Ep #391: What Happens When You're Grateful and Want More



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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The Widowed Mom Podcast

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, Episode 391: What Happens When You're Grateful and Want More.

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, the only podcast that offers a proven process to help you work through your grief, to grow, evolve, and create a future you can truly look forward to. Here's your host, Master Certified life coach, grief expert, widow, and mom, Krista St-Germain.

Hey there, welcome to another episode of the podcast. Okay, I've been getting ready for the next round of Goal Magic, which is one of my favorite things that I do in coaching. It's a separate, standalone coaching program that is almost always been done for women who have already done Mom Goes On. And it's about picking a big goal and going after it and becoming the woman who gets it done.

It has me thinking about something that I see happening with widows all the time, and I want to talk about it here on the podcast. So, why do we seem to think that something has to be wrong with our lives before we're allowed to want something different? Have you ever noticed that? I notice it. I see it all the time.

We'll be going along and doing our thing and we'll have a little thought about something we'd like to do or something we'd like to change. And then almost immediately, our brain starts evaluating whether there's a good enough reason. Is it really that bad? What's wrong with the way things are now? If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Don't you have a lot to be grateful for?

And if the answer is that everything is basically fine or good enough, then sometimes we just stop considering it because why would we change something that isn't broken?

And I have some thoughts about that because I want you to love your life, right? And I think that one of the most wonderful places to want something new from is from a place of genuinely appreciating what we already have. And I really want us to get more comfortable with that. I want all of us to be

able to look around at our lives and think, "You know what? This is pretty great. I am really grateful for what I have. I am also interested in seeing what else I might want." Those two things go together beautifully. They are not in opposition.

And in this episode, I want to talk about why we sometimes stop ourselves from wanting more when life gets to be okay, how I think this connects to the grief plateau that I've talked about so often, and how you can start figuring out what you might want next if you're not quite sure. Because I suspect that some of you have gotten so good at focusing on just getting life to work to not be as hard as it was immediately after your person died, to get through the awfulness, and it's gotten better, and that you may have stopped asking yourselves what you actually want next. And of course, if we don't ask ourselves what we want next, how are we ever going to create it?

So something I've noticed, most of us are pretty good at identifying problems. We know when something isn't working, we know when we feel frustrated, we know when we're uncomfortable enough that we want something to change. We can scan the environment and see the opportunities where things aren't functioning or working the way that we would like. They're kind of below where we would like them to be. And then we get busy trying to fix those things, which makes sense. We're humans, we solve problems. Human brains love problems.

But sometimes we become so used to making changes in response to a perception that there's a problem that we forget we can actually make changes simply because we want to, simply because that's the experience we'd like to create next. And we act as though dissatisfaction is some sort of prerequisite for change or for a new desire, that something has to be wrong before we get to want something different. And I find that so interesting, and I want us to get curious about it because I know how limiting it is.

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If I have to wait until I'm unhappy with something before I consider changing it, then I'm basically letting my level of dissatisfaction determine what I'm willing to create in my life. And why would I want to do that to myself? Why would I insist that I dislike something before I'm allowed to be interested in something else? I can love my house and want to move. I can love my house and want to redesign part of it. I can love my house and want to change something about it.

I can enjoy my career and then also decide I want to do something completely different. I'm ready for a change. So, I don't need a problem to solve in order to have a preference. And if I have a preference, I don't have to justify making a change only when there's a problem. And neither do you.

So, I want to connect this even more specifically to widowhood because I think there's something particularly important for widows. You've heard me talk about the grief plateau before. I use that term to describe that place where most of us get where we're past the intense grief. Grief is manageable. We're functioning again. We're doing the things that we need to do. People in our world are telling us we're doing great, how strong we are. The kids are getting where they need to go, bills are being paid, house is being managed. If we wanted to go back to work, we could or we have. From the outside, things look like they're okay.

