

Grit 'n' Grace — THE PODCAST

Episode #244: How to Handle the Holidays with Great Joy

Amy Carroll

Jill, last time we talked, you said – and we're going to quote you – “Every year, I tell myself, this holiday season is not going to be crazy. It's not going to be crazy. I'm not going to let it be crazy. And then I do.” So, the holidays are rolling around again, how is that possible? So how can we not let them be crazy? How can we be intentional joy seekers in the midst of the crazy?

Jill Baughan

Well, I think what we're going to talk about in the next little while, we'll address a lot of that. But one thing I found – I am reading a book by Tish Harrison Warren called *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, I don't know if you've heard of it before. But she really inspired me to think about one thing. And that was the way you start your day. So to answer your question, I'm going to say the way you start your day, and the way you end your day, are just so, so, so important. She said, I'll tell you this just very briefly, she said that she kept her phone by her bed, like a lot of people do. And she noticed that every morning, before she did anything, she picked up the phone, checked the news, checked her social media, she said it was only for a couple minutes, but she found out that she was feeding herself all this tension. Checked her to-do lists, checked everything, all that was before she even put her feet on the floor.

So she decided – she started out by saying “Who makes their bed?” She said, “I never make my bed. Why make it?” Well, she decided for Lent one year to switch up her morning routine a little bit. And she decided as just an act of intentionality,

she would, instead of grabbing her phone, she put her phone in another room. And she said she decided to make her bed and then sit on it for just a couple minutes. She said, sometimes I would pray and pour everything out to God; she said, but sometimes I would just sit in silence. Just sit, just invite God into the day.

And I think that's the key phrase right there. So I started experimenting with that. And I thought – I was already making my bed. So that, I don't know, that just kind of wasn't me. But the thing that gives me life in the morning is shower. And I thought, why don't I invite God into the shower with me. It's like church without the people and the clothes. So awesome. And so I wrote a podcast episode about it. Just invite God in whatever it would be in the morning, just for a minute, before everything else. You wake up and you think about all the things you have to do in the next 24 hours that can't be done in the next 24 hours. Wake up and you wonder or you're trying to find out what went on in the world that's horrible while you were sleeping and can't do anything about. You wake up, and if there's some bad thing in your life, you forget it for a second, have you done this, you wake up and for a second, everything's fine. And then you remember whatever it is.

So that has been a life-giving little ritual for me. Then I think the way that you enjoy your day helps, too. My husband and I started one of those one minute – and this is not for everybody, you have to figure out what works for you – but we started one of those one minute journals. It goes on for five years, which is daunting, interesting for some people, but you just write one thing a day, that was good about the day. So we chose to do it at the end of the day, right before we get into bed. And you could see we've been doing it almost two years now. So

we can see a year ago, when things were super crazy. We can see a year ago April when my father in law passed away. You know what we were grateful for in that. There's just kind of nothing like waking up and going to sleep to to peace and perspective. So that's that's one way.

Amy Carroll

Fantastic. Very practical.

Cheri Gregory

Very, very practice. And I can just already feel myself relaxing just at the thought of how doable those are.

So I've been thinking about something you said last time we talked, which is 'When we're in the midst of hard stuff, we don't pay enough attention to joy.' And I realized that I'm afraid people won't take me seriously if I find joy in the midst the hard stuff. And so I'm just going to share with you an epiphany I had between the last time we talked to now: I realized that I associate positivity with passivity, like the only way I can get people to take a problem seriously is to be nonstop negative, loud and proud on every channel they hear. I don't like being the naysayer, I never wanted to be a Negative Nelly or the squeaky wheel. But it seems like the moment I express gratitude or share a blessing, people who should be taking action to solve a problem that's real, they start heaving this sigh of relief. 'Oh, thank goodness, she's finally calmed down and quit making such a fuss.'

So here's my question for you: how can we do both? How can we experience and express genuine joy and gratitude, while also telling the truth about real problems and holding people accountable for solving them?

Jill Baughan

That is a huge question.

Cheri Gregory

I know.

(All laugh)

Jill Baughan

I puzzled and puzzled and puzzled over it, mainly because it involves other people's actions, which are really – I will be totally honest and say, I don't know how to make people behave. I do not know how to make people – I know, I know. You want to end it now, goodbye.

