

Elizabeth B: Hello, everybody, and welcome back to the Primal Potential Podcast. I am Elizabeth Benton and a couple of caveats here. Number one, if you hear background noise, it is probably the plow. I am sitting here in some winter weather and, you know, they're going to come do the driveway. If you hear it, sorry about it. The other caveat, today's episode is probably going to be a bit of a tough one. I don't mean tough as in tough love, but challenging, challenging because we're talking about how to take care of yourself when life is at its hardest. I think what makes this tough isn't talking about the hard things in life, because most of us are very comfortable talking about our problems, but because it's tough to be honest with ourselves about the excuses we make. That's probably the hardest part, setting our egos aside.

I get a lot of emails from people who feel like they're at a point in their life where either they can't or it's hard to prioritize either fat loss or good choices in general, taking care of themselves, because life is too hard. Maybe they've had their heart broken or lost a loved one or, you know, lost their job, their marriage is in trouble. I get it. I get it. You guys know I haven't hidden any of this. The past few years have been some of the toughest years of my life emotionally. I am so grateful for my own strength that I developed in that time. If you heard that, that was ice falling off the roof.

I'm so grateful for the work that I put in because there was a time in my life when I used my circumstances to not take care of myself and now, instead of my circumstances being an excuse to not take care of myself, my circumstances are the reason I must. I will say this too. I don't have it all figured out and I am also not a therapist nor do I play one on the internet, but I have developed some really powerful and helpful tools for myself and I have seen my clients use them successfully as well. These are things that help me break out of a decade-long pattern of using food to numb myself from pain or putting off my own self-care and my own goals because of life and I want to share them with you.

I will say also I'm not talking about coping with clinical depression or mental illness. I am not a doctor. I am not a mental health professional. Let's not get it twisted. I'm all for therapy. We're all adults here. If you need professional help, get professional help. I'm not suggesting that a loved one dies and your biggest priority should be the number on the scale. Not what I'm saying. A quick soapbox moment just to minimize any upset emails I get. I don't want us to have to be so careful with each other that we don't share tools and strategies. I mean, depression is real. Medication can help. Therapy is really valuable. Because you're a grown up, if you need professional help, get professional help. If you want to hear what's been really helpful for me in hard times and helpful for some of my clients, awesome, keep listening because I really want to share those tools and ideas and encouragement with you today.

Another thing I'm going to be sharing, I asked some of my Fat Loss Fast Track veterans and some of my Master's Club friends to share their questions and struggles on this topic. What I'm going to do is I'm going to integrate some of them into this episode and then I'm probably going to do a followup episode

just answering their questions and concerns related to what's hard about prioritizing self-care when life is difficult.

If this is your first episode of the Primal Potential Podcast, you might want to pick another one first. Episode 195 is great, 284 is great, but this one is going to be fairly deep and maybe not representative of the typical kind of Primal Potential episode here.

I want to lay a foundation that will run through this entire episode as well as the next question and answer one. When I asked some of my clients what questions they had about this idea of making progress on prioritizing yourself, even when you are emotionally hurting, one of the first comments that came up was this one. Somebody wrote, "How do you stay true to yourself and your goals and feel the loss at the same time? Not hide from your feelings, but face them and feel proud of how you do that, self-care when you're feeling emotional." Like how do you separate not dismissing your feelings, feeling them, but not having them be an excuse for like trashing yourself?

I think it's incredibly important to not lie to yourself about what you're feeling at all. I'm not suggesting that we should say in the face of pain, "No, everything's great and I'm happy and I should be grateful for my health." No, that's not what I'm saying at all. It's very important to feel whatever's going on in your life.

Let me just state something that maybe some of us overlook. How you feel is separate from what you do. They're two totally different things. You can legitimately feel sad, hurt, angry, and lonely and make great choices that prioritize you. Feeling those things, those pains, those difficult emotions is totally separate from actions you take.

The other thing to keep in mind or consider, I guess, is how much of the pain or negative emotion you are experiencing is due to what happened and how much of that pain is created by you because you're continuing to focus on it, to harp on it? Separating what actually happened with how you are compounding the problem by fixating on it. Starting with this fundamental understanding: feelings are one thing, actions are another. They are only linked because we have years and years and years and sometimes decades of saying, "Well, when I'm sad, I do this. When I'm lonely, I do this." They're not actually linked. You've just told yourself they are or your actions have kind of joined them together, cause and effect, but it's not real. I can feel sad and act with love and courage and care or I can feel sad and act with destruction. I can feel happy and act with love and courage and care or I can feel happy and act with destruction.

