

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 183-THIS CHRISTMAS: RECEIVE THE GIFTS OF
GRIEF

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

This is Episode 183.

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.

There's a lot of pressure to be joyful during this season. And sometimes, when you are grieving, joy is difficult to rustle up on demand.

Grief, of course, usually comes as a result of loss. It could be that someone dear has died, or a relationship has ended, leaving a very large hole in your heart and life. But it can also be the result of lost opportunities or something you've done you shouldn't have done, or that something or someone you want very much isn't yours. You may be grieving while you're regretting, longing or waiting and waiting. And make no mistake, grieving while you're trying your best to celebrate is hard.

If this is you (and it's all of us at one time or another), I have a proposition for you: consider unwrapping the gifts of grief this Christmas.

I know. Your response to the gifts of grief might initially be a hard "no," while you hand the box back to God and say, "Oh you shouldn't have. No, REALLY, you shouldn't have."

And who wishes for trouble? For hard times? For heartache? Exactly nobody. And make no mistake, I'm not trying to be a Miss Merry Toxic Positivity Sunshine by talking about the great parts of grief. Grieving is no fun and it's okay to acknowledge that. Author Kimberly Stuart, during an interview with Kate Bowler, gave us permission to grieve honestly when she said, "You don't have to make sunshine where there's an absolute absence of light."

So there's that.

But this Christmas, it's possible to experience joy—albeit maybe in a different form—if we are willing to accept a few presents that our distress may try to give us.

Like **the gift of an invitation to connect with God**

He invites your conversation, your questions, your rants. And often during times of crisis, we're more inclined to come to him and open ourselves up to hear something, anything, from him, just to help process our sorrow.

You might also discover **the gift of courage** under your tree.

Author and counselor Alexandra Kennedy writes, “It takes tremendous courage to face our grief, to turn toward it and embrace the full experience of devastating loss. Grief brings us to our knees. Most of my clients are at first intimidated by the power of grief but find that they can grieve without feeling overwhelmed. This takes courage and it builds confidence—confidence in our capacity to embrace the exquisite beauty and sorrow of being fully alive.”

There's also **the gift of connection.**

Kennedy also says that “Grief can be a profoundly lonely time. It is a common experience for friends and colleagues not to show up and give us the support we need. Indeed grief rewrites our address books. However our grief can open the way for new connections—deeper, richer relationships with people who understand what we are going through and who support us by being fully present, without trying to fix us.”

One of the greatest gifts of grief, in my life, anyway, is **the gift of empathy.**

In past episodes I've shared with you that Ben and I spent many years of our marriage dealing with infertility. Our journey, like that of others, was full of frustration, low self-esteem, guilt, self-pity, helplessness and plenty of questions for God—even anger.

I'm a door slammer. Some people manage to release their anger in civilized ways, but my instinctive response to anger was to slam doors. I've broken hinges, jammed locks, and thoroughly irritated my husband with this behavior. (His response to anger was to clam up; I think it's healthier to slam doors.)

One day I agreed to take a neighbor to the doctor for her prenatal checkup. On the way home, she chatted about her plans for the baby's room, her childbirth classes, and her son's excitement over the prospect of a new sibling. The knot in my stomach was the size of a baseball. When I got home, I walked into the house, slammed the first door I could find, and knocked the mirror right off the back of it.

The pages of my journal were testimony to all the feelings.

One day I wrote: *I guess what I fear most goes even deeper than my inability to have a baby. I'm just so afraid that I'll walk around the rest of my life with a hole in my heart that will never fill, a wound that will heal; that I'll carry with me always the aching sadness of a dead dream...*

After a particularly discouraging day, I wondered on paper: *Why is it infertility always seems worse at night? During the day, I'm surrounded with noise. My mind is occupied and I can hope. But then nighttime comes, and we lie in the darkness, nothing more to say to each other, on pillows wet with our tears, on a bed that used to be a refuge, a place where we would love and dream. But now, this bed, this house—even our love—they all feel so empty tonight.*

And sometimes, I couldn't help but be disillusioned with God Himself, like the time I wrote: *I wish I could get this sadness out of my system and then let it go, go away. But it follows me everywhere. Yesterday my predictable body told us NO for the fifty-fourth time. God seems so far away, so cruel to create us with a desire for family, then withhold the family when the desire lingers on. Sometimes there's nothing left to do but grieve.*

We finally had a beautiful baby girl, our daughter Jamie. And even though I had told God that I'd never ever ask for anything from him ever again, we began shortly after her birth asking—no, begging—for a second child..alas, to no avail.