But on the inside, we're not really loving life necessarily. Yes, getting through the days, yes, functioning, yes, surviving, but not thriving, and not really excited about the future. That's the sweet spot. I like helping women in all places in grief, but specifically Mom Goes On is really designed to help women get from the grief plateau to loving life, to really, genuinely being excited about the future.

Sometimes I call the grief plateau Grief Groundhog's Day because it feels like you're doing the same thing over and over and over. And because it's not as bad as it once was, you tend to start to think, "Well, maybe this is

just my new normal. Maybe I should just be grateful for what I had and at least it's not as bad as it once was. And, you know, I'm surviving and everybody's telling me I'm doing great. So maybe this is just as good as it gets and I should just be grateful for what I have. And I should just focus on my blessings."

Tell myself, other people have it worse or it used to be so much worse for me and at least it's not that bad anymore. And I think that those things actually are worth appreciating. It's great to look back at where you have come from, especially when acute grief can be so hard. And so getting to a place that feels more stable and less tumultuous, maybe not great, but better, doing things that you at one time didn't believe you could do, proving to yourself that you're stronger than you thought you were. Even if it doesn't feel great, it's worth celebrating that it feels better.

And I am not anti-gratitude. I actually love gratitude. What I don't like, though, is when we use gratitude as a way of resigning ourselves to something that we don't love, or we use gratitude as a way to avoid something that is inside that we don't want to feel. Because here's what can happen. We've done all that work to get to a place where widowhood is easier. We have figured out how to manage all of the things that changed when our spouse died, or at least, you know, get our firm footing. And we do arrive at a place that's manageable, and it's okay, and it's fine.

And because it's so much better than it was when everything felt so overwhelming, we just start to tell ourselves that we should just be satisfied. So we start treating okay as though it's the end of what we're allowed to want for ourselves. And I wouldn't want that for any of us. Because that's what's going to keep us in the grief plateau. That's what's going to keep us in Grief Groundhog's Day.

So getting to okay, yes, it's a wonderful accomplishment. It's something to be grateful for. But why would okay have to be the destination? Why can't it be the starting point for creating the next thing? Why can't we get to a place

where, yes, it's manageable and we genuinely appreciate what we have and who we've become, and then from that place, we say, "And what next?"

That's the goal I have for always, that I create a goal for myself, that I accomplish that goal for reasons that I like, not because I'm trying to prove myself to anyone, but because I genuinely want something, and I'm grateful that I do it. And from that place where I am grateful, then I can contemplate what's the next experience that I want to have.

And I don't mean that it has to be a huge ambition. I don't even mean that it's superior to create goals all the time. I just want us to stop assuming that because nothing is terribly wrong that there's no reason to consider anything different or to allow ourselves to desire something different.

So let me give you an example. Imagine a woman who's been widowed for a while. She's got a good job. And when I say good, I mean she really likes it. She's got a supportive boss. She enjoys the people she works with. She's good at what she does. She has a schedule that works for her family. She's well compensated. She's genuinely grateful for the job that she has.

Maybe that job was a really important source of stability after her husband died, right? She is happy to be there, good at it, getting well paid. And then she starts to notice that she's thinking about doing something different. Maybe it's a position that opens up in her organization. She reads the description and she thinks, "Oh, that could be interesting, or I might like that. That's different." Something about it sounds appealing. Maybe she gets to learn some new things, more responsibility, better pay. She can imagine herself doing it.

And for a minute, she's interested. But then, she starts thinking about her current job, how fortunate she is to have it, how she really shouldn't complain, how she already has a good thing going. And before she knows it, she's talked herself out of even exploring the opportunity. She hasn't

decided that the new position wouldn't be a good fit. She hasn't considered what she likes about it or what she might enjoy. She hasn't actually made a decision about whether she wants to pursue it.