A few weeks ago, actually I wrote a blog post. It's kind of related to this and it just occurred to me that it really applies here. Let me just take a quick second and read you this blog post that I put up on primalpotential.com that I put up a couple weeks ago. It says, and I wrote this obviously, "In 2004, I went to Africa. It was the 50th anniversary of Ghana's independence and I went there to sing Somewhere Over the Rainbow at a celebratory government event. Long story,

we won't get into that. I remember being in Ghana and being incredibly inspired by the genuine joy of the people in Ghana and marveling at how destitute they were, yet how joyful they were. I had a spare hair elastic around my wrist and the little kids were obsessed with it. To them, it was this exciting new toy they had never seen before. I remember thinking, 'This thing that litters the bottom of my purse, that if I dropped on the ground, I don't even know that I would bother to pick up, is an exciting new toy to somebody.' Just perspective. When I came home from Africa, I got a tattoo and it was a symbol from their language there in Ghana and it means no one can do anything to me but God."

I think it's symbols in general and you guys know I love words and language and linguistics and things like that. I think it's so fascinating to me that somebody just decided that that's what that meant and everybody agreed and so that's what it meant. At some point in history, somebody said, "This means that," and everybody accepted it. I felt like it was totally okay, recently, to redefine what this symbol means to me, this symbol that I have between my shoulder blades. I'll tell you what it means to me now and why it changed.

In life, there is what happens and there is what we think. They are two different things, what happens and what we think about what happens. There is the present moment, which we call reality, and then there are our thoughts and perceptions about what happened, what is happening, and what might happen next. We spend 99.99999% of our energy and attention on thinking, thoughts, while spending very, very little time actually just present in this moment without thinking about yesterday or other people's opinions or tomorrow or what comes next. We spend most of our time in our head in thought and frighteningly little time experiencing reality without forcing reality, the present moment, what is happening, through our filter of thought and perception. You might want to spend some time thinking about that. I've been doing that. As I thought about it, which is kind of funny I'm telling you to think about thinking, but as I thought about it, I realized, and it was kind of a breakthrough moment for me, 100% of my unhappiness comes from my thoughts about things that happened, my thoughts about the past, the present, or the future, all of it. It all comes from thought. I shared on the blog and somebody, I posted something on Instagram about moving because I'm moving again and somebody said, "Is it because of the audit you mentioned in the blog?" No.

Anyway, I shared in this blog, for example, I am being audited. That happens. In and of itself, it's just a fact. IRS wants more information about some tax here in the past. That in and of itself doesn't make me unhappy. It just is. It is a fact. They want more information. Period, the end.

Any unhappiness or negativity comes from what I think about it. What do I have to find? Do I still have what they want? What if I don't have what they want? How much time is this going to take me? If I'm feeling sad, it is a result of my thoughts about a particular situation. If I am just present in a particular moment right there, then I'm not in that past thing that made me sad. I'm right here, right now in this situation. If I'm overwhelmed by cravings or feeling

disappointed about something about my body, all of that negativity, all of that emotional discomfort comes from what am I thinking, not from reality, not from what is actually happening. That's pretty crazy. With my thoughts, I can create pain or I can create joy and appreciation. With my attention, I can experience reality, this moment, what's happening now or I can escape into a tunnel of thought.

I thought about that tattoo which means no one can do anything to me except God. I thought, "You know what? The only thing that can hurt me are my own thoughts." I wrote, "As I write this, I'm challenging myself to focus today on finding joy in each moment as it happens. When I catch my mind drifting to the past or to the future or anything other than the moment I'm living in, I'll look around and find joy happening now, joy in a song I'm hearing, joy in the people I see, joy in what I get to spend my time doing, joy in my health. The only things that can hurt me are my own thoughts. I will not manufacture drama. I am not going to create unhappiness with my own thoughts. I refuse to create weapons against myself. Not happening. Not today." That's what I wrote on the blog and I think it really applies here to how and why we feel emotional pain.

