

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents



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With Your Host

Jody Moore

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I'm Jody Moore and this is *Better Than Happy*, episode 428, When You're Caring for Aging Parents.

This is *Better Than Happy*, the podcast where we study what the healthiest, most successful people in today's world think, feel and do. And we leverage this knowledge to create our best lives. Are you ready, little bird? Let's fly.

Hey there everybody, welcome to the podcast today. I got a request from one of you. Thank you to the person who wrote this in. I want to keep her name anonymous. But she said, "I know there's a lot of people who are taking on caregiving roles and it can be trying." And she went on to say that she has a great relationship with her mom, it sounds like. She said her mom was a lovely person and that she's always wanted to take care of her. But now that she's in her house, it's presenting challenges she hadn't expected.

I'm going to go ahead and read you the next part of what she wrote because I asked her, "Hey, could you please elaborate a little bit on the challenges. Just because while my parents and my in-laws are getting older, they are still pretty independent. So I haven't quite entered that phase of my life yet." And she said, "I'd love to hear your thoughts on not parenting your parents, even though you know what's best for them. Living with another adult in your space and taking responsibility for them without feeling resentful and overwhelmed.

Finding harmony with someone who you love dearly from a different generation who has different ideas on just about everything. I basically try to channel my Jody", she says, "in situations. I've been listening for years and you've always had some perspective that I hadn't thought of." So thank you to the person who wrote this. We're going to dive into all of that today. And if you have more questions that I don't address, bring them to me over on Instagram. I'm happy to answer them there for you.

But before we dive in, I have some opportunities that I want to mention where I want to teach some different topics that I think serve some broader

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents

generations that I haven't always really been talking to in the past. Most of the workshops and topics and courses that I do have been geared towards women because obviously as a woman I'm very familiar with those challenges and have loved teaching women and will continue to.

But I know that this work, that there's a lot of you who listen, first of all, who are men. And there's, not only women have I spoken to, but women like myself who are moms and in the thick of raising kids and whatnot. I know there's a lot of young single adults also known as YSA, if I use that abbreviation, that's what that means in our church. There's a lot of things that as a young single adult myself, I wish I would have known.

And so I just want to start offering some additional tools to those of you who may have some different challenges. And that is why I've put together some masterclasses. So one of them I've put together is still geared towards the typical population that I talk to. It's going to be called Finding Your Purpose. And I'm specifically thinking about those of you who maybe all your kids are now in school and you have your days free and you maybe have some dreams or goals. Or maybe you don't know at all what you want to do.

Also, those of you finding yourself newly in the empty nest phase. And especially if you stayed at home with the kids and now the kids are all gone and I know that's a really challenging time. And the way women describe it to me the most is, I just don't even know what my purpose is anymore. So we're going to do a masterclass, it's \$59 called Finding Your Purpose. You can sign up for it and the other two that I'm teaching at jodymoore.com/masterclass. Pick the one that's right for you.

The other two are going to be dating confidence for YSAs. I didn't get married till I was 30. And when I was in the thick of dating as a member of the church and the pressure that I have felt to hurry and get married and the problem that boys weren't asking girls out on dates and it was just a rough time.

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents

And then finally, I want to offer a masterclass called The Career Reinvention. And reinvention can mean a lot of things. So maybe you have a job that you just dislike and you'd love to get out of that job and get a new one. Or maybe you want to stay in your job, but you just have a really difficult boss or difficult coworkers or the culture is difficult, but you don't want to have to leave that job. We're going to reinvent you ultimately to reinvent your career. But if you want to see how these tools apply in navigating your career, come to the Career Reinvention.

So again, all three of those, they're \$59 each. And I've never taught these topics before. And I'm very excited to get them to you. You can head to jodymoore.com/masterclass and come and take a class with me. I will be there live on Zoom so we will be interacting. This will not just be passive, it will be interactive. They're happening in mid-October, so go check them out.

