

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 186: OWN YOUR ENVY

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

This is Episode 186.

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)

Envy brings out the ugly in us...and it can start when we're very young.

Did you envy anyone when you were a child? I envied other little girls who were dainty, and didn't take up the whole frame of the school photo with a big head and shoulders. In my yearbook, there's a ridiculous photo of me with my Brownie troop, and I'm squishing my arms together in front of me so I'd look a tad tinier than I was.

Did you have envy in high school? When I was in high school, I envied cheerleaders and girls with boyfriends. Or even dates.

And even after you grew into a mature, responsible adult—have you ever envied anyone? How about now? I have long envied people who can eat whatever they want and not gain weight. And that one started long ago, the summer I was nineteen, when I began to not eat like a normal person.

Because I had spent my freshman year at college envying every girl who was thinner than me, I decided that summer that I would finally lose an enviable amount of weight. I set my sights on a number that was 20 pounds less than the weight the scale registered the first week of May; then I began a long journey toward wrecking my relationship with food.

Although I could have joined a weight loss group or chosen any of a number of other ways to lose weight, I, of course, wouldn't consider a *reasonable* method. For Pete's sake, why be reasonable when you could be radical and stupid? So I counted calories, setting my daily limit at 900. I memorized my calorie counter and tested my mother's culinary creativity (as

well as her patience), as I ate practically nothing for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In an effort to get a little something sweet, I remember putting liquid sweetener on dry toast. Yuck!

For ten weeks, no dessert passed my lips—nothing fattening, nothing fun. I woke up every morning angry, because I knew I was beginning another day of deprivation. But, by golly, I was dedicated to it. In a couple of months, I had lost twenty pounds, all right...and a significant portion of my mind with it.

Shortly before school started, I was so desperate to be nondeprived, I actually looked with lust at a few stewed prunes my mom was cooking on the stove. Prunes, I knew, though good for you, were not exactly low in calories, so I tried to point my mind in another direction. But alas, it didn't work—it was like trying *not* to think of pink elephants. Before I knew it, I was frantically retrieving every prune in the house and throwing them in a pot of heated water. Indeed, I thought they were magnificent—which is very sad. Even as I write this, I think about how pathetic it is to finally bust out of a diet with something like stewed prunes. Before my whole food orgy was over, I had eaten 26 of them.

Yes, that's right. I ate 26 stewed prunes. Do I even need to explain why I had to call in "sick" to work the next day?

Shortly after that, it was 32 chocolate chip cookies. Another time, the Reese's peanut butter cups that were in the freezer were calling my name. I ate 125 of them in five days; that would be about 25 a day for five days in a row. Granted, they were the little ones, but still. Obviously God, in an act of grace, had given me an asbestos stomach.

As unfortunately happens with many young women, I was stuck in a deprivation mind-set that wouldn't let me go. I began starving myself during the week, then eating so much on the weekends that I would end up physically ill. Although I was never anorexic or bulimic, I was always either empty or overfull. It was a crummy place to live, all because of envy.

As a result, I now know what I'm capable of, friends, and it ain't pretty. I envy people who have no issues with food.

Envy, though, isn't always about superficial things like weight and material possessions. Envy can be all about emotions and health and trauma.

Full confession here: I struggle with envying

People whose parents both stayed alive until they were adults.

People who were able to have all the children they wanted.

People who have their whole family living close by.

People who can walk and hike without discomfort.

People who have all their own original joints.

But friends, **all** of us know what it's like to want something we don't have.

As an aside, I will say that I don't generally envy people's material goods. My philosophy is: I don't need a boat, just friends with a boat, a time share, a house at the beach. You know.

But generally, envy is one doozy of a joy stealer. So what can we do about it to preserve some joy in the middle of our lack? Juliana Breines, writing for *Greater Good Magazine*, Gives us a few things to think about.

1. First, she says, just acknowledge your envy.

It can seem very threatening because it means acknowledging our own weakness and insecurity, our own sorrow. But we are better off unravelling this form of vague resentment and identifying its green-colored root before it gets the better of us and damages our relationships. Often admitting envy reveals the deep desires of your soul—and that's valuable information.

2. Recognize that pride is just the flip side of the envy coin

It is tempting—but generally unhelpful—to try to counteract envy with pride. “Sure, he has a nice car, but I'm better looking” is not going to get you very far. You might feel vindicated in the moment, but sooner or later someone is going to come along who has a nicer car than you and is better looking.

In other words, reassuring ourselves about our own enviable traits is unlikely to be sustainable, and it maintains the same unstable social comparison hierarchy where someone else needs to be put down in order for us to feel boosted up, and vice versa.

Instead of responding to the pain of envy with efforts to bolster your self-esteem, try self-compassion instead. Acknowledge that it is hard to see someone do well when you're floundering, and remind yourself that you are very much not alone in your feelings of inadequacy. Even the most successful people suffer from self-doubt at times. Being imperfect is synonymous with being human.

3. Third, Juliana suggests that we replace envy with compassion for others.

Have you ever envied someone who seemed to have the perfect life, only to find out later that they were in fact suffering in a very major way? These cases are more common than we might think—we just don't have the opportunity to learn about someone's difficulties when we're mired in envy of their seemingly charmed life. (Social media does not help things, by the way.) It's not that we should seek out others' suffering, searching for chinks in their armor, but rather we should be open to seeing them in a fuller way, a way that will inevitably include both strengths and weaknesses, joys and sorrows.

4. Let envy fuel self-improvement—when appropriate

When our envy is rooted in things we cannot change about ourselves, such as a difficult childhood, a traumatic event, or certain health conditions and disabilities, using envy to motivate self-improvement is more likely to dig us deeper into frustration and self-blame.

But sometimes envy alerts us to things that we want in life that are potentially attainable, if we're willing to make certain changes.

For example, if you envy your productive colleague, you may find that you could be more productive yourself if you learned to manage your time better. You may even be able to get a few tips from them.

5. Finally, don't forget to count your own blessings

As the saying goes, envy is counting the other fellow's blessings instead of your own.

I know. You've heard this before. And it may sound a little trite. But there is transformative power in refocusing on what God has given you. Go ahead. Start a list. I bet you'll be writing for a long time.

And so, my friend, as you navigate your own unfulfilled wishes that seem to be way fulfilled in someone else's life,

May you be gentle with yourself, and understand that envy is an ever-so-normal part of being human,

May you be gentle with people you envy, and understand that they, too, want more than one something they don't have,

May you remember that doing things like eating 26 stewed prunes, 32 chocolate chip cookies and 125 Reese's peanut butter cups will not meet your deepest desires—not even close,

And, most and best of all, may you, on the regular, turn your heart's gaze to all the gifts that God has lavished on you.

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who might be under the influence of the Green-Eyed Monster, 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.

Own your envy, my friend. And always, always remember: if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTE:

Breines, Juliana. "Five Ways to Ease Your Envy: What can we do to disarm the green-eyed monster when it strikes? *Greater Good Magazine: Science Based Insights for a Meaningful Life*, August 1, 2013.

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_ways_to_ease_your_envy