A few years ago, no, not quite that long. Maybe about a year ago I heard a story on a podcast. I think it was one of Tara Broch's meditation podcasts and I remember being so struck by it. I know I shared it with the ladies that went to Ascend back in November. It goes something like this. I'm going to totally mess it up. Imagine for a second that you're walking your dog. Everything's cool. You're just enjoying the day, you and your dog, and then out of nowhere, some other dog comes barreling at you, barking like crazy, and charges at your sweet dog and the owner comes up running behind, apologize, she gets control of her dog, and they walk away and your dog is rattled, barking, alarmed, scared, disturbed, but a block later, everything's cool. If you were a dog, you'd still be barking a week later.

Imagine if something happened to a dog that was unfair and they barked about it for a month or a year or three or years or five years, no. They're like (barking) and then like done, over. We humans, we would still be barking for a week, for a month, for a year. How many of you still talk about things that happened a month ago, a year ago, several years ago? Guys, when it's over, it's over. You can feel the pain but you don't need to bark about it. Maybe you're not barking to other people, but lots of you are. Maybe the barking is in your own head, the thoughts, the oh my gosh, the what if, the this, the that, the other thing.

Think about it this way. I'm sure many of you have seen this little quote floating around social media. Was it a bad day or was it a bad five minutes that you milked all day or all week or all month or are you still milking that thing from three years ago? A big part of why we struggle is because we don't let go, because we are emotionally attached to the problem and don't want to stop talking about it, partially because it brings us attention, partially because it makes us feel justified.

I heard something once and I think it's kind of harsh but I think the reason it feels so harsh is because it's true. Because if it wasn't true, it would just be like that's dumb, but that's not how you feel about it. If you tell more than three people about a problem, you're looking for attention, not a solution. I'll just leave that here. I know it's harsh but again, if it was just like if you have brown hair, then you have purple toes. Something like that wouldn't be harsh, it would just be like that's ridiculous, but we don't have that reaction to that comment. If you tell more than three people about a problem, you're looking for attention, not a solution.

Anyway, another comment that came from one of my clients about this topic, they wrote, let's see, "For me, it's dealing with the feelings of 'I don't want to do X because I'm sad about Y.' If I'm feeling particularly sorry for myself, I shouldn't have to worry about eating or being positive when I'm feeling sad about this or the other thing. I could use some tips on trying to balance keeping the healthy train rolling with taking some time to grieve and care for myself emotionally."

I think this one comes back to the difference between how you feel and what you do. Like do you want to be miserable? Sometimes you do and that's fine, but own it and understand and accept when you're not looking for a solution, you want to be miserable and do things that will perpetuate that misery like overeating or staying up too late or skipping a workout or drinking too much. Because the first key here is being honest, separating how you feel from what you do. Guys, some actions will make you feel better. Some actions will make you feel worse. Some actions are distractions. I'm not talking about a cookie makes me feel better right this minute. If we stretch it out, this choice or this action over time, does it make me feel better? Does it make me feel worse? I think many of you know that you feel worse when you overeat or you over indulge. You feel more tired, you feel more emotional, more defeated, more hopeless, and then you pin it on the problem instead of on yourself and your actions. You say you feel so terrible because of this thing that happened, this pain in your life.

I'd love to encourage you to embrace some honesty. The fact is part of this pain is pain you created because you're not taking care of yourself. Fact: you can't change what happened but you can change what you're choosing, you can change how you take care of yourself. I think you need to ask, "Do I want to feel better?" And embrace I do have the power to make myself feel a little better by making sure I get enough rest, by eating really well, by surrounding myself with positive people. If there aren't positive people to surround myself with, by reading books that are positive. Do I want to feel better or not or do I just want to accept and own that right now I want to be unhappy?

If you knowingly choose something that makes you feel worse, that's fine, that is a season, but own it and accept that you're not looking for a solution because right now you want to be attached to the problem. That's fine. You want to feel that pain right now and you don't want to take actions that can make you feel better. You always have the power to make yourself feel better it's just, "Do I

want to choose that or not?" There's no doubt a certain comfort that comes from wallowing, that comes from woe-is-me, I get that, I've felt that, but do you want to be justified in your feelings or do you want to feel better?

