

Thinking On Purpose



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Natalie Bacon

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Hi there. Welcome to the *Design Your Dream Life* podcast. My name is Natalie Bacon, and I'm an advanced certified mindfulness life coach as well as a wife and mom. If you're here to do the inner work and grow, I can help. Let's get started.

Hey friend, welcome to the podcast. Today I want to talk with you about thinking on purpose. I define thinking on purpose as deciding consciously what you want to think. Because on default, we're just going to think how we've always thought which is going to be based on what we've learned so far being a human being. So that might be from our past experiences, from our parents, our teachers, our community, our family.

We are so amazing in our humans that our brains really pick up on all the beliefs around us, and we adopt them. This is awesome if you grew up with a dad like I did who always said I could do and be anything that I wanted to be, and that it didn't matter if I failed. That I could take those failures with me and turn them into lessons and just keep going. Didn't matter if I missed the mark.

But if I was taught something else, being taught money doesn't grow on trees. That is a belief that was very limited and based on scarcity. So I had to do a lot of work on not believing that and seeing how it wasn't true. So some of our beliefs on default will serve us. Other beliefs on default will not serve us. So the point of thinking on purpose is to pause and decide what you want to believe.

I think that it's worth mentioning here that this particular topic assumes that you are already familiar with the other part of doing the inner work that teach, which is becoming aware of what you're thinking and feelings. And knowing that you are the creator of that. Not that your life is happening to you, but you are the creator of your life. So that's like the first part.

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how we are creating all of it. So the overwhelm that we're feeling, the business, the anxiousness, the hard season that we're in. We are creating that. That doesn't mean that it's invalid. It doesn't mean that anything's gone wrong. We might want to think that it's hard, but we just want to know and own that we always are the creators of our lives.

The second part is what I'm teaching you today, which is let's decide intentionally how to think on purpose. So we have to have the first part, which is the awareness that everything we are thinking is creating how we are feeling. So at any point in time, it's not so much what's happening externally in your life that is having an effect on how you feel. It's your thinking that's creating that feeling.

Again, that's not a problem. It's just we have to first know that before we do this next part, which is to think on purpose. So as long as you know that, you're up to speed. If you're not, that's okay. You can listen anyway. Make sure you get that directory and go through that, and then you will understand a little bit more of what I'm talking about.

Today I want to talk about the second part, which is once you've accepted where you're at now and you have some awareness around that, we are going to create thoughts on purpose and decide what we want to think.

So if you think of all the life categories that make your life so amazing: your health, your marriage, your kids, your money, your home, your time, your community, the travel that you do, any other entertainment and fun that you do, how you contribute, how you volunteer. All of those life categories, you can decide on purpose how you want to think about each of them regardless of what the facts are in each of those categories.

So if you think about a present challenge that you are having. Let's say it's the bedtime routine with your little ones. What do you want to think about that bedtime routine?

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Now it's tempting to want to go to this bedtime routine is something I can have fun with. This is amazing, and I can feel really good about it. But your brain is really smart. It know when you're lying to it. So the goal here is not to turn negative thinking into positive thinking, but instead it's to become aware of the negative thinking and turn it into thinking on purpose.

So your negative thought might be, "Bedtime routine is incredibly challenging." The thought that you might want to think instead on purpose might be, "The bedtime routine that we have is hard, but I can do hard things. I'm growing as a mom. The kids are growing. I can do this."

That might not feel like peace and lightness and the most joy you've ever felt, but it's going to feel a lot more empowering. You're going to show up in a very different way as a mom than sticking with the thought that it's horrible and unbearable and you're just not cut out for it or whatever your original thought is.

So it's looking at the real challenges in your life and deciding what you want to think from this place of knowing that you don't have to think the thoughts on default that your brain just presents to you. Like I said, you can do this for every area of your life, like the little things or the big things. You can think about your future challenges. This is a lot of times where anxiety comes up. Being worried and wondering about future problems that haven't yet happened. What I like to do is remind myself that I can solve that problem when it happens.