So I'm going to go ahead and address again, thank you to the woman who wrote in this question. I want to begin by just making sure that we all are clear that when we go to tackle any challenge or problem and we're using coaching as the tool, we always begin by separating out facts from thoughts. And sometimes you can literally, if you want to do it this way, literally get out a piece of paper and write down what are the facts. Have a column for facts or whatever, a section on your paper where you put facts.

And then have a much bigger section of your paper where you're going to put all your thoughts. Let yourself do what we call a thought download. And don't edit it and don't try to be kind and polite about it. Really get your thoughts out. Byron Katie has a worksheet she uses when she coaches people called the Judge Your Neighbor Worksheet. Because she wants to be clear, no, this is the place on this worksheet when you're doing, she doesn't call it a thought download, but it's the same idea where we need to get all your judgmental thoughts out.

That doesn't mean we're going to keep them but writing them down on a piece of paper gives you a chance to take a look at them. Keeping them just in your subconscious and pretending they're not there, doesn't actually

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents

get rid of them. So we want to get them all out on paper, judge your neighbor.

So for the woman who wrote this in, I would do a let's do a judge your mother worksheet. So I would want to hear her thoughts all about her mother and whatever else. What is challenging about this? Do you have thoughts about your living situation, your house maybe? Or do you look at other people caring for parents and have thoughts and judgment about them? What are the things that you think and feel about this situation? And then we pick one thought at a time, one maybe story at a time and we just start questioning it.

You don't even have to start with a story. You could start with a feeling, but then we're going to go to what is the story creating the feeling. So in what this woman wrote me, which is a little mini thought download, although because she was writing it to me, she probably censored herself a little bit or edited it. I would encourage her to take this and then add to it. But the first thing she says is, I'd like your thoughts on not parenting your parent, even though you know what's best for them.

So there's a lot of assumed thoughts behind that statement or that question she asked me. She's assuming that you shouldn't parent your parent or that you don't know what's best for them or you shouldn't think you know what's best for them or that you do know what's best for them. I don't know. There's a lot here that we can unpack. So I would begin by asking her that. What do you mean? Are you telling me you shouldn't parent your parent? And then look at all there is to unpack here, you guys.

What does that even mean? What does it mean to parent them? What are you telling me that you are trying to hold back on doing that you kind of want to do? Do you want to tell her no, she can't have ice-cream for breakfast? Do you want to tell her she needs to go to bed earlier or she needs to help do some chores or she needs to be nicer to people? Or what is it, what do you mean by this? Let's get to a specific situation.

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents

When you felt yourself feeling tempted to 'parent her' and then told yourself that you shouldn't because obviously that's a repeated theme or she wouldn't be bringing it up. And then we just take a look at the situation and I ask her, "Does thinking the thought, I shouldn't parent her, I'm not her parent, serve you in this situation or not?" I don't know the answer, honestly. I don't think it's a blanket answer yes or no that you should or you shouldn't parent your parent.

I think it depends on the situation. It depends on what's going on. Certainly within your own home you have a right to have certain expectations or certain boundaries. Second of all, it might be the most loving thing you could do to parent your parent in certain situations. What if you told yourself she did such an amazing job parenting me, I'm going to now, parent her in return because I love her that much.

But remember, when we parent our kids, they don't always like it, but we do it because we love them. We don't let them run out into the street. We don't let our toddlers run out onto the freeway because we love them. But they might scream and have a little tantrum when we don't let them run out into the street. So maybe the way you're thinking, I know I'm not supposed to parent my parent is the real problem here. I don't know. Maybe you should. Maybe that is the most loving thing you could do. Ask yourself that question. See what I'm saying?

Second part of your statement, even though I know what's best for them. Now, the woman who wrote this in, she gave me a little smiley face emoji after that, which I interpret as that she knows she doesn't know what's best for them. But let's just acknowledge that you think you do. And then again, here's what I would say about thoughts. They're both true and not true. So maybe you do know what's best for her. Maybe it doesn't serve you to think that you shouldn't think you know what's best for her. On the other hand, maybe you don't.