Taking time to grieve or to feel your feelings is independent from food. It's independent from food. You can be sad and hurt and make good food choices. You can be sad and hurt and make bad food choices. They are not linked. I know how easy it is, and this is another thing that comes up very regularly, I know how easy it is to fixate and get stuck on what is wrong and on the pain, but when you do that, you are choosing to stay in a prison of your own mind.

I'll remind you guys of the Rumi quote I love and talk about often. "Why do you stay in prison when the door is so wide open?" I get that it's not easy to redirect your thoughts, but it's also not easy to stay anchored to the ones that are hurting you and causing you pain. The how though, the how do I stop focusing on that or fixating on that? It comes down to two things. Number one is practice and number two is mindfulness.

Most of our emotional pain and suffering, just like I wrote on that blog, comes from the fact that we've left the present moment, we've left whatever is happening right now, and we're kicking up dirt in our own heads. We're thinking, replaying, what-ifs, why me, why not. When I notice that that's what I'm doing, I just redirect my attention to what am I doing right now. Come back to right now and I do this over and over and over and over. Then I typically have a series of phrases or mantras, little gentle reminders that I give to myself that help me kind of step out of that cycle of negative thought, just step out, come back, step out, come back. Do I find myself back in the negativity over and over? Yeah, but you know what? The more you practice, eventually you'll find yourself going, "Huh, it's been a few hours since I thought about that or it's been a few days since I thought about that or, wow, it doesn't feel so hard anymore."

There are series of things I tell myself. Honestly, they're different every day. Sometimes they're different every hour depending on what I need or what helps. Sometimes I'll just say, "The best is yet to come and I believe this because I believe in my power if I work hard enough to create what I want in life," or I'll say, "You're okay." As simple as it is, "You're okay. Focus on what you're doing right now. Come back. Come back to right now. You're okay." I also tell myself, "I control the narrative." If the narrative of my life isn't working for me, it's time to change the narrative.

Many of you guys know that my dad died in a car accident several years ago so I understand loss. You also know that I recently got divorced. I understand loss. I've had many, many significant heartbreaks. It's easy to fixate on the pain of those things but it's also a choice to stay there. It doesn't mean that I don't validate a feeling of loss related to my dad's death, but I don't have to stay in a cycle of, "This happened and oh my gosh. And remember when ... And this is how I found out. And what about this and what if this?" No. What am I doing right now? Can I be here right now? What is great about my life right now?

What do I want to create about my life? Sometimes I tell myself, "It's what you wanted. This loss represents something that you wanted but it doesn't mean it wanted you." Related to heartbreak, yes, it's validating like, "Yeah, you wanted that thing and so your pain makes sense but what you really want in life is what wants you. This one wasn't for you. It doesn't mean it doesn't hurt, but this one wasn't for you." Sometimes I'll say, "It's okay to make space for my future to show up. Sometimes when things leave my life, it's making space for my future to show up."

I heard on another podcast recently that if you want a lush, green, full, and alive life, you not only have to endure the rain, but you have to embrace the rain. You have to understand that you need the rain. As much as it might be uncomfortable, it is serving a purpose to help you get to the next level. When there are rainstorms in my life, I try to say, "This is growth. This is growth and I'm walking towards something better," or I'll say, "The strongest steel was forged in the hottest flames." It's okay to be uncomfortable.

It's just kind of like when I was first losing weight and I was trying to teach myself to pay attention to hunger, I would tell myself, "Hunger is not an emergency. I don't need to fear it. It doesn't tickle, it doesn't feel great, but it also isn't pain." Sometimes with emotions just saying like, "Yes, this is uncomfortable and I would rather feel something else, but I'm also very much okay. There is a world beyond my pain and suffering and I don't have to make it all about me. What else is happening in this world? Can I do something for somebody else? Can I step outside my own pain and extend myself to somebody who maybe needs my attention more than my problems need my attention?" You can't open yourself up to joy today if you won't put down the pain from yesterday. This is not a decision that happens once. It's a 100,000 redirects until one day you say, "Hey, this feels a little bit easier." Don't expect it to be easy. Peace takes work and you have to want it.