I was talking with one of my girlfriends recently. She has a little one, and we were talking about where we want to live. We were talking about this area in Charleston that we both just absolutely love. She was talking about the school systems, and had asked me, "Well what if catholic schools are the only option there because the public schools aren't very good comparatively? How would you feel if you had a child who was gay and they were going to catholic school?"

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It was a good question. I said I am someone who doesn't want to worry about that right now, but I am confident that I will do what my family needs and what is best for my child, what I think is best for my child and what he or she wants at that time. So I'm not going to choose somewhere to live right now based on something that is not even a challenge at all. It's deciding that I can solve that problem down the road without needing to solve it right now when it might not even be a problem. Even if that meant down the road we ended up moving, then we would move.

I think there is this lightness that comes with knowing that you can think whatever it is that you want to think at any time. So it feels really useful to worry now about all of the problems, but that's just your brain on default wanting to protect yourself and protect your family and do everything right. What we want to do is increase our awareness that that's what's happening inside of our brain and decide on purpose, "Okay, how do I want to think about this right now?"

You can also apply thinking on purpose to any habits that you want to change. Let's say that you want to change your eating habits. What do you want to think about your eating habits? I like to play around with I'm just someone who doesn't eat a lot of processed sugar. In my mind I'm like oh I like that. I could get there. I'm not there yet, but I really like that idea. I did that with drinking as well. There was a point when I decided I'm just not someone who drinks. That was a huge identity shift, but it came from me thinking on purpose about the future that I wanted to create.

You can also do this as it applies to your goals, like a specific goal. If you want to write a book, what do you want to think? If you have lifetime dreams, what do you want to think? It's so tempting to just think our default thoughts, which sometimes again serve us, but other times they don't.

So if you have kids at home and you have this desire to write a book, your default thought might be, "This is not the season to write a book. I don't have the capacity." You may decide that you want to think that, but let's

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pause and see how that is actually a thought. It's not a fact. It's not what specifically is the truth based on the circumstances.

So lots of people write books with little ones at home. You can too. You don't have to, certainly, but what we want to do here is bring awareness to the fact that it's a thought that you're thinking you can't do it. Then decide on purpose what you want to think instead. You may want to keep that thought, or you may want to think something in the middle. You may want to think it's possible I could write a book, but I'm not sure that I'm going to. You may want to think, "It's possible that I could write a book when my kids are in school."

There are thousands of thoughts that you can think at any given time. I think that this is so hard for us to think on purpose because it takes so much more energy. Your brain just thinks so fast on default. It's always trying to solve problems and put out fires.

What we have to do is slow down and think deliberately, which takes a lot more effort. So it is effortless to think what you've always thought. If you continue to think how you've always thought, you'll continue to create the life that you've always created.

So if you want to make any changes in your life, then you have to learn how to think on purpose. That will require more energy, more intention, and even sometimes some more discomfort because it requires taking so much ownership of the life that we've created, which sometimes we're not ready to do. That's okay, but we want to know that this is available to us whenever we are ready.

I also think this is challenging because we sometimes look for validation from our social circles. If they don't necessarily agree with what we are thinking, that can inadvertently create some disconnection if we're not managing our minds.

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So I'll give you a really small example. I was talking with one of my girlfriends who's also a Grow You member. She was saying, "Mom guilt is just something that will always be there no matter what." I said, "Yeah, you know, I actually don't really believe that."

It was this moment where we maintained our connection, but it took a little bit more courage for me to say that because my primitive brain was like I just want to agree with her because I love her. Of course this person that I'm talking about, she is just lovely and laughed it off. We maintained our connection there, but that's not always the case.

So it requires having some courage to think in a way that may create some separation. I think that's okay. I think it's better to live in your truth than it is to lie to yourself and to someone else. It's something to just keep in mind that thinking on purpose, like that example I gave before about money doesn't grow on trees.

