

Loving on Purpose Podcast

with Bonnie Lyman

Episode 54 Finding Fulfillment as an Empty Nester

Welcome to the podcast. Loving on Purpose. I'm your host, Bonnie Lyman. If you're having trouble navigating through your relationships with your adult children, if you are struggling to connect with them or having specific challenges, you're in the right place.

Hello. Hello, my friends. I welcome you to my podcast. This is episode number 54, finding Fulfillment as an Empty Nester. First of all, though, I want to welcome you all back. You are so kind to me. You listen to me more than anybody else in my family does. So that always makes me feel good. They're kind of tired of hearing my opinions, but you seem to welcome them. So if you're new, I admonish you to go back and listen to episode number one, which is called Loving on Purpose. And that is the theme of my whole coaching program. And that's what I decided to name this podcast. Because I feel if we can learn to love on purpose and that means that's where our default is, that we tend to lean toward naturally finding things that we like about people, or we're at least focusing on that or looking for that, rather than what's wrong with them or what we don't like about them. It just makes life happier and easier.

And as we have our struggles with our adult children, if we get defensive, we lose every time. So the only way to win in this thing we call life and the pursuit of happiness is to learn how to love others because it always comes back to us. But we're going to talk about some of the difficulties people have as life as an empty nester when all their kids have moved out of the home. And anybody can listen to this. But some of you are living a life exactly as you expected. Your kids always want you over. They always want to get together every Sunday for dinner with you. They ask you questions and take an interest in your life. They want to be with you. And they call you at other times just besides when they want you to watch their kids. And they still are giving you a certain amount of attention that fulfills you. But there's a lot out there, and that's who I work with that are struggling in their relationships. And they're not what they expected. And they're feeling left out, and they're feeling disrespectful. Disrespected. They're feeling ignored. They're feeling like their children don't want their help. They feel like they're actually bothering their children.

There was a time in my life I actually had the thought, I repulse my son. Now, what a horrible thought that is. And yeah, I felt horrible thinking that thought. But you know what? I was making a judgment that that's what he thought. It was a story I was making up in my head because he never told me that. But just his actions of not ever talking to me and ignoring me. That's the story my mind came up with. And so one of the

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remedies that I came up with in Connecting better with your adult children, I called it, we need to get a life. We need to get a life outside of our children, our adult children. Now, this doesn't mean completely away from them, nothing to do with them, but it means being so excited about something else we are doing in our life that we're able to accept how much time they want to spend with us or just how interested they are. And I feel with all my heart, no matter how my feelings, my thoughts about how my children treat me, I always come back to. But I know they love me. I know if I needed them for something besides just companionship, maybe they would be there for me. And I have seen that. I'll give you an example.

We were out driving. My husband was driving, and we ran over a big sharp rock and got a flat tire. I mean, it just put a hole in the tire. So I took a picture and I just sent it to these kids and I just made a funny comment about seniors learning how to drive, but they all responded with, can we come help you? Which I really touched because we weren't asking for help and we could take care of it. But there are other times where it feels like they're ignoring us. But that's just a thought we have. It's not even true. So we have to learn how to believe facts, but not believe these crazy stories we get in our head. So here we are as an empty nester. We spent all our life raising our kids, especially as a mom. We've put our heart and soul into this. And if we haven't been thinking ahead of time, what am I going to do when they all leave? Because a lot of us thought, well, I'm just going to be involved in my kids life, and I'm going to be doing activities with my grandkids, and I'm going to be going out to lunch with my kids. That all.

My life is still going to be centered around my kids. Then a lot of us find disappointment and dissatisfaction with our life. But regardless of our age and I'm 75 right now, I get to feel as young as I want to feel, and I don't feel 75 when I look in the mirror, I look 75. But like my husband said, I am not that person I see. I still feel like I'm 29, and I'm just out figuring out life, figuring out what I want to do, figuring out what lights me up. And that's what we need to do. I'm going to give you some thoughts. And these weren't necessarily my thoughts, and I'm embarrassed to say I did find a life midlife rambler, and I may have gotten it from them, but there was a list of the happiest things people do when they're not raising children anymore. They're starting to go into the next phase of their life, mid life, senior, whatever you want to call it.

