it's because they don't feel there's as many options and things. But also their level of happiness tends to rate higher than people who are in a marriage where you choose your partner.

Jody: Arranged marriages you said?

Natalie: Yes.

Jody: That's fascinating.

Natalie: [Crosstalk] happiness.

Jody: That's so fascinating. I wonder if there's anything, we sometimes trust other people's judgment more than our own. I don't know, again, if this has anything to do with it. But we second guess our own self, did I marry the wrong person? But if that's either just not an option or you trust that somebody else probably, your parents made a good decision for you then it takes that piece out of it. And like you said, you just become more solution focused.

Natalie: I think that has to play into it. Also even just speaking from, I just recently read a study about women in the 1950s rated so much happier than women today. And what the connection they're making is just simply having every choice available to you to be whatever you want and do whatever you want, become whoever you want, seems so great. It can be really constraining because, I'm not saying we should go back in time on any of that.

But even looking at marriage 100 years ago, people got married for much more practical reasons that you needed a partner to survive. But when that's the case, your expectation going into it is very different. You don't think that you're with someone who's going to complete you or who's going

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to help you feel good about yourself all the time and feel loved or self-actualized essentially is where we're at with that. And now our expectations that we place on this relationship are so high and we live so long that it's no wonder we're struggling.

Jody: Wow. Alright, well, how do we take the marriage prep course?

Natalie: There's a couple of ways you can find it.

Jody: And when is it? Give us all the details.

Natalie: Yes. So it begins on June 1<sup>st</sup>, which is a Thursday. So all six classes are six consecutive Thursdays beginning June 1<sup>st</sup>. They're in the evening. It's all over Zoom. So you can be anywhere in the world to take this. You can come live, which I highly recommend just so you can interact, but it will also be recorded. So if one of you or both of you can't come, you'll have these recordings forever that you can refer back to even down the road. I think that's helpful.

So when you were mentioning getting this for a wedding gift for someone. Maybe they don't have a lot of time right now to watch it or they're thinking, but we've got a perfect relationship. It might be a nice thing to have in your toolbox for down the road if you are struggling as a resource to be able to fall back on. So yeah, so that's Thursday evenings, it starts at 6:00pm Pacific, 7:00 Mountain, 8:00 Central and 9:00 Eastern.

Jody: Good adding one. I always get the time zones wrong.

Natalie: [Crosstalk], but it starts on Thursdays. You can find it through my website [natalieclay.com](http://natalieclay.com). There's some options for marriage prep in the main navigation. Also if you're on Instagram, if you go to my bio, I have a link there. There's links to everything, my podcast, the Engaged Couples course. I also have Marriage Lab that I just have to mention briefly for anyone listening to this who feels like, man, I wish I'd had this or I need these. Can I come to this if I'm married?

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I really am trying to keep these spots reserved for engaged couples. I'm not going to kick anyone out that signs up, but we're not going to be using the time to talk through some of the more intense marital struggles that can come up. Because I do like to keep this much more lighthearted and much more focused on...

Jody: We don't want to poison their minds with our negativity yet. We want them to stay optimistic and excited.

Natalie: Yes, but if you are feeling like, wow, I could have used these tools and I am already married, the alternative for you that I would highly recommend is Marriage Lab, that's where we go over these same topics. And we just discuss it through the frame of already being married.

Jody: Love it. And they can learn about that at your website too, which is what, Natalie Clay Coaching?

Natalie: No, just natalieclay.com.

Jody: Natalieclay.com, sorry. Instagram is Natalie Clay Coaching, yeah?

Natalie: Yes, that's correct, yes, also through my Instagram they can find that too.

Jody: Okay, alright, awesome.

Natalie: Thanks, Jody.

Jody: So much good stuff here that Natalie does. I always learn something new when I talk to her because you're constantly reading from all the experts and Natalie's obsessed with this stuff. She soaks it up.

Natalie: I do, I find it so fascinating because you learn so much about yourself through this relationship, it brings up all our stuff. I always say, man and marriage, you're going to struggle or you're going to learn, there's not a ton of in between. But don't be scared, it's also fantastic.

Jody: Also amazing, we highly recommend it.

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Natalie: With tools, we don't have to cause ourselves the depths of pain that we...

Jody: Well, it really isn't and there's a handful of things in life that are like that. I think building a business is like that. You're either going to struggle or you're going to grow. And working on your fitness for many of us is like that. And being a parent is like that and marriage is one of those, that it's like, no, we're not saying don't do it, totally do it. But you're going to grow through it or you're going to struggle and some of both.

Natalie: Some of both, you're going to struggle but you might as well get some growth beyond the struggle instead of just struggle and then struggle harder.

Jody: And it's the good kind of struggle. It's the kind of struggle that makes you more yourself and more compassionate and it's worth it because of what is available as you work through it.

Natalie: Yes, I do have to say on speaking to that point is when you think about when we're children growing up, we have parents ahead of us who are telling us, "Sorry, I know you want to stay up but you can't." They're enforcing that struggle on us that leads to our benefit. You have to do your homework. You have to work hard. You have to learn to stick with something. You have to learn to work hard. All these things that it's not human nature to want to push ourselves on.

So that's where I think marriage really provides us that same incentive from a different vantage point, just on our own we're not inclined to grow in all these areas. That's not human nature to put ourselves up to suffering. But we have this incentive when we're married to instantly put that incentive of if we want to have a good relationship and a good partnership and then also once we have kids and everything that brings along with it. Then that incentive is us to keep trying and to grow beyond some of our own individual weaknesses that we're struggling with that cause us some of the troubles that we're encountering.

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So as long as we're not taking it from a shame based perspective, which is I shouldn't be this way. I am selfish here and I should only be this selfish instead of this selfish or whatever it is. And there's really so much that we can learn and grow and that really is like you said, really rewarding.

Jody: So good. Alright, thanks for joining me, Natalie.

Natalie: Thanks, Jody, thanks for having me on.

Jody: Alright, talk to you soon.

Natalie: Okay, bye.

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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.