I keep a list of the things that make me feel good. I really do. I actually keep a list of things that make me feel like, "That was good." It's little things like I've shared with you before like a clean kitchen, a specific song. Turn to that. Don't rely on your memory because sometimes when you're in a funk, you're like, "I don't know. Nothing will make me feel better," but if you have a list, you're like, "Okay, I can try that one. These first three, no way, but I can try that one." Don't betray yourself.

I've shared with you before that I tell myself, I tell my clients, "Be militantly on your own side." What does that mean to you? To take care of yourself, what does that mean? What does that look like? What are you willing to do today to do that?

Another huge piece of advice that has been incredibly helpful to me comes from Tim Ferriss and he says, "If you can't get out of your mind, get into your body." If you can't stop creating problems with your thoughts about what has happened, get into your body. Move. Work out hard. Push yourself. Do something physical

and getting into your body, not in like going for a stroll or a slow spin class, no, like really push your body gets you out of your head and sometimes that's what you need.

Another one, and you guys know I love my classical stoicism. This is one from Marcus Aurelius. "When jarred unavoidably by circumstance, revert at once to yourself and don't lose the rhythm more than you can help it. You'll have a better grasp of harmony if you keep going back to it." Basically what this says is when life throws you a curve ball, keep a rhythm, keep your normalcy as best you can. To me, this means add more structure. When life gets hard, do not ditch the structure. Whether this is a morning routine, a PM routine, an afternoon routine, guys, keep that structure. You're not going to rise to the level of your hopes. You're going to fall to the level of your training. What kind of structure can you put in place? For me, meditation, gratitude, work, eating well, working out. I ask myself, "What can I do today to make myself feel proud?" What is that list for you? What things could you do? Make your bed, go for a walk, take a nap.

When I asked some of my clients what they struggled with, and I get this one, it's so huge, one of them said, "How to keep coming back to the positive self-talk and not get sucked into the black hole of the negative." Practice. Notice when you don't like how you feel. Instead of negative emotion being like, "Oh my god. I'm miserable," have it be a trigger, a flag, "Wait, what am I focusing on? Do these thoughts help? Do I need to think these thoughts right now? Is this emotional place where I want to stay? Well, if I keep thinking these thoughts, I will stay here. Do I want to stay here? I will not anchor myself to my unhappiness. I refuse to anchor myself to my unhappiness. Can I mentally, emotionally, or with my thoughts, go someplace else for one minute? Just to what I'm doing right now. Okay, I'm driving. Scenery, great, fantastic. I'm working on this project. Can I put my full attention there for five minutes? Or listen to a song that empowers me. Can I do that for three minutes?" Or redirect by moving your body. When you're sucking wind really hard, you're not having a pity party. I'll tell you that right now. You just won't.

What I'm going to do, I think, is a followup episode of just Q&As because there are a ton of questions and comments that came in from my clients and I want to get to all of them. The next episode will be specific to: How do I handle this challenge as it relates to when emotionally things are hard and taking care of myself?

I also want to say this. If you feel like you need help with this, my recommendation for you, unashamed, is *Breaking Barriers*. *Breaking Barriers* is an ecourse that I created just for this because if you aren't winning the battles in your mind, you're not going to win the battles in your body. You're just not. This is why so many people feel like they want to lose weight and they don't understand how they can want something so bad and then consistently not do the work. It's because if you're losing the battles in your head, in your thoughts, with your emotions, that's what's taking precedent. So much of what we do is

driven by how we feel. Understanding the emotional component and gaining this mindfulness and this awareness and this ability to redirect so you can overcome the mental and emotional obstacles that are in your life, whether you've created them or they've been there for decades, Breaking Barriers is honestly the tool I am most proud of. It really is. I've said that before and I still feel that way. I personally go through it about every other month because I always need help in handling the emotional ups and downs of life.

Go to primalpotential.com, search Breaking Barriers, or go to the show notes page. It's a self-guided ecourse and it has audio lectures. It also has some worksheets to guide you through certain activities. It's a powerful, powerful, powerful course to help you if you feel like this where you're stuck, this is why you're not getting what you want out of life, this is why you're not getting the results you want towards your goal. Definitely check that out. Stay tuned for the next episode which we will do exclusively questions and answers on this topic. Hope you guys have a great day. Talk to you soon.