But here are several thoughts about what the happiest people do. They don't wish things could stay the same and be like they were when their kids were little. They also don't deny their feelings if they're feeling sad or lonely because there's not as many people around them. Their children could have all moved to foreign countries or they're

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lonely. They don't beat themselves up for having those feelings. They just feel sad and lonely some days and they just accept this part of it. The happiest people who are in their midlife, they don't sit around waiting for a text or a phone call of somebody to invite them to go do something or giving them a suggestion of something they could do for the day. The happiest midlifers don't take things so personally. I just got more involved and I wanted to in a reply to an Instagram post that Adam Grant made about when people don't respond to your text or emails that it did not mean they didn't care for you. And I agreed with them and told them why. And I've gotten more comments than I've ever gotten on just making a post about no somebody that cares for you responds to a text or an email, but that's taking it personally. That's making it mean. If they really loved you, they would do that.

For all I know, they just got in a car accident. So we don't take anything personally when people say things to us, or especially our kids say something to us. And if it's critical, it's saying something more about them and what's going on in their life and how they're feeling and what it means about you. The happiest people that are in this transition from an empty nester to finding a life don't try to solve their children's problems. It's not their responsibility anymore. Remember, it's just to love them and tell them you think they're great and wonderful. The other thing that happiest people do, they don't second guess their children's decision when they tell you they don't or are unable to come to Sunday dinner like maybe most of the other kids do. We don't try to figure out why they don't want to do that. That's their business.

Another thing is the happiest people now remember, you just want to remember these things. If you want to be happy, if you want to be miserable and sad, then I can help you do that too. But remember, these are what the people that are now empty nesters and they just want to be happy. They don't beat themselves up. They don't beat themselves up that they can't figure out what they want to do with their life right now. They don't beat themselves up that they didn't train their children on how to treat their mother after they left home. Another thing the happiest people that have become empty nesters do, they don't neglect themselves. You know what I do every single day now that I was unable to do because there were too many people needing to use the bathroom, I take a long hot bath. And even if I have a client at 07:00 a.m., I will get up at 530 just so I can take that bath. Just a little thing I do for myself. Another little thing I do for myself.

If I'm really tired and at the last minute I get one of my kids call and say, my spouse and I, we want to go out to eat tonight and it should be easier if we didn't take the kids, could you come over and watch them? As much as I enjoy those kids, I just may say, no, I'm sorry. And I say it in a loving and coming way and I'm honest. I am just so wiped out

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tonight. Sorry I can't help you out. Our kids would rather us be authentic and honest than come and feel put out and resentful. Another thing, and this has to do with kid that this article suggested that the happiest people do, they don't let their kids stay in the nest too long, and that's an individual basis. There were times when it was necessary that we had a child stay in our home for about six months under a peculiar circumstance. But just because it's rent free and because they can't think of anything else to do, you maybe aren't going to be the happiest doing that. So one of the things I think everybody should do, and Brooke Castille mentioned this, you make a bucket list of all the things you want to do until you're 100 years old. And if you can do this now before your kids have flown the coop, you're you're going to start planning for it. And I know a lot of moms have.

There are more and more moms that are the most obvious one to me is they are going back to school and finishing a degree or getting their masters so they're still able to balance both lives. And they are preparing for what they want to do. When there are no kids in the house, that takes their attention, most of their attention and care. This is a time in our life that is an awakening to many of us that we really are responsible for fulfilling our own needs. Our children aren't just because it didn't work out the way we thought and we thought we would be spending more time with our kids and our grandkids. That is not so much the case these days and we're not really prepared for this, but this is going to be at least half of our life depending on how many children you had and when the youngest left home. But it's half of our life that we are going to be empty nesters. So you need to allow yourself to dream, and you need to focus on what you want to do and what you can do, not what you can't do. We need to let go of the manual of what life looks like when your children become adults.

Now, some of you are already doing that because you have seen the frustration of a generation ahead of you, of becoming frustrated because their children haven't had the involvement in their life that the mom wanted. This is a good question to ask yourself, how do I want to think about this part of my life? Do I want to think of it as an ending? That my mission, my purpose on life, in life is over, and I guess I'll do with whatever comes by. Or do you want to think of this part of your life as a time of new growth and new development, a time of contributing to the world in another way than raising your family, which I believe is one of the biggest contributions we can make, is to raise a family, to raise children where they felt love and safe. So are you older and wiser, or are you older and worse? Just something to think about.

