

412: Unwanted Thoughts



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Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 412, Unwanted Thoughts.

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 the podcast. I want to talk to you about when you have thoughts that you don't want to have. And I almost called this episode, Intrusive Thoughts because that's the term I feel like I've heard the most that a lot of people use to say, "I'm having these intrusive thoughts." But I wanted to be cautious. I don't want to mislead anyone or represent in a way that isn't accurate. I am not a therapist. I'm not trained in traditional clinical therapy.

And so there are a lot of terms like intrusive thoughts that come from the world of traditional therapy, psychotherapy. And I am not an expert in OCD for example or any other kind of mental health diagnosis that you might receive from a clinical expert. So I just want to be very upfront about that. My expertise as a coach is in dealing with normal healthy human brains. And the way that we are as human beings, our tendencies or patterns and especially the ways in which our otherwise healthy patterns can sometimes keep us stuck or prevent us from having the best possible life. So I'm calling these unwanted thoughts.

But I will say that even in healthy human beings, sometimes the 'unwanted thought' might feel sort of extreme or intrusive or really bizarre. You might be afraid of some of the thoughts that you have at times. So I want to begin by sharing with you a story. I live in Spokane, Washington and there's a huge river that runs right through the downtown area of Spokane. And just a week or so ago, I guess, a couple of weeks ago now I was teaching a training. I have a group of coaches that I'm working with currently who are just advancing their coaching skills.

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And they come to Spokane for two days when we start that class and we spend two days together studying coaching and improving our coaching skills. And the room where we like to meet is in a hotel downtown Spokane that overlooks the river. In fact it's such an awesome view of the river and the room that we're in has windows surrounding the front half of the room that overlooks the river. And as I turn around and catch a glimpse of that river it feels like I'm in the river basically. It's so close to the river and the river is huge and it's just gushing.

You can tell it's powerful, the amount of water moving through there, the current, it's this huge rushing river. And the people here visiting, it's spring right now so they were like, "Is the river always that big? We've had lots of moisture in the United States this year, so is it extra high or is it really high because of the time of year?" And I told them the truth which is that it is high right now because it's spring but it's almost always pretty powerful. It's almost always a huge rushing river. It's always dangerous.

It's not the kind of river that we get out our inner tubes and float around in. It's a dangerous, powerful river. And suddenly I had this flashback because I don't know if you know this but I actually grew up here in Spokane. I moved away right after high school and lived in Utah and California for many, many years, but five years ago, six years ago I guess now, my family and I ended up moving back here. And when we were talking about that river, the size of it, the power of it, how magnificent it is. I remembered this experience that I had as a young girl in Spokane.

I remember being with my parents and my siblings and we were walking downtown Spokane across one of the bridges that goes across the river. It was a huge bridge, cars drive on this bridge. It wasn't a little shaky bridge by any means, very stable, very safe, lots of guardrails and everything, but still being that close to the river and I was probably nine or ten years old. And we were going to a movie. For some reason we'd parked on one side of the river. We had to cross the river to get to the movie theater.

And I remember seeing the river, feeling the magnitude of it and having this thought, I could jump in that river and die. And it wasn't a depressive

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thought. It wasn't that I wanted to die. It wasn't even that I was going to jump in the river, but I had this thought that I could and it was a real consideration. And it wasn't a thought that I necessarily ran away with in terms of other thoughts about what would happen if I did that. It was just that I could and I almost felt this pull to the river.

And then we continued to cross the bridge and we went to the movie. And I remember sitting in the movie being afraid of myself for having had that thought. I kept thinking, first of all, don't tell anyone that you thought that because that seems wrong that you would be thinking that. It seems like something might be wrong with me. And second of all, I was afraid because I knew we were going to have to go back across that river after the movie to get to our car. And I was afraid of my own thought. I was afraid, first of all, what that thought might mean about me but also what I might do.

I was suddenly like, am I going to jump in that river? Why did I have that thought? I kept thinking it over and over again. Why was I thinking that? And having all kinds of fear. Can you relate to this? Have you ever had thoughts that seemed kind of extreme, maybe even somewhat violent? For me they are sometimes violent. I have them from time to time. And they might include harming myself or harming others. Now, again, I want to be clear that if you have intrusive thoughts on the regular, go see a doctor and get some help. Or even if you're just questioning it. Nothing wrong with getting it checked out.