If you are in a family that firmly believes that and you decide that you don't want to believe that anymore, it's something that your brain is going to see as disconnecting you from your group, from the pack. Your brain always wants to stay in the pack. I've experienced this so much with changing careers and money. I will say that the more you practice thinking on purpose, the easier it gets, but it is something to kind of be on the lookout for and just know that it is normal.

So why is this important at all? Why don't we just continue thinking on default? Because when we think on default, we think that our life is creating how we feel. We think that the season that we're in is creating the overwhelm or the anxiety or the frustration. The truth is that it's our thinking that is creating how we're feeling. This doesn't mean that we should be feeling how we're feeling. It doesn't mean that our feelings are invalid. They are valid, they are real, but we are the cause. We are the creator of it.

What we can do with thinking on purpose is decide if we like how we're thinking and feeling about something. So if it's a real struggle at bedtime

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with the bedtime routine. Instead of resisting that and trying to make it to not be a struggle, going into acceptance. Like this is hard, and that's okay.

That is that next step. That is that next believable thought that is going to help you show up in a way with so much more compassion for yourself, compassion for your kids and your family. Really just showing up in a way that you're proud of instead of showing up in a way where you're really frustrated and feeling so much overwhelm every single night that you are doing that bedtime routine.

Thinking on purpose is also so important not just because it reduces that day to day suffering, but it also allows you to create whatever you want in your life. If you want to write that book, run that marathon, quit your job, start a business, lose the weight. It all is created from your thinking. So that is just good to know and good to know why it's so important. Because whatever you've created up to this point you've done based on your prior thinking.

I love thinking about that. I'm like oh, my marriage was created based on my prior thinking and my prior decisions. I'm so grateful for that. Starting our family and moving to Charleston and all of the things that I've done and we've done as a family and to grow our family, getting our puppies. just all of it. That all started from our thoughts.

Sometimes I think acknowledging this can help you see the power that you have and can help you prioritize doing this work even more when you see what a huge impact it's already had on your life. I know for me, I get reenergized when I think about so much that I have created in my life from thinking. It reminds me how important this work really, really is.

When you change your thinking, you will have a shift. You will feel differently. Because you feel differently, you will show up differently. I can tell you from experience that if it takes a little while to get that shift, that's okay. It's like starting a new workout routine and not seeing any results. It's like going on the treadmill for 20 minutes and then getting off and weighing

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yourself and wondering why you haven't lost weight yet. It takes time and it takes practice, and to just keep going with it because you will have that shift.

For every area of my life, I've seen this. Sometimes the shift happens quickly. I remember when I decided to stop worrying. It was pretty instant. I just learned that you don't have to worry. It doesn't actually help create a better result. So I just stopped worrying pretty much most of the time. When my stress response, that nervous system gets activated, I'll worry. Like my flight getting cancelled when I was in Mexico. I was super worried in that moment, but otherwise after I can calm down the nervous system I'm really out of worry. It's just not a big part of my life.

Now for you if you have been in the habit of worrying a lot and you're worrying about the future and that's creating some anxiety, that's totally normal. That's just what your brain is in the habit of doing. You can use thinking on purpose to change that.

So how to do this, I want to give you some steps that you can apply. You're going to first ask yourself, "What am I thinking now?" This is your starting point. So I love to use the analogy of a GPS. So your GPS, you need your starting point and your ending point. Then you hit the button, get directions, and then it gives you all the steps to get there. You have to have both the starting point and the ending point. So step one is getting that starting point. What am I thinking now? Maybe the thought that you come up with is I'm just so busy.

Okay then step two is what do you want to be thinking? What do you want to believe? This is your ending point. Maybe your ending point might be, "I would love to think I have a lot of free time and space to enjoy my family, my life, my work, my health, all of the things." Okay that's your dream thought. That's what you want to think.