So first you have to have the desire that you want to find something fulfilling to do in your life. And then you have to believe that you will find it, that there is something out

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there that will fulfill your life in a way you never imagined possible. And then you need to go figure out what you want to do and give yourself time to do that and be patient. Figure out why you want to do that thing. I had been trained as a life coach when my daughter Jody was trained with no idea, no desire to become a life coach. And that was in 2014, and I didn't become a life coach till 2019. But it took some contemplating. There are some other things I wanted to do. I just wanted to for the first year, I remember, I just wanted to get up and be able to decide, what do I want to do today? And then I needed a little something more. So I dabbled in a couple part time jobs. One was at Williams Sonoma. One was a Weight Watchers leader. And then my husband and I knew we wanted to go on a mission, so we went to Africa for 18 months. And that was so fulfilling. It was so fulfilling that when I came back and two months later was diagnosed with cancer, I didn't care. I had just had the opportunity to have this amazing experience.

So then I did my cancer thing that I wouldn't put on your bucket list if I were you, but it just happened. But as you're trying to figure out what you want to do, figure out how it's going to make you feel, how is doing that thing I'm thinking about doing going to make me feel. And if you like the feeling, then you maybe want to pursue it. And then you can even ask yourself, what will I be doing that would make me feel that way? So I suggest any idea that comes into your head. You do a total brain dump and you get a piece of paper and you keep adding to it. Keep that paper with you everywhere you go and keep adding to the list as things come up in your mind of what you might possibly like to do. And if you tell your brain, if your brain knows you're even working on this, your brain will help you come up with ideas because that's what brains do. They like to solve problems. So they're going to help you solve this one too. And then you start to narrow it down.

What are the top three things that you want to do most in this chapter of your life? Another thing besides a brain dump is to look at what other people your age are doing and that will give you the thing that you might want to do. I looked up on the internet the ten most popular activities that people in their midlife engage in and this is what they came up with. Some of them I'd consider, some of them I wouldn't. One was to volunteer and there's lots of places in your community to volunteer. Saturdays were really hard for me. It's like Saturday is a fun day. Saturday is when you get to do anything you want and you kind of do something different than what you're doing during the week. My Sundays were probably my most boring day. So this isn't necessarily going to rock your boat or float your boat, but I heard somebody talking about doing laundry in the temple and I thought I'd like to do that. So every Saturday afternoon for about 4 hours, I go and help with laundry in the temple.

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And it's a completely different experience from anything I've ever done. But I'm meeting new people and I'm doing something different. And I like that. I'm just not taking an extra long nap that day, but that I'm doing something useful. But there's lots of places to volunteer. Another popular thing empty nesters do is travel. And so if you've dreamed of going some places, maybe it's only one place, maybe you're not financially able to do that. But what a worthwhile use of your time in figuring out how to save or make money to go on that trip? Another popular thing that seniors like to do was expand upon their culinary skills. In other words, they're cooking and they're baking. Another one is to declutter and organize their home. Now, I have to be honest with you. I had the thought, I don't want my kids to go see how many coats I own. I have got to start getting rid of some of this stuff in my closet. This year, I did not put up many Christmas decorations, and it was just fine. I'm not getting rid of them yet, but if I have the same feeling next year, I am going to give a lot of those Christmas decorations away.

Another thing is to find a creative outlet. I have a friend that I was coaching. I was actually doing some weight loss coaching with her, and I asked her in our last session, what is an impossible dream? You have an impossible goal. And she's been an empty nester for quite a while. And she said, I really don't have one. I'm very satisfied with my life. She gives service. She loves to quilt. She probably has 100 quilts, but she still loves just cutting those pieces of fabric up in little pieces and sewing them back together. But there's all sorts of things out there. There's all sorts of courses. There are courses on how to take better pictures using your iPhone. And I think there's a website called Teachable.com that offers a lot of different courses. But get creative. Maybe it's a new hobby. Maybe it's learning how to change the oil in your car. Maybe it's learning a new language. Maybe it's learning calligraphy. The best way to find anything is to Google it. I've been working on this for several days, and every time I Googled something about midlifers or empty nesters or seniors, I got a whole new list of places it took me. I like to say everything's Google. Now, here's an idea. How about writing a book? You could just write a book. It's very easy to self publish a book. Amazon will help you do it. There's lots of self help and courses out there. You could just write a book. Maybe it was short. All the things I learned from my children.

I love words and I love quotes. So I have thought about maybe I'll just write a book one day about all the empowering thoughts I see my mind's already going to well, I need to come up with 365 so that there's one every day that might make someone's life a little more uplifting. Your thoughts and your wisdom are desired by more people than what you think. Another thing is to start a blog, and it just doesn't have to be with your family. But blogs are kind of fun to read because they're kind of a story.