But the healthiest of human beings have sometimes extreme kind of bizarre thoughts. Now, I see this with my clients, in other maybe we would say less dramatic circumstances but they still can feel overwhelming or disturbing or frightening to them. For example I coach a lot of people who say, "I can't stop thinking about", fill in the blank, usually it's an ex-boyfriend or something. And oftentimes these are people who have been married for many years. They're not even necessarily unhappy in their marriage but for some reason something has prompted them to think about an ex-partner, boyfriend, girlfriend etc.

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And now they find themselves sort of reminiscing or ruminating on wondering what their lives would be like had they ended up with that person. And then they start feeling really guilty. They start telling themselves, no, I'm not supposed to be thinking about that person. I don't want to think about that person. I don't think that's going to serve my marriage in the long run. And of course, thinking that makes it harder to not think about them. So those are just a couple of examples. Maybe you have other examples of when you have these sort of unwanted thoughts that feel scary.

They feel dangerous because if we act out on them it's not likely to lead to a result that we want in our lives and yet there they are, what now, what does that mean? So I want to speak to the what now. The what does it mean, again, is going to be up to you. If you need to talk to a doctor, please do. My guess is for a lot of you listening to this though, you're going to recognize, yeah, Jody, that thought that you had of maybe I should jump in this river or I could jump in the river, I have a version of that when I'm driving down the road.

I have the thought, I could drive off the cliff and kill myself and all my family. And then you panic and think, why am I thinking that? And you don't act on it, but you just are afraid of yourself for having had it, whatever that version of it is for you. Here's what I recommend to people and how I coach people when they tell me this is the situation. So if we are afraid of the thought, if we make it a big scary monster, again just oftentimes shame and the hiding of it actually makes it even more powerful, more dangerous to us.

So if we make it scary in our minds then we give it power. And I don't even necessarily mean that being afraid of it means you're going to act out on it. I just think we don't want to give it any more power both in our action line but also just in our current experience of how it's making us feel. And what we do going forward and how we even think going forward. We don't want to give power to things that we don't want. This is a tough concept. A lot of people are giving power to things that they don't want. It feels preventative. It feels defensive. It feels useful.

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We're walking around, talking about and thinking about all the things we don't want. I kind of did an episode on this last week. But my point is that even your unwanted thought will gain power. It will be harder for you to feel like you have leverage over in other words. It will feel like it just comes up into your mind and it will feel terrifying when it does if you give it lots of power. And so what I like to do instead is to not make it a big scary monster. I like to just chalk it up to human brains are funny and odd and thoughts are strange.

And it's nothing to be afraid of, it's just a thought that came into my mind. And it doesn't mean I'm going to act out on it for sure. And it doesn't mean that something's wrong with me. And it doesn't mean that I should be ashamed. And that actually most people have from time to time an unwanted thought, even sometimes a really dramatic one. I remember hearing a speaker and I so often when I'm doing this podcast, I suddenly have memories of things I've heard and I don't have the person's name to cite it to and I apologize so much for that.

I just want to be clear that this isn't my invention but I heard a speaker one time talking about this very concept and it was a man and he said that he was in a hotel that had like you know how some hotels have the lobby in the middle. And then all the floors up above are open looking down into the lobby? Not open as in you could fall off but there's a guardrail, maybe even windows or something but you can see all the way down to the lobby down on the first floor from the third or fourth or fifth floor of the hotel. It was that kind of hotel.

And he described having the thought, I could jump off this balcony here and fall all the way to the lobby and die and it would be dramatic and it would make a big scene. And I can't remember the exact words but that was the scene that he described. It reminded me of course of my experience of the river. And he described this, yeah, that was a weird thought that I had.

And hearing him say that, I was so grateful that he was willing to share that because it made me go, "Oh, okay, so maybe something's not wrong with me because a few times in my life I've had experiences like that. Maybe

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this is what the brain does. I don't know why." But I don't think it has to be something that you're afraid of. I don't think it has to be something that you run away from, even again the ex-boyfriend type thoughts.