She's just decided that because her current job is good, that she doesn't have a good enough reason to want another one. Can you see the difference? She's using the fact that she likes what she has as a reason to not consider what else she might want. And then think about what that creates. If she's thinking, "I should just be grateful for what I have. It's fine. It's good enough. It's not broken."

How's she feeling? Resigned? Guilty for even considering something else? And then if she's feeling that way, what is she likely to do? She's probably going to close the job posting. She's probably going to stop exploring the idea. She's not going to give it any airtime. She's going to go back to doing exactly what she was doing before. And then the result is that nothing changes, which then reinforces the idea that there's no reason for anything to change. It's a pretty effective way of keeping ourselves right where we are when you think about it.

And what I think is really interesting about that is that I should just be grateful or the concept of gratitude sometimes sounds like this noble thing, like it's wise, it's advisable. But remember, I've taught many times on the podcast about the thought-feeling-action cycle, that our thoughts create our feelings, our feelings drive our actions, our actions produce results in our life. And so we can see that in this situation, that thought, "I should just be grateful or if it's not broke, don't fix it," isn’t actually helping her create what she wants? It's actually preventing her from discovering what she wants, contemplating whether she might actually really want it.

So, let's imagine that she approaches it in a different way. Same job posting, same appreciation for her current job, but instead of immediately evaluating whether there's a problem that justifies making a change, she lets herself be interested. She thinks, "Yeah, I really do love my job. I'm

grateful for so many things about it, and I wonder if I'd enjoy this other opportunity." And now she gets to explore it. Now she can talk to someone who has that kind of position. She can investigate what would that work involve. She can consider, does it line up with what she wants for herself and her family next?

Maybe she decides to apply, maybe she doesn't. Maybe she decides she prefers the job that she already has. Either way, she's actually making a decision based on what she might want. And she hasn't had to stop being grateful for anything along the way, either. It's a beautiful thing.

So gratitude doesn't have to put a limit on what we allow ourselves to consider. It's actually a great place to consider what we want next from. We can take all that appreciation with us into whatever we decide to create next.

And another piece of this that I think is interesting, sometimes we spend so much time focused on what needs to be done that we've gotten out of the habit of asking ourselves what we want. Think again about what happens after your person died. So many decisions that have to be made, so many things that need attention, logistics and, oh, it's just so much. And for so long, it can feel like one minute at a time, one hour at a time, we're just trying to get through the day. We're just focused on whatever immediate fire feels like it's right in front of us.

And we can get pretty good at that, even though it's exhausting. But answering what immediately needs to get done, who needs me, what needs to be handled, what decision do I need to make, is very different from asking ourselves, "What would I love to experience next? What would I enjoy learning? What am I curious about? What do I want to create next? What do I want to experience?"

One set of questions is about responding to the circumstances that are right in front of us. And that makes sense. If you're listening to this podcast

and you're a widow, you're either going through it now or you've already been through it. And the other set of questions are about intentionally participating in creating the next chapter of life that we want. And if we've spent a long time focused on managing what needs to be managed immediately and fighting the fire that is right in front of us, we might not even realize that we've stopped asking ourselves that second set of questions.

And sometimes it's been a long time coming. It might be the pattern that we have lived our whole lives from, way before widowhood, where we were just so good at solving other people's problems, of being the person they came to solve their problems, of putting what they wanted or asked of us above what we wanted for ourselves, of seeing ourselves as the one who makes everybody else happy, that we are no longer in touch with what we want next and we aren't asking ourselves what we want next. And I see this with widows who are in that grief plateau place all the time.

They're getting it done. They're being responsible. They are doing okay. They are no longer in bed all day. So if I ask them what needs to be done today, they can give me a long list. If I ask them what they want for themselves next, it's a much harder question to answer. They might be able to tell me what they don't want. They don't want to feel so lonely. They don't want to feel so overwhelmed or so exhausted. They don't want to feel like every day is the same. They don't want to feel like their best days are behind them.