But here's a here's a resource and a person that I think you would love listening to if you don't already. And that's Kate Bowler. Do you know Kate Bowler?
Everything Happens for a Reason and Other Lies I've Loved?

Cheri Gregory

Oh, I've heard that. And that's a very appealing title.

Jill Baughan

Yeah, yeah. And she's just written another book that I've just started. But Kate Bowler is – she must be about 40. Now, when she was 35, she was diagnosed with stage four cancer and given about two years to live, and she's still doing well. She's a professor at Duke Divinity School. I think she is such a truth teller. And she has such a way of saying both sides of it. She said while she was in the hospital – I think it was one during one of her rounds of chemotherapy – she wandered down to the bookstore in the hospital and saw all this live your best life now literature. And she said “I just wanted to scream. Because no, I was not living my best life now. There was no way I was going to live my best life now.” She had a lady on her podcast, her name is Susan David, and that lady talked about toxic positivity.

Amy Carroll

We've talked about that on Grit'N'Grace.

Jill Baughan

Oh, have you really?

Amy Carroll

We have, a little bit.

Jill Baughan

Just that you can't change the circumstances with positive thinking. Is that your take on it that? You can't be rich and healthy and everything just by thinking positive thoughts. It's not always gonna happen that way. So anyway, I think you would find her really refreshing because she'll say ‘I've had cancer, there are three types of people who respond to me.’ And she goes on to talk about people

who say 'At least,' you know, start the phrase with 'At least you're having good chemotherapy.' So I'm gonna be honest with you and tell you I don't know how to change other people's – I don't know how; all I know how to do is present both sides.

So when I've come up against that, which is not very often, it hasn't been at the forefront of my mind. But I think it just helps to acknowledge both sides. It's like – it's just popped into my mind. It's just like when my grandson – who's six now – I've watched my daughter with him. And when he gets super upset about something, and I've read this too, that the best thing you can do is not say 'Stop it' or 'Quit it' or 'Just shape up' or 'What's wrong with you?' what you probably want to say to these people who are whatever. But she gets in his face. I mean, in a good way. She can stand his level and say 'You're angry, right?' And that diffuses some some of the tension right there because they feel acknowledged. I guess these people should be doing that for you. 'You're upset, right? You're frustrated, right?' But I don't know, somehow in an interaction with somebody saying 'I understand what what you're saying here, and, but...' as I said, when it comes to other people's behavior, I don't know. I'm just being super honest with you.

Cheri Gregory

Well, we've talked for years here and Grit'N'Grace about being recovering "control freaks," which a friend, Barb Roose, reframed for us as 'control-loving behaviors.' And so your admission that you don't know how to change other people, and I love the illustration you just gave oof talking, getting down on a child's level and acknowledging – it sounds like that's what I need to do for myself. I think I do wait for other people to give that acknowledgement and I

withhold expressions of joy to punish them for not acknowledging my pain. It sounds a lot like anger – it's a thing that you're holding on to, expecting it to impact the other person. So you've given me much to think about here.

Amy Carroll

Well, last time, Jill, Cheri put you on the spot. And she asked you how you would define joy. And you said– you gave us a great definition right on the spot, you said “a deep delight that's always available to us.” And then you told us you might have more later. So do you have any further thoughts on that?

Jill Baughan

I do. Because that was such a good question. You made me think, and I thought about it, and I came up with my own personal perfect definition of it. I don't think it's in the dictionary anywhere. But oh, well. I consider joy a deep delight that fills your soul. So that joy can be really personal. What fills your soul might not fill someone else's soul. But also that definition, I think allows you to experience joy during a time that's really hard. It helps you find it. I know that – and maybe I'm jumping the gun a little bit but Cheri, you asked ‘Where can I find it? What am I looking for? I'm trying to find it.’ And I feel like when other people have asked me the same thing, ‘Where can I get this?’ I don't even know. And I said it's like you're tearing through the jungle with a machete looking for it. Where is it? Where is it? And true that sometimes it's an intentional effort. Did I quote Tommy Newbery last time, on our last interview about what I call low carb thinking when he talked about mental discipline?