Now just like a GPS, you don't just jump from where you're starting to where you're ending. Every belief pattern that you want to change, just like

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every set of directions that you put into your GPS has a different number of steps to get there. So if you are going to your local library, it might take three stops to get there. You might have a turn, a stop sign, and a light. Contrast that with if you are driving across the country to go on a road trip. You might have 500 stops, and then there is everything in between.

The same is true with respect to creating new beliefs. For some of those beliefs like I was referring to with worry, for me, it only took a few stops. For other things, like when I did so much work on relationships before I got married. I mean there was 10 years of stops, but I just kept going.

It was so worth it because I got to the place where I no longer believed I was going to struggle in relationships. I no longer believed that I was too type A and this alpha female. I really stepped into who I wanted to be as a wife and as a mom. It took that long, but you know what? It was so, so worth it. It was the work that was worth doing for me.

I just want you to know that if there's anything that you desire in your life big or small, lose five pounds, move across the country, write a book. It can be anything. It's work worth doing if it's on your heart. So step two is that deciding what you want to believe, okay. This is your dream thought.

Step three is what is the next believable thought that will move you from step one towards step two? So the next believable thought is a tool that I teach. I call it that intentionally because it's the next believable thought that you can grab and hold onto. Meaning if you try on the thought, "I have a lot of free time and space in my life," and you are someone who currently is thinking, "I am so busy." Your brain is not going to believe you for a second that you have a lot of free time and space in your life. It just won't. Your brain currently is believing I am just so busy.

So we have to find thoughts that you actually can try on, see how they feel, and practice. That will be your next believable thought. So you might come up with a list of two, three, five thoughts that take you from I'm just so busy towards that dream thought of I have a lot of free time and space in my life.

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So that might sound like I'm so busy right now, and that's okay. I can do busy. Now that's not the dream thought, but it does move you out of feeling so disempowered.

So how you know if it's believable for you is checking in with your body. How does the thought feel? When you think the thought, "I'm just so busy," how does that feel? If it feels overwhelming, what we're going for is the next believable thought that is going to feel a little bit better than overwhelming. That next believable thought is not your dream thought, but it's that first stop on the journey. It works because it helps you shift.

Now I want to mention here that you can shift, but it requires practicing. So a lot of times we want the work to be done at just creating that new thought, on deciding this is how I want to think about it. I'm busy. I can do busy. I'm busy and that's okay. It's just a thought that I'm busy. Sometimes I'm busy and sometimes I'm not. These are all just ideas I'm throwing out there, right. We have thousands of thoughts that we can think about busy.

What you want to do is you want to find one that's believable for you that feels better than the thought, "I'm just so busy," and practice it. Practice, practice, practice it. Again, I think it's so interesting. It's like learning how to do pushups but then never practicing the pushups. It's like you have to actually do them. Even though you already know how to do them, like you already know what that thought is. "I'm busy and that's okay."

Then you have to redirect your brain to it on a daily basis. You can put reminders on your phone. You can put little sticky notes. Sometimes I do that. Put them on your computer. You can make it your background. You can make an alert. You know there's all different ways that you can do it, but the key is that you do keep it at the top of your mind.

As you're doing this work and coming up with thoughts, I want to mention modifiers. So modifiers are things that you can add to the beginning or to the end of thoughts that will loosen the grip on the thought. So when you really believe that you're so busy, what you want to do is just loosen your

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grip on that thought. So you can add a modifier to it either in the front of the thought or at the end of thought.

So you heard me say “and that’s okay”. That’s one of my favorite modifiers. Another one I like to add is sometimes because our brain likes to magnify that one belief, but often there are so many other beliefs that are also true. So when you add in “sometimes, I feel really busy” that can soften that grip. There are lots of other modifiers as well. I've heard people use “I'm thinking the thought” and put that in front of the thought. “So I'm thinking the thought I'm just so busy.”