But when we start to talk about what they actually want to experience next, what they'd actually enjoy, what they're interested in creating, what they see for themselves next, that can be a much harder conversation. And part of that is because what we wanted is no longer available to us and we spent a lot of time wanting what we had and then it got taken. But part of it is because we aren't asking ourselves those questions. We've been so focused on getting through what has happened, managing life, the basic survival things, right? What our kids want, taking care of other people.

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And we just have not been spending time allowing ourselves to lean into what we might want. And sometimes we need a little practice with that. It can feel very strange to start considering creating something simply because we want to. And then human brains, doing human brain things, probably have lots of opinions, lots of thoughts about what we come up with. So maybe we let ourselves contemplate something we're interested in, and then all of a sudden we're having thoughts about why that's not practical or how we might not be capable of doing it, or whether we'd be disappointed if it didn't work out. What happens if we fail?

And then, if you think about it from this perspective, of course, right? If we've experienced significant loss, and this has happened to me so many times since Hugo died, we know things don't always turn out the way we want them to. We know what it's like to love something and lose it. We know more than most people that life is uncertain. And it can be really scary to let ourselves want something when we can't guarantee how it's going to turn out. We can't guarantee that we're not going to lose it.

So, let's normalize all of that and let's also not let it be a reason we don't acknowledge our desires. Let's figure out a place where we can acknowledge or spend time acknowledging that we do have a desire, that there is something that we want next, even if we don't know how we're going to get it, even if we don't believe it's possible, even if we think we're going to fail, even if we're worried we're going to be disappointed, even if we think other people won't like it.

We can want something and notice that we want it, remind ourselves that has nothing to do with whether we take action toward it. Just acknowledge the wanting. Acknowledge that the desire exists, even if we don't pursue it. And acknowledge that we can be grateful for what we have and want something different. That's not in conflict. We don't have to be unhappy with what we have to want something different.

So, that is available to us. For today, I would just love us to contemplate getting more comfortable with a wanting heart because sometimes we just skip right past it. A little glimmer of interest in something and our brain just immediately jumps to all the reasons it doesn't make sense or we can't have it. And the desire never even gets our attention. It never gets a chance to develop. It never gets a chance to be thought about, contemplated, nurtured.

So, we can genuinely appreciate the life we have and we can use gratitude as a reason to stop considering what else we want, which is not helpful at all. When I look at my life and I think about how grateful I am for the things that I have, that appreciation in and of itself can be a lovely experience, right? I can enjoy what I've created and see all the things that I now have that I once thought was a pipe dream. I can appreciate the people and the experiences that are a part of my life. And from that place, I can start thinking about what else I would enjoy. What else would I like to create?

Not because I'm unhappy with what I have, but because my interests and desires matter and so do yours. What would be fun to learn, to do, to experience? Not because I have to, not because I'm a more worthy person if I do, but just because I'm a human on the planet with desires and those matter.

So one way of thinking about it opens up possibilities, the other one closes them down. And I am all about opening them up. So, notice if you're using gratitude as a reason to settle for what you have. We can accept what we have and still want more. We can be grateful for what we have and still want more. So let's not use gratitude against our desires. We can appreciate what we have, use that appreciation as a foundation for creating what we want next.

Now, again, it's like wanting from satisfaction, wanting from gratitude. And think about how much easier and how much more enjoyable it makes the pursuit of what we want. Right? If we're only ever wanting from a place of

lack, if we're only ever wanting from a place that says, "This is a problem," then the outcome, then creating what it is that we tell ourselves we want, takes on this extra heaviness that makes the pursuit of that thing less fun. And it means more than it needs to mean.

When I work with women in Goal Magic, that's what we're doing, right? Is we're coming up with something that we would just really love to create or do. So I've had women do businesses that they want to start, books that they want to write, certifications that they want to get, hobbies that they want to create. It doesn't really matter what it is. It's something that you want. You like your reasons for wanting it. Maybe you don't believe you're capable of it. It stretches you.