Cheri Gregory

You mentioned the phrase, but I don't think you gave the name.

Jill Baughan

That was a concept that I read by Tommy Newberry. And he just said, a life of joy is preceded by some intentionality. And so I think your intentional – everybody knows that gratitude – well, I think everybody knows that gratitude is powerful. And you've heard it time and time and time and time and time and time again. But it is I think it's because it's true. And also, I have talked before about looking for the good in the middle of a big bad story when I talked about my father-in-law in the hospital, and having to watch him pass away on FaceTime.

But here's something else I've thought of that relates to that definition of joy. And that's when it's an inside job, rather than going out and beating the bushes looking for – which, that's important too. But it's trying to find rather than trying to force a mindset, 'Well, I got to think positive. Well, I got to look for the good in this awful hot mess.' It helps to practice paying attention to what delights you and feeds your soul. And then, I'm always saying then be sure to give your soul snacks on the regular.

Amy Carroll

I love that.

Jill Baughan

Joy shots and soul snacks. That's what we're all about. And I'll give you an example of this. Just maybe two weeks ago, something floated across my social media feed, and it was an Instagram account called discoverocean. All one word, discoverocean, it was 30 seconds of the most beautiful deep sea photography, whales, sharks, animals plant. It was just awesome. And I thought, okay, so feed

yourself that so I found them. And I'll give myself a 30-second joy shot. A 30-second soul snack, just a little one. But I paid attention instead of letting it scroll by and say, "Wow, that was stunning. That was breathtaking," and then forgetting it, oh, pay attention.

Music to me, just opens up my spirit and my soul and expands it. So I give that to myself, especially when you know, tough things are going on. Or I have to exercise. I thought of an example that I read in a book called another *Wilderness*. And I can't tell you which author said this, but she said when she was going through a terrible time – her best friend had died – and she said, I went out into the woods, because no other arms were big enough. Isn't that just stunning?

Amy Carroll

And I love all the ones that you've given us, Jill, are free. I mean, I think a lot of times, like 'I have to go pay for a 90 minute massage' or 'I have to...' yeah, that kind of thing. And the kind of soul care that you're talking about, these are all accessible to everyone.

Jill Baughan

And we just so often we don't pay attention to what is delighting us. We just don't. We just keep moving on. And keep moving on to stop and note it somehow doesn't mean you have to write it down. But sort of do something about it. Even if it's to text somebody. If it's a sunrise – people do it a lot, like taking pictures. You don't even have to take a picture. But text somebody important to you and say 'Sunrise, joy shot today.' it cements it in your mind. It just is a practice. And I think we can practice that. I do. So again, rather than trying to force that mindset

if we just pay attention to what feeds your own soul, what feeds yours might not feed mine. So but it's easier to inject.

Cheri Gregory

I love this approach. Because the question that you're answering for me was 'Well, where do I go looking?' and 'What am I looking for? And I was definitely the machete approach. And just listening to you, I was thinking, I have a friend who recently sent me like this literally two second clip of her latest foster kitten. And maybe it's five seconds, and he opens his mouth, nothing comes out. He opens his mouth, nothing comes out. And then he opens it a third time and the tiniest little mew you've ever heard comes out. I've watched it like hundreds of times. It's just so cute. And I guess it didn't occur to me that counts. I think I was looking for something external. I was looking for something that – I guess I was looking for somebody with a big sign that said 'Joy' who would then hand me something like really, really obvious. But the other thing that I heard what you said was lingering. There's an intentionality and a lingering on it. The pace seems to be really important in order for it to be joy rather than this flickering moment of like a little spark but that then dies out because it hasn't been enough time for it. So I'm very encouraged. I feel like I could I feel like I could do this with practice and without a machete.

Jill Baughan

Facebook has a bad reputation for a lot of things, and I understand that, but the one thing I've seen is that people – how many pictures of sunrises have I seen? How many pictures of flowers coming up through the concrete? How many pictures of little things? And for that I say 'Yay!' because share it and it's even

even more real, you know? So, anyway, that's that's just a little concrete thing that helps. It has helped me.

Amy Carroll

Okay. Well, let's talk about the lessons that we've learned from 2021 so that we can hold on to them for when the next hard thing hits. Jill, you go first.