For me, that modifier hasn't worked as well. My brain's like, “Yeah but really, I'm just so busy. “ I like to go to “and that’s okay”. It feels softer and easier for me to feel. That's the test. So the test with the next believable thought is you try it on and you see how it feels. Nothing in your life has to change. Your circumstances don't need to change.

So you can take something like the bedtime routine, which is a great example because the toddlers need to go to bed. You can do this work in that area where you really can't change the circumstance. You're not going to not parent your children. You're not going to not put them to bed. It's a circumstance that is there. That is such an amazing opportunity to do this work on it.

Sometimes we can change our circumstances. You may have heard me say before I'm all about setting up circumstances in your favor. For doing thought work and for creating thoughts and for thinking on purpose, what you want to really learn and practice as a skill is that you can think anything that you want to think. You can practice thinking deliberately. When you do this, you will shift. You will change how you feel.

So there's still going to be pain. Toddlers still going to be screaming. You still are going to feel how you're going to feel, but you're not going to have so much resistance. You're not going to have what I call suffering. So I love thinking that the pain of life or of the season is inevitable, but the suffering

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is optional. The suffering is coming from those thoughts, “This shouldn’t be happening. This shouldn’t be so hard. This should be easier.”

Instead when we uncover those thoughts, we can accept them and allow them and create space for them and say, “You know what? I want to think on purpose here. I want to think this is a hard season, and that’s okay.” That bedtime is hard for me, and that’s okay.

I’ll never forget what I learned from my coach Jody Moore about being the world’s okayest mom. I bought the shirt. I’m obsessed with this thought. What it comes from is thinking that we should aim to be the best mom and the most amazing mom and how that thought seems so lovely and aspirational and positive. Yet it creates so much pain for us because we’re always falling short.

Instead we can think on purpose I’m the world’s okayest mom. Have the time I’m getting it right and doing an amazing job, and the other half I’m a hot mess. That’s okay. That’s the way of it. That is part of the human experience. So we shift from judging ourselves and thinking that we are horrible at being a mom to loving ourselves and knowing that we are perfectly imperfect. That is a gift that you can give yourself, and it will feel so much better. Even when it feels hard, it feels better because you’ve given yourself grace.

So as you go through this process of thinking on purpose, real quick I’ll go through the steps again. It’s uncovering what you’re thinking now. So ask yourself, “What am I thinking now about this situation?” So you get that thought. Then step two is asking yourself what do you want to think about this situation? What do you want to believe? That’s your ending point.

Then step three is what’s the next believable thought that moves me from my starting thought a little bit closer towards my dreamt thought. Then you practice. You practice, practice, practice that next believable thought. Making sure that it feels true for you and it feels a little bit better than where you started from.

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Then once that new thought becomes the thought that you are thinking on default, you can then go to the next thought and the next thought. Slowly but surely you will move towards that dream thought as you practice it. You'll know this is working because you'll feel a shift. You will feel a shift, and it might be instantly. It might be overtime, but it will feel different.

So I want to encourage you to practice this because it will have a huge impact on your life regardless of what is happening outside of you, you can always choose how you want to think and feel. You may want to feel terrible, and that's okay. Other times you may want to feel amazing. The key is seeing that you are the one who gets to decide.

When I first learned that I could think anything at any moment, it shifted my whole world instantly. I immediately let go of spinning out and ruminating on what other people were thinking of me and what I thought about them. I just decided to control what I was thinking. Of course this only lasted pretty much for that day, but that's the fun of it. It's a lifelong practice.

It's like finding that new workout routine that you love so much. You can do this a little bit, whether it's every day, a little bit every week, a little bit every month. It's practicing thinking on purpose and knowing that it's the most important thing because it creates how you show up in your life for yourself, for your family, for the world. So there's nothing more important. That's what I have for you today my friend. I will talk with you next week. Take care.

If you loved this podcast, I invite you to check out Grow You, my mindfulness community for moms where we do the inner work together. Head on over to nataliebacon.com/coaching to learn more.