Maybe we're totally wrong about what's best for our parents. I think that's true with our kids sometimes. We always think we know best. Sometimes we have to acknowledge, maybe I don't know what's best. Or maybe I'm

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents

right about what's best but they need to experience something other than the 'best case scenario' at times in their lives in order to exercise their own agency for various reasons. See how much there is to play with here. We take these thoughts and we just want to play with them. We just want to be open to them.

I do think that caring for an aging parent is similar to caring for your kids. And I think if you can think about it in that way, it might serve you better, that if you're taking on the responsibility of caring for them, then you do have some authority now and you do have some responsibility. And maybe you do want to have expectations and you can do that with the utmost respect and love. You don't have to disrespect your teenagers to hold them accountable.

And you don't have to disrespect your parents to say I'm sorry. That's not okay in our home or I can't sit back and watch you cause potential harm for yourself in this way. You can do it with the utmost respect and love. And where the line is of what's your responsibility and what's theirs is a tough thing to navigate. But I think that if you keep in mind the goal is always love, love for everyone in the situation, love for you, love for your parent. How do we love and honor and respect everybody? That's always going to be a valuable question.

Now, I want to speak to one other part here. You talked about resentment. If I'm feeling resentful that is not because of anything my parent is doing. That is because of the way I'm thinking about it. If I think they shouldn't be that way or I think it's not fair or sometimes self-pity leads to resentment, like poor me. I can't believe I have to do this, it's so hard. Why aren't my other siblings helping? Why don't other people have this challenge? This isn't fair. I didn't want this. I wasn't expecting this. All of those kinds of thoughts will lead to resentment.

And the problem with them is that they're a lie. Here's what I mean. If you are taking care of an aging parent and telling yourself you don't want to, you are lying to yourself. How do we know that you want to? Because you're doing it. So begin by telling yourself the truth. I'm choosing to take

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents

care of this parent. I have agreed to, or I volunteered to. Now, I get a lot of you are like, "Yeah, but if I don't, it's only because nobody else will." I hear you, but guess what? You still don't have to, you really don't. The state will step in or whatever, your parent will figure something out.

I don't know what to tell you. You don't have to take care of them. If you're doing it, own that you're choosing to do it at least for today. Today I choose to take care of my mom. And here's the other good news. You could be so grateful to yourself. You could say, "Thanks me for doing this challenging thing. I love you, I appreciate you." We're all walking around wanting everyone else to love and appreciate us. And what I keep telling people is, "No one else is going to do it as well as you can do it."

Not only are they just not reliable, but they're not very good at it. You're good at it. You're good at taking care of you. You're good at acknowledging you because you know exactly what you want to hear. Somebody else might guess about what they think you want to hear or they might tell you what they would want to hear in your situation, and it might be wrong, half the time it's wrong or I was like, "Why would you say that?" Because that's just what they would want to hear in that situation.

So you're always better acknowledging you. Thanks me. You've got to acknowledge yourself, thank yourself and love yourself on the regular, and own the truth, which is I am choosing to take care of this parent. From that place you either can get to peace around it and stop being resentful or make a change. If you truly don't want to take care of that parent, figure out something else.

I think again, the question I love you to consider along with what is the most loving thing for everyone involved is, who do I want to be? Who do I want to be in this situation? What kind of daughter do I want to be? Now, a lot of you are going to say, "I don't want to just leave my parent high and dry and let them figure it out on their own." So again, back to owning the truth. What feels like me being the daughter I want to be is caring for them in this way or finding another solution, figuring out who is going to take care of them.

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents

The last thing I'll say is because again, you mentioned having somebody else in your house who has maybe different ideas, maybe different routines and habits. And maybe doesn't treat your house the same way you do, doesn't approach meal time the same way you do, doesn't have the same level of comfort when it comes to cleanliness or formalities or things like that. I get that. Those are the challenging things about living with someone new. Treat it like you would with any other human being who you love and respect.