Jill Baughan

You people are heavy hitters here. Yes, I have all the answers to the next hard thing. Here's one thing I learned. Lots of joy shots. Little tiny ones can change not only your day, but they can change your life. They can change your mindset, even little ones. Morning, evening. During the day, just little, if we pay attention. I walked out the front door the other day, and we have a little short front porch. It's really nonfunctioning, nobody can sit on it. It's decorative. But we do have a one person porch swing on our front porch. And I looked at that, and I thought, here's a metaphor for you. I said, it's like, you're sitting on a porch swing and all your your mess is sitting there with you. And joy comes up like a little child with his big eyes and wants to sit on the porch swing too. And if you say, Oh, all right, come on, and sit beside me. And we can just swing together. So there's one on the left, there's one on the right. And that's the way it rolls with joy shots every day, the bad stuff is still no less bad. It's no less bad. And then I thought and you know, sometimes both of them went in your lap all at the same time. And it's all mixed up like this together. That's just okay. I think sometimes we try to focus too much on 'Well, has it been a good day? Or has it been a bad day? Has it been a good year? Has it been a bad year?' Well, this has been a terrible – 2020 was awful, dumpster fire. Well, maybe so a lot of it was terrible. And it's no use, trying to pretend that it wasn't. But I think we need to practice just swinging with both of

them. Telling them to be nice, get along, we're in this together. Here we go. And, just roll with it. That's mine. But I am really interested to hear yours. Because I'm looking for answers too.

Amy Carroll

Well, mine is kind of embedded in yours. And I think for a long time that I have said instead of dealing with the tension of both I have pretended like the bad isn't happening. And what actually happens when you do that is that it all spills over and kind of squashes joy. So with the intention of positivity. I've actually squashed positivity because I wouldn't acknowledge the negativity, if that makes sense. So now I'm learning to hold both. To not try to walk in denial. Denial's not just a river in Egypt. So not to walk in denial, because that just washes any positivity that is actually real away. So I like your idea of having both in the swing, I'm trying to start to acknowledge the other negative presence in the swing so that I can experience the positivity and the joy in life more.

Jill Baughan

It's hard because I'm – and I hear this, I don't know if you do the Enneagram or not, but I'm a seven and I've read that sevens tend to avoid unpleasantness. And so for that reason, don't make me listen to the news first thing in the morning or last thing at night, and maybe not at all in between. My husband will say 'Well, did you know...' No. So I struggle with I don't want to know what's going on because I can't handle it. So that's kind of the same.

Amy Carroll

How about you, Cheri?

Cheri Gregory

Well, mine, not surprisingly, mine is the opposite of yours because I tend to be so problem focused. You'll remember this from message development days. 90% of my message would be the problem with a little tiny bit of hope tacked on at the end. And so for me, what the last couple years has really shown me is, no matter how 'realistic' I think I'm being, it still doesn't save me. Like, I can read all of the news, I can be on social media from the moment I wake up into the moment I go to bed, and it doesn't actually change anything. It doesn't make anything any better, being informed, being aware. I'm not saying any of us should live completely under a rock. But I'm like, Okay, if this was going to work, wouldn't it have worked by now?

Daniel and I watched the the Netflix documentary *The Social Dilemma* last week, and there was a very, very interesting line: 'The critics are the true optimists.' And I liked that one. And I thought 'Then I need to become a real critic,' not just a moper, not just a collector of problems, who thinks other people should get their act together. I need to figure out what it means to be a real critic who actually says things succinctly. So that the optimism, the belief that things can be better and should be better, so that that's what actually comes out. And so I'm really encouraged, Jill, by what you've been sharing with us about joy being something that I'm not looking for externally. And really, with some breathing room, with some – I mean, you even, I think you said that joy comes by paying attention to to ourselves. Like what? It's so counterintuitive. That almost feels selfish. And yet it makes sense.

Jill Baughan

Well, and I tell people that I have before I said, you pay attention to what feeds your soul, and then you give your soul a snack. Feed yourself, and then the rest of the world will thank you.

Amy Carroll

After we turned off the recording, you said “I feel like everything that's happened to me, that I've done, everything has led me to this point, and that I've come home to myself, this joy stuff is not what I do, it's just who I am.” So you're doing and sharing some wonderful things with the world. Tell us about your podcast.