But also, we practice doing it from a place that says, “Where I am now is good. I don't need to create this thing to be okay. I am okay. It matters and it doesn't matter at all. I can love what I have and be curious about what else is possible for me, what else am I capable of. I don't have to wait for something to go terribly wrong before I make a change. And I can enjoy everything I actually have and still make a change.”

Because what would your life look like if you didn't need to be dissatisfied before you allowed yourself to want something? What if you didn't have to wait until you were unhappy enough to make a change? What are all the changes you would make that maybe you're holding yourself back from because it's good enough right now? I think we could make a lot more choices intentionally. We could grow more, we could have more fun, we could see what we're capable of, we could blow our own minds more often.

So, my suggestion for this week, consider an area of your life where you already believe that things are pretty good. Something where you're not miserable. It's a piece of life that you already appreciate. Maybe it's your work, maybe it's the way you spend your free time, maybe it's your social life. Whatever you choose, start by acknowledging what you already like about it. What do you enjoy? What are you grateful for? What do you

appreciate about it? And then, ask yourself a question. If nothing has to be wrong here for me to want something different, what might I want? What might I let myself want? I love that question.

Another way to think about it is, if nothing has to be wrong here and everybody approved of my choice, what would I want? It takes away the requirement that something needs to be a problem before we can consider changing it. It takes away the requirement that we need other people's approval before we consider making a change. And just notice what comes up. Maybe you'll realize that you wouldn't change anything. You love things exactly the way that they are in that area of your life. Wonderful. What a great thing to know.

Maybe you'll discover something that you've been thinking about for a while, but you haven't been giving yourself permission to seriously consider. Maybe you'll notice, "I don't actually know what I want." All of it is useful information. If your brain immediately starts telling you all the reasons that your desires aren't practical or all the reasons that you should just be grateful for what you have, see if you can notice that too. Just notice the pattern. I'm not telling you to change those thoughts or argue with those thoughts. I'm just offering that we increase our awareness by noticing.

Notice that your brain moves you from considering what you want to evaluating whether you have a good enough reason to want it, as though wanting it isn't good enough by itself. And then you can come back to the question if you like, "What would I want if nothing had to be wrong for me to want it?" You don't have to make a plan, you don't have to commit to a goal. It's not about changing anything, it's just about noticing.

This is where we start because so many of us are not giving our desires enough airtime. We're so focused on making life manageable and having gotten ourselves to the okay place that we aren't giving ourselves as much space to think about what else we would like. And I don't want any of us to miss out on that. Yes, appreciate the life that you've created, especially if

you've worked hard to get there. Enjoy it, be grateful for it, and also, what else? Not because it's superior to have a goal, but because you might have a desire that is inside of you and it's not getting attention because you're covering it up with gratitude or because some fear is getting in the way.

And being okay is better than the alternative. But that's not loving life. So if you're on a grief plateau, if you've got the grief Groundhog's Day going, you're functioning, you don't really love life yet, I especially want you to consider what you've been telling yourself that you should be satisfied with. I don't want anyone to resign themselves to a life that's just okay. And I don't want any of us to be waiting until some area of life is terrible before we decide to change it. Being grateful is a beautiful place to create the next thing we want from. All right?

Then next week, I'm going to build on this conversation. We're going to talk about intentionally rebuilding your life after loss because once we start allowing ourselves to want things, we can begin thinking about what we want next. So, that's what I have for you this week. Remember, I love you. You got this. You don't need a problem to solve in order to want something. Take care and I'll see you next week. Bye-bye.

If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get excited about even after the loss of your spouse, I invite you to join my Mom Goes On coaching program. It's small group coaching just for widowed moms like you where I'll help you figure out what's holding you back and give you the tools and support you need so you can move forward with confidence.

Please don't settle for a new normal that's less than what you deserve. Go to coachingwithkrista.com and click Work With Me for details and next steps. I can't wait to meet you.