Again, what does love do? Love honors you and your home and that you have the final say in what's allowed in your home, what's not allowed. But love also is respectful of other people and honors that other people have agency. So a boundary sometimes is necessary. A boundary is when we're like, "Listen, I'm not okay with this, so this is my boundary, but you get to exercise your agency and choose what you're going to do. I'm just letting you know this is what I will do to protect my boundary."

So it may be like, "Hey, I'm not okay with leaving food all over the countertop, the kitchen's got to be clean. So you have agency now. You've got to choose whether you're going to clean off the countertop or not. But if you don't, this is what I will do to make sure that my home is treated the way I want it to." What is the thing you're going to do, not what they have to do but what are you going to do to make sure your needs are met? It may be you will not be allowed to prepare food in my kitchen any longer. That will just be something that we only do together when I'm there to make sure it gets done properly.

Do you see what I'm saying? A boundary is, you have agency and I honor and respect that. I do as well, though and this happens to be my space. And so this is what I'm willing to tolerate or not. So there may need to be boundaries. In most cases, they just need to be conversations. They just need to be conversations.

I will say, there are certain topics, maybe jokes that get told, I'm not just talking about our parents, I'm just talking about other people in general.

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents

Might have different ideas about what's appropriate, what's funny, and everyone can just laugh it off versus what I don't think is anymore.

And I will make comments to people, whether it's my parents or anyone else and say, "You know what? We don't talk like that in our house, I'm sorry. I know you're kidding. I know you think that's funny, but we don't do that in our house. Or I know you think you're just making an observation. But I don't think that is a healthy way to talk about people or think about things. So please don't do it in my house." Those are not easy conversations to have but they're necessary.

And ultimately all of this can help you stay close and connected to your mother, I will say to the woman who wrote this in, but to any of you in this situation. When you choose to show up as your most loving self who loves you and honors you and loves and respects them, that may include difficult conversations. It may include boundaries. It's certainly going to need to include you appreciating you and acknowledging you and loving you. And when you do that work, this can be a really amazing time of your life.

Again, I have not gone through it personally yet in my own life. But I've heard many stories, as I'm sure you have of other people who have had really beautiful experiences with their aging parents or in-laws. And you've got to do your work, though. You've got to pay attention to your brain. You've got to manage your brain.

You guys, I just want to end with this thought. The day I'm recording this, it's in September and the weather is starting to cool off here. And if you've been listening to me for a while, you've heard me complain about winter. And even just a little bit of rain and a little bit cooler temperatures the last few days, I noticed myself starting to feel down and feel dread and start to want to talk about it again and make it a central focus in our lives. And I have decided I am not doing that this year.

I am going to go do the work on my own brain. It's not going to be overnight because I have a lot of strong beliefs about how much winter sucks and a lot of people around me that will validate it. It's how we connect in

Ep #428: When You're Caring for Aging Parents

Spokane, Washington. So it's going to be tough work, but what I'm going to do is the same thing I'm teaching all of you. I'm going to take a look at my thoughts. I'm going to be on the lookout for other, what seem like believable ways that I can think about all of this, what feel like me. And I'm going to decide who do I want to be.

Because the truth is, I choose to live here. I do, I choose to live here. So I can be miserable about it or I can change my thoughts about it. I'm going to do that work. You can do that work too with the caregiving you're doing for your aging parents or with the teenager you have that is not behaving the way that you wish he would in your family or your money situation or any other topic you can do this work on, always the same.

It's, what are my thoughts? Why am I choosing that? How do I want to feel? What am I going to need to believe instead? But it's not, I don't want you fooling yourself. I don't want you to try to do affirmations. You've got to take it slow, come and get some help from me. Come to one of my masterclasses if you want help with it. Thanks for joining me today. I'll see you next week. Take care.

Coaching changed my life and I've watched it change the lives of thousands of men and women since, but is it right for you? You'll only know by giving it a try. Try it out today at jodymoore.com/trial.