So I have, in my house there's a front door and that's on one side of the house. And on the back side of the house is a sliding glass door. That is how we access the backyard. And when you come in the sliding glass door there is a path, pretty easy and pretty direct path from the sliding glass door all the way through to the front door, if you wanted to walk all the way through the house, you could. And I always picture that pathway in my mind when I have an unwanted thought.

I picture that, it just came in the sliding glass door in the back and I'm not going to freak out and fondle it and/or be afraid of it and hide from it or anything like that. I'm just going to let it keep on moving all the way through and out the front door. It came in the back door, here it is, nothing to panic about, just let it keep going and it'll go right out the front door. It's no big deal. It's just passing through. It's a passing thought. If you don't fixate on it and spin on it, or freak out about it and push it down, it will just pass in most cases. That is what I have found to be true.

Sometimes I even have areas where I am working on shifting the way I think about things, but I still have those old thought patterns that come along because I'm so practiced at thinking them. Thoughts about bodies are a good one. I have beliefs about bodies that are so much healthier than I used to have 10 or 15 years ago because I've purposely worked on shifting my thoughts. I've got lots of coaching on it. I coach myself on it. I consume content that rewires the way I think about bodies.

In other words, I don't just look through magazines like I did as a teenager like Vogue Magazine or Mademoiselle or whatever. I purposely expose myself to media that has diversity in bodies and different ages and things like that. So I've done lots of work and I have a much healthier relationship with my body and bodies in general but still sometimes those old thoughts just come online. They're so wired in me. I've thought them for so long and

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on some level I maybe even still believe some of them, that they show up and I don't want them.

They're not useful, I know they're nonsense and yet they're still there, but instead of getting mad and telling myself, oh my gosh, I thought I already did this work. I thought I had solved this problem, why is this back? I just let it come in the back door and I go, "Hi, there is an old friend I haven't seen in a while or an old acquaintance I haven't seen in a while." And I just let it keep right on moving. I just go, "There is that thought again, yeah, it's still rattling around in there. It still visits my house sometimes."

So that's what I wanted to offer you today. If you're like me anyway, you're going to have some unwanted thoughts, maybe. Maybe there is a stage of enlightenment that we can reach at which that doesn't happen anymore but I don't know. I don't know that that's possible for those of us that are humans and not divine beings to have 100% management over our thoughts. In fact, I don't like to manage my thoughts any more than necessary. I know because you hear me on this podcast and those of you who are working in my program, you see me coaching.

Some of you start to think that I just always have healthy, useful thoughts. And the truth is, I don't. I, in fact, 80% of the time I think our brains on default work really well for us. I think our brains choose useful thoughts and stories and they guide us in useful ways and they create great experiences for us now and in the future. I think 80% of the time you don't even need to pay attention. You can just let your amazing brain operate on default.

And then there's 10% of the time when I would like to manage my brain because it's not serving me but I'm just not going to be able to or I'm not ready to. Or I don't have the skill level to yet or it's just easier to let it come in the back door and pass out the front door and not make a big deal out of it, not give it power by focusing on it. And so it's only that last 10% if I did my math right, $80 + 10 + 10$ is 100. That last 10% where I purposely do thought work. I get coached, I listen to coaching and I do self-coaching.

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And I manage that last 10% of my thoughts and that's all that's necessary to create a pretty amazing life experience and become a really impactful, fun and necessary version of you that when I say necessary I mean the world needs. We need you to be operating at your best as much as possible, first for your sake because you deserve it, because it's more fun. But second of all the world needs it as well. So don't freak out when you have unwanted thoughts.

Thanks for joining me today, everybody. If you want help understanding this better and knowing how to do that 10% especially that I'm talking about. The 10% of managing your thoughts, make sure you're signed up to join me at The Art of Happiness. It's only \$19. It's three days on Zoom or via replay if you can't come live and it'll really deepen your understanding of how to do all of this work. And it's at jodymoore.com/trial. I'll see you there. Thanks.

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.