Jill Baughan

Okay, well, I have a podcast that is only – it's a shot. It's a joy shot. Each episode is about 10-15 minutes long, usually includes a story, almost always includes some humor, but some depth too, get into some really heavy stuff. And I just wrote episode 95 his last week, so we have 95 ways to shoot joy into your life in that podcast. And it's a solo operation. It's me and that 10-15 minutes.

Now, I have started, in the past few months, having guests on maybe about once a month, because I thought I wanted to go deeper into some joy stealers that people have been through. So we've talked about miscarriage. I know, you've talked to Rachel Lewis about her book. Amazing. And we've talked about infant death. I mean, they're really very serious subjects. In November, I'll air an episode where I talked to a man who cared for his wife who had Alzheimer's for 17 years. We're going to talk about widowhood. We're going to talk about making peace with your past. And it's – they're fascinating people. I have loved getting to know them. They're always ending on a note of hope. It's not just ‘Here's the problem,’ but it does – I tell them my questions are ‘What's your story? And were

you able to find joy in the journey of it? How have you been able to find joy on this side of it?' So the weekly episodes continue, and again, they're just joy shots. They're on your way to work, on your lunch hour. It's been so much fun. So much fun.

Amy Carroll

We're excited to send people your way.

Jill Baughan

Drinking from a firehose, when I plan a retreat based on find joy no matter what. And when I tried to plan this retreat we're about to do, I'm thinking, if we had two weeks, I could probably fill it. But anyway, that's the beauty of a podcast. Yeah. So there you go.

Cheri Gregory

I'm excited. I will, as soon as we're done here, I will be subscribing because as, as our friends who are listening already know, and as you can tell, I would do well with these regular – what'd you say, joy shots and soul snacks.

Jill Baughan

Soul snacks.

Cheri Gregory

I love that. That's so memorable. You also have a wonderful free download for anyone who subscribes to your email list. So we're going to really encourage our friends were listening to do that. And it's called Make a Joy Box For Someone

You Care About. And I have downloaded it and printed it. And I'm so excited about this. So could you tell our friends who are listening what this is all about?

Jill Baughan

Sure. This is a truly easy way to show someone maybe this past year that you appreciate them, you've been thinking of them. If you have a friend who has had a hard year, or is going through a hard time, or just just someone you want to say I love you, or I like you, or I appreciate you. There is nothing to me like a box. You can give me all the Christmas bags you want. But there's nothing that gets me going more than a box. And so you can do all this honestly, in no time with one trip to Target if you want to. You don't have to do it then. But it's a way to give you instructions on personalizing a joy box for somebody that you care about. Christmas coming up is fine. I've given these to – I gave one to a 67 year old, I've given one to a 40 year old, I gave one to a 16 year old. It's ageless, really. And it just saves you the headspace. I know people are probably already starting to stress about gifts. Starting the list, oh, what am I going to give so and so. And this will help. It just helps a lot. I love it. I take my own advice.

Cheri Gregory

I love, again, how practical it is. I was able to look at it and go 'I can do this.' I don't have to remember anything. And none of it was hard or fancy. It was just, you've done all the thinking. You've laid it all out. You've got some pictures there. It looks like something I would love to receive. And I was already thinking I could do this for Christmas gifts. Like everybody could get their own personalized box. And without me having to spend, you know, go over to the perfectionism side of 'I am now going to hand make the paper and fold my own boxes.' Totally doable and totally fun. So again, for our friends who are listening, we'll have a link in the

show notes to go subscribe to Jill's newsletter and podcast and you'll receive this immediately. I filled in my information and boom, I went straight to that download button. It's great.

Amy Carroll

Fantastic. Well, you've given us great tools.

Jill, give us some final words for those of us who are really determined more than ever to find joy no matter what.

Jill Baughan

I think I would just have to say remember to start with what brings you joy. I think that's the best piece of advice because you know, it's the old analogy on the airplane, give yourself the oxygen before you can give it to somebody else. And just give yourself permission every day, every day. Something that that fills your soul. And as I said before, the rest of the world will thank you for the rest of your world. Even your little world will thank you for it.