

# Jill Baughan

## TRANSCRIPT FOR EPISODE 28: USE YOUR WORDS

I'm Jill Baughan, and you're listening to the podcast called Find Joy...No Matter What.

This is Episode 28.

If you're in a tough place right now, your joy may seem like it's hiding--or gone.

I understand. But it's still there, I promise, just waiting to be resurrected. And this podcast is designed to help you do just that...no matter what else is going on in your life.

For just a few minutes each week, I'll tell you a story--one that just might inspire a way to uncover a piece of joy you might be looking for. Then, we'll consider how it might speak to your life, because even though you'll hear quite a few of my stories during our time together, I believe you'll find your own in every one of mine.

Finally, I'll offer a benediction to send you into your day--or into your night.

So. If you're up for doing joy shots with a friend today...have a listen. (Music fades)

Have you ever been rooting around in an attic or in a drawer or boxes of old stuff and come across some old letters from your past?

My husband has always been one to keep everything ever sent to him by any girl anywhere. When I've asked him why, he always says, "I might want to write my memoirs someday."

I, on the other hand, have decided to annihilate all forms of incriminating evidence of anything questionable in my past.

But our letters to each other before we were married? We've saved every one of those because, after we've picked ourselves up off the floor from laughing at our expressions of unbridled adoration, we realized the need to keep remembering words like these:

*Dear Jill,*

*I love you so much. I would give anything I own to be with you right now, my precious. I really don't know how much longer I can stand to be without you. You are the sweetest,*

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*most considerate person in the world. I feel you are a blessing, a gift to my life. You are the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me.*

You see, the year before Ben and I were married, we were 600 miles apart more days than we were together. So we wrote to each other every day, keeping the ol' flame uber-fanned.

These are the letters that steamed themselves open before they got to the post office.

These are the letters that one day--when our daughter finds them in the attic--will make her throw up in her mouth.

But these are also the letters that--if our house were to catch fire--I would fight to save.

Because the power of words on paper is mighty, my friends.

You yourself might have learned this as a kid in elementary school from the first note passed to you that said, "Do you like me? YES or NO? Circle one."

Pretty heady stuff, even if you circled NO.

I realize we're in a different era now, with phones and computers and all. In fact, it struck me the other day that I hardly recognize my friends' handwriting any more, because we email and text pretty much obsessively.

Don't get me wrong. I love my laptop. I can write faster and be more prolific with my words on a keyboard, and my phone can be a very good and necessary tool.

But words on paper somehow transmit the personality, even the heart of the writer. They're imperfect, the script recognizable. And because it takes longer to write them, they sometimes have more thought pushing them onto the page.

Words on paper beg to be read over and over again, to be savored, held in your hand and tied into bundles with twine or ribbon and tucked away in a safe place.

Words on paper can also bring encouragement and inspiration, even if they are discovered or recovered years after they were written.

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I talked in Episode 8 about my father's sudden death when I was ten years old. A few days after the funeral, I got a piece of mail, a sympathy card from a friend who had sent a separate card to my mom and my brother and me. Most people had sent cards to us as a family, but not individually. And in mine, she wrote these words:

*Dear Jill, You are much younger than I when I lost my Daddy, but you, too, will have nothing but happy memories of a wonderful Daddy. You do have a brother to help you and your mother--and what a really great brother he is, and what a dear Mother. Try to grow to be the Christian young lady that your Daddy would want you to be. Jesus and your family will help you.*

And that meant so much to me, I saved that card, and still have it to this day.

I have those words in her handwriting 56 years later.

Understand, they didn't take my pain away, or even answer the questions for God that I had--and still have.

But her words were the first drops in the refilling of my soul, and the retelling of my story.

And for many people, words on paper can be one of the grandest adventures of all.

Hannah Brencher, author of the wonderful book *If You Find This Letter*, has an amazing story about writing down encouragement. While she was in college, her mother (who didn't believe in email) wrote her letters (paper ones, you know? the kind that the mail carrier brings) that kept her heartened.

After college she moved to New York City, and found herself suffering from deep depression. In conjunction with counseling, to help herself cope, she started to write letters--the same caring kinds of letters her mother had written her--to strangers. She left them all over New York: in cafes, subways, libraries, at the UN, on park benches, everywhere. Dozens and dozens of them.

She blogged about doing this and, in her words, "made a kind of crazy promise to the internet: that if you asked me for a handwritten letter, I would write you one--no questions asked."

Almost immediately, her inbox was flooded with requests from people who desperately needed hope and a reason to wait by the mailbox. In response to the overwhelming numbers of requests, she started a global organization, The World

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Needs More Love Letters, **where volunteers write to those who have never known themselves loved on a piece of paper**, such as

--a woman whose husband has just come home from Afghanistan. She is having a hard time unearthing this thing called conversation. She tucks love letters around the house as a way to say, "Come back to me."

