

## TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 146-HAVE MERCY

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

This is Episode 146, and the last episode of the Winter '22—'23 season. So in the coming few weeks, catch up on some episodes you missed, and I'll see you back here at the beginning of the Spring 2023 season on March 20...because...

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.

Someone gestured at me in traffic yesterday. Apparently I didn't change lanes fast enough for him, and when he made a right turn behind me, he took that opportunity to honk his horn and give me an angry salute.

I felt mad. Defensive. And I told myself all kinds of tales about what a rude, immature, maladjusted human he was, and how I bet he went home and growled at his wife and kids, and left misery in his wake everywhere he went. Pathetic. I let the incident take up valuable real estate in my mind and my emotions for a good half hour after that.

Please tell me I am not alone here.

Author Tommy Newberry says this: *We interact with other people every day, and they can be rewarding or challenging, inspiring or infuriating. How do we respond? In dealing with other people, the chief strategy for staying joyful is to become fluently compassionate, by which I mean that compassion becomes your reflex.*

*What might this look like? When interacting with a difficult person, you automatically think compassionate thoughts. You speak compassionate words. And you engage in compassionate deeds, whether or not you happen to feel like it or believe it to be justified.*

*Here's the basis of "fluent compassion": instead of suppressing or expressing negative emotions, you can extend compassion toward the person who seems to be the source of negativity in the first place. Assume that problem people are struggling or in pain of some*

unknown origin. Accurate or not, this learned belief will help you respond more positively and will also boost your mental and emotional health. If the problem people weren't stressed, they wouldn't be acting so negatively, right? So graciously give them the benefit of the doubt...Is this interpretation of the situation always true? Probably not, but what harm does it cause? Instead of asking, "Does she deserve my compassion?" assume that she does and respond accordingly.

Newberry himself cut in front of a driver at a four-way stop, and found himself on the receiving end of some rabid behavior. But he says, he decided to assume that there was a reason for the other driver's response. He says, *What if I later found out that the obnoxious driver had just received some bad financial news or had been notified that his home was up for foreclosure? What if he had been up all night at the hospital taking care of his son who was near death? Would that change my perspective? Totally!*

***The real lesson for me that day was that my compassion preserved my joy. I do not suppose that my compassion mattered to the other driver in the slightest, but maybe he cooled down a little more quickly because I did not return fire.***

*When people respond negatively, attribute it to something they are dealing with that you don't know about...It is helpful to remember that when someone treats you harshly, it says much more about him or her than about you. But how you respond reveals your character.*

Newberry does have a couple ways to increase your mercy-quotient. First, *remember that most negative outbursts are conditioned responses and not as ominous as they may initially appear. **Other people are living out scripts that were placed in their heads long before you ever met them.** You may have acted as the trigger for their response, but you are not the source. Challenge yourself to become the type of individual who is not rattled by the reactions of others.*

So sometimes the object of our challenge has demonstrated some genuinely volatile behavior, but sometimes, possibly closer to home, it's even harder to respond with compassion to someone whose behavior is just...annoying.

Years ago author and speaker Pete Wilson told this story on himself: *Last Thursday night I took one of my weekly trips to Lowe's...After I found what I was looking for I headed to the outdoor checkout counter which I thought would be faster. As I rounded the corner with my one, maybe two items, I saw the lady in front of me with several (as in 4 or 5) push carts full of flowers and plants. I knew it was a mistake to get behind her, but I was already committed and somewhat stuck.*

*I had NEVER seen one individual buying so many flowers at one time. I thought, "Surely they have a special line for people buying this much stuff." It literally took the checkout guy a solid ten minutes to ring up all of her stuff. I grew increasingly frustrated and in my passive aggressive manner started huffing and looking up and to the right every 30 to 45 seconds.*

*I even took a picture with the intention of twittering a smart aleck remark. But then it happened—the perspective bomb.*

*The guy behind the counter, who was also somewhat perplexed by the large quantity of flowers, bravely asked the lady what she was going to do with all of this. The lady hesitated for a second and then replied, “My best friend found out this week she has stage four breast cancer. She’s always wanted a really nice garden so I’m going over to her house to plant all of this for her to enjoy when she gets back from the hospital.”*

*Instantly everything changed. I was no longer focused on my self-centered, ego-driven desires to get out of there as quickly as I could. I was suddenly reminded what a gift it was for me to be standing there waiting in line.*

*Amazing how a little perspective can change everything, isn’t it?*

So Tommy Newberry also has another suggestion for helping us exercise more compassion: *Get curious about other people and their stories. Being curious about the other person’s story can replace a negative thought with a positive one as it did in Pete Wilson’s case. It also causes you to disconnect yourself from the situation,, creating a mental environment far more favorable to compassion.*

When I first started teaching freshman English at VCU, I found a few behaviors of newbie college students endlessly irritating. I felt there was NO good excuse for turning in late work or falling asleep in class or—the worst—being late to class. One semester I got so tired of latecomers trailing in, one day I locked the door, and posted a skull and crossbones on it with a sign that said, “This class started at 8:00 am. It is now past 8:00 am. Slide your paper under the door. You are absent today.”

But as the years went by, and students began to tell me their stories, my heart softened. I learned that they, too, often led complicated, messy lives, and that during the course of the semester, while they sat in my classroom, here’s what was on their minds, competing with whatever I was trying to teach:

- She just found out she’s pregnant and must decide what to do.
- She missed class because she was getting an abortion.
- Six months ago, he lost his wife to AIDS, and is now raising their little boy—also infected—alone.
- He missed class because he was in jail.
- She was raped when she was twelve, and an assignment you made brought back too many memories and made it impossible for her to deny it any longer.
- She comes to class having worked all night in the ER.
  
- He is a married man, the father of two, who just found out that his wife is expecting twins, and his oldest son has leukemia.
- He is from Korea, and writes about what it’s like to wave goodbye to his family, watching them disappear from an airplane window, never knowing if he’ll see them again.

--She is from China, and knows what it's like to be brought to this country against your will, and dropped off to live with relatives just so she can get a better education. She doesn't want a better education. She just wants to go home. She is so homesick she wants to die.

--She is from Sweden and just found out over the phone that her mother has breast cancer.

--He is from Bosnia, and knows what it's like to live with the sound of gunfire nearby; to worry about his parents, both physicians, tending to victims of that gunfire; to find his best friend dismembered and dead in the street not far from his home.

--She missed class because her little sister has run away again. Her mom called, begging her to come home and help find her.

--He doesn't want to go home, doesn't know where to go home, because his parents are divorced, and he can't stand either stepparent.

--His grandmother was an alcoholic, his father is an alcoholic; he got drunk last night, and is terrified that's following in their footsteps.

They were all in my classes over the years, and knowing their stories helped me to be more compassionate about their struggles, and to work with them rather than locking the door and taking their inattentiveness personally.

Of course, there was that one time that I noticed a student not paying attention to what I was saying because he was distracted by something—it appeared—in the direction of my head. When I asked him what was on his mind, he said, “I just have a question, Ms. Baughan. Do you do that to your hair on purpose?”

Even so, my friend, in response to the life stories and the sometimes just plain dumb questions of the people in your orbit,

May you make an effort to be fluently compassionate with them,

May you not take personally their vitriol or their thoughtlessness or their indifference

And may you practice the mercy that you yourself need every single day...

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know someone who might be chronically short on compassion, I invite you to share this podcast with them, and subscribe yourself on iTunes, 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.

Have mercy, my friend. And always, always remember, if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTE:

Newberry, Tommy. *40 Days to Living a Joy-Filled Life*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2012.