It wasn't fair, and we couldn't understand why, and we had cried years of tears before we finally accepted God's answer of "No. No more babies for you."

"Baby" Jamie is 42 years old now (still the delight of our lives, by the way). It's been a long time since those days of doctors' appointments, invasive treatments, surgeries, and heartbreak on a 28-day cycle. But our loss—like every one of your losses—has been woven into the fabric of our lives, even our present lives.

Writing about this, author Barbara Eck Menning says of her own experience, that still, "My infertility resides in my heart as an old friend. I do not hear from it for weeks at a time, and then a moment, a thought, a baby announcement or some such thing, and I will feel a tug—maybe even feel sad or shed a few tears. And I think, 'There's my old friend. It will always be a part of me.'"

And decades later, because of "my old friend," I have a heart that's inordinately tender toward people with fertility issues. It's forever right below the surface. Tell me about your unsuccessful efforts to conceive a child, your journey of frustration and sorrow, and I will help you cry on the spot. Empathy of the highest order.

And finally, my favorite one to open up is **the gift of the promise of joy to come.**

Maybe in little joys, like when, in the middle of our own crisis, Ben wrote a check for a Christmas present he bought for me. Not wanting me to see what it was, which would happen if he wrote the item in the registry, he selected an alternate name. I was more than

a little puzzled the next time I looked in the checkbook and saw that he had supposedly spent forty dollars on “Elf manure.” Ha. Ha.

However, on a deeper level, author Jamie Wright, whose twenty year old son took his own life four years ago, has this to say about the joy to come:

The hard part isn't being sad all the time.

Feeling sad is as natural as blinking, as ever-present as breathing. I don't even have to think about it. It's just part of being alive when your child is not.

The hard part is being happy.

The hard part is letting in love and fun and awe and wonder and pleasure and peace.

It's allowing all of the things you think should have died with your child to go on living.

I was thinking about this last night, as I lay in my comfy bed after a super fun trip to a gorgeous part of the world with the love of my life, where I smiled, and laughed, and sipped wine, and ate great food. I played in the sun and kissed in the rain, and after a wonderful week of travel, I'd finally fallen into bed exhausted from the goodness of it all.

And I felt happy.

Like really, truly, deeply happy.

I know nobody would condemn me for crawling into a hole, alone, and burying myself in grief for the rest of forever. And, trust me, I could do that. In fact, it would be easy.

But I'm working hard to let myself love life and live well, not despite grief and not because of it, but right alongside it.

The bad part will never not be bad, but it turns out, the good parts can still be good.

And so, my friend, this Christmas, if you are grieving,

May you be assured that the good parts can still be good,

May you know that you will feel joy again; it will just look different,

And instead of thinking, “I hate for life to be like this in the middle of Christmas,” may you begin saying, “Thank God Christmas has come in the middle of life like this.”

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who are struggling with loss, 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, 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.

This Christmas: open your hands and your heart to receive the gifts of grief, my friends. And always, always remember: if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTES:

Goff, Bob and Kimberly Stuart. “From the Archives: Kate Bowler,” *The Writing Room Podcast*, August 30, 2023.

Kennedy, Alexandra. “Four Surprising Gifts of Grief.” *Thrive Global*, March 9, 2020.
<https://community.thriveglobal.com/four-surprising-gifts-of-grief/>

Menning, Barbara Eck. *Infertility: A Guide for the Childless Couple*. Simon and Schuster, 1988.