--a girl who decides that she is going to leave love letters around her campus in Dubuque, Iowa, only to find her efforts rippled effected the next day when she walks out onto the quad and finds love letters hanging from the trees, tucked in the bushes and the benches, and

--the man who decides he's going to take his life, uses FaceBook as a way to say goodbye to friends and family. But words from strangers, now tucked underneath his pillow at night changed his mind.

Her book is an inspiring read, and her TED talk is well worth your four minutes and forty seconds.

Maybe you want to get involved, and write letters to strangers in cooperation with Hannah's organization. I'll put a link in the show notes for that organization and her TED talk.

Or maybe you want to do it on your own.

Or maybe there's just someone you know who needs to hear from you.

That's the thing about words on paper. The encouragement or love or appreciation lives on those pages.

So you may not be inclined to write a lot of words...But it doesn't take a lot of words to make a big difference in someone's life.

My father-in-law, a widower who was confined to a wheelchair the last years of his life, had a drawer full of cards and notes that people had written him with love and concern. He'd pull those words out of that drawer to give himself a little lift when he was discouraged about life.

Years ago, my brother told me he had a file full of encouraging words from people. He labeled it "Uppers," and I do believe it was the best drug for the job.

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And certainly words on paper can take on an added dimension in times of social distancing and beyond.

Bob Goff, author, speaker and an extroverted "people person" talked about the effects of this pandemic on his instinct to hug people. It's all about respecting people's boundaries. He says, "As people are getting acclimated to that, we're trying to learn to distance but be to be together..."

"I won't be giving hugs to people any time soon..which for me will be like carving a new little groove in my brain." But "you can replace a hug with some words. To say not just, 'I'm giving you an air hug' which is super fine but what if you say, 'You know, one of the things...that I love about your character is...'?"

Like the time just a couple years ago when Ben and I were on a flight returning home from a trip out West. We couldn't sit together, so I took my window seat in 25F, while he was 6 or 7 rows back. About halfway through the flight, the flight attendant approached our row, reached across two people and handed me (in the window seat) a folded up piece of paper. On the outside in Ben's handwriting, it said\_"25F" drawn inside a heart with an arrow. I opened it up and read, "UR Irresistible." So sweet! I glanced back at him and thanked him.

About twenty minutes later, another flight attendant approached our row, reached across two people, and handed me another note addressed to 25F drawn inside a heart with an arrow. I opened it up and saw "Do you like me? Yes or No. Circle One." Haha. What a romantic guy! Again I glanced back, smiled and nodded, "Yes."

About twenty minutes after that, yet another flight attendant approached our row, and handed yet another note--to the lady on the aisle. She opened it up, read it, and screwed up her face, indicating that this one was either from some weirdo in the back of the plane, or the flight attendant had delivered the note to the wrong person. I'll spare you the details of its contents. Suffice it to say that it involved an "unscramble the word" activity that was super-easy.

It made my day.

So who needs to hear from *you*?

Please know that somebody somewhere is in deep need of your words right now.

Someone needs sustenance or empathy or sympathy. Someone needs to know that they are cared about. Maybe they need to see the words, "I love you," "I believe in

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you," "I see you," "You can do this," "You're on my mind," "This too shall pass," "You're in my prayers," "I'm proud of you," "I'm on your side," "I love who you are, no matter what, forever," or any one of a million other words of hope and affirmation and joy.

And I understand if you're thinking, "But I'm not a writer; I'm not clever; I'm not eloquent enough. I might sound stupid."

But please trust me. Eloquence has nothing to do with messages from the heart. Let me repeat that: Eloquence has nothing to do with messages from the heart.

So you can tell that phantom English teacher who's whispering in your ear to back off and take a couple shots of shut-up juice.

Because your words on paper are about to change a life. Or at least a day.

And so my friends,

May you grow a heart that sees people's need for the kind of encouragement that they can put it in a pocket and carry around and pull out whenever, and be re-assured that they are worthy of affirmation,

May you stop being obsessing over your own lack of eloquence.

And may you learn how to simply give a hug--and some joy--with your words on paper.

Thanks so much for joining me! You know people who *need* a little encouragement to *give* a little handwritten encouragement, I invite you to share this podcast with them, and subscribe yourself on Apple Podcasts, or wherever you listen to podcasts. Or you can go to my website at [jillbaughan.com](http://jillbaughan.com), click on a podcast episode and sign up to receive episodes in your inbox. Just don't miss a single one, because I so look forward to being with you again soon.

Write on, my friends. And always, always remember, if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...