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Maybe this would be a book, or maybe this would be a blog. But if I was to write a blog, it might be something about how God conspired in my favor. This week, another popular thing and remember, these aren't my ideas. I got this off the Internet is to plant a garden. That might be your thing. I'll tell you right now, it's not mine. I just didn't go to Trader Joe's for my fruits and my vegetables and my flowers. But a lot of people get so much enjoyment in being outside and digging in the earth. Another thing might be turn a hobby into a business. I have a friend. Her name is Annie McDaniel, and I believe it's called Miss Annie's Home Kitchen. And she had a friend, and she saw what she was doing of collecting recipes and making them to these little books. And so her hobby was to turn this annie, who miss Annie was a person that would go to schools and get in a costume like a penguin and teach to elementary kids all about the life of penguins. And she turned this into a business. And I think her husband can retire now on the amount of money she's making.

But that's just kind of a new angle to her hobby. A lot of people that ruins their hobby when they turn it into a business. But do you see how it's not only a business, it's not only the money, but it's a contribution she's making to the world? The 10th thing that they mentioned that was most popular with seniors was to relax, just do everything a little bit slower, take time to smell the roses, even when you're just driving to the grocery store. Or like my baths, I take a little longer bath. And another thing I do, I'm not even ashamed of. I watch more TV than I've ever watched in my life, but it's relaxing for me. So those are some ideas and some popular things to do. When you become an empty nester, ask yourself, go back to your past and look at what really lit you up. And what can you take from that and make that a part of your life in the future?

What was so great about doing what you did? The mistakes that we make in not pursuing our dreams or the mistakes we make in not finding something to do that's fulfilling at this time of our life is waiting for somebody else to not only tell us what to do, but to give us permission to do what we're dreaming about doing. The other thing is we mistakenly feel fear instead of excitement about the future. Fear is what fear does, and excitement is what excitement does. And I kind of took that from watching the movie Forrest Gump when he talked about what stupid does. So you just have to be excited and hopeful and dream. And the best news is you've given an assignment to your brain. You can tell I'm really big into relying on my brain to help find me evidence of how I can do whatever I want to do. Limiting beliefs like I'm too old makes you feel a certain way, and that feeling keeps you from pursuing your dream. If you believe you're too old, then, yes, I guess you're too old. But if you believe I'm unstoppable, I can do this. There's no

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reason I can't. I'm going to figure out a way. The other mistake we make is we aren't curious enough about what we want to do because of those limiting beliefs. How committed you are to having a fulfilling life now depends on your feeling. And it all starts with your thoughts. If you don't have thoughts that produce excitement or if you have thoughts about all the reasons why it can't happen, you're going to end up killing your dreams instead of hanging out in that part of the brain that says, yes, you can do this.

Here are some empowering thoughts. There is something out there that is exactly what I want to be doing and I just haven't found out what it is yet. Now is my time to do whatever I want. Maybe you've gone day after day after day and just felt useless, bored, nondirective, unambitious. I love this thought. Nothing ever stays the same. This is only temporary. Another good thought. I don't know right now what I want to be doing with my life, but I will figure it out. Imagine your future self as you want her to be and ask your future self, what do you know about me? To help me, guide me now to find out what I will be doing.

If you want to know more about life as an empty nester or the midlife part of your life, Susie Rosenstein has an excellent podcast, Women in the Middle. And one of the things she said, the way you actually think about your sickness and not figuring out what you want to do is making the problem worse. You end up with more spin and no movement. And I want to add to that. If you tell yourself you can't think of anything, then you never will. Just consider thinking, I just haven't figured it out yet, and be patient and loving and kind to yourself. It is a great opportunity for me to speak to you every week. It feels my soul. It gives me purpose every morning when I wake up that I know there are people out there needing some help. I thank you so much for listening. I thank you for any reviews, any comments you've ever given me. Women know how to support other women and I am so grateful to be a woman at this time in my life doing exactly what I want to be doing. I wish you a wonderful week and I'll talk to you next week.

If you like this episode and you felt it was of benefit to you, I ask you to share it with somebody that perhaps it could also benefit. But if you're still feeling kind of stuck in that you don't know how to apply what was talked about or where to start, on changing your thoughts, on changing your perspective, on bettering your relationship, get on a call with me and we can have a discussion, and I can tell you how to apply it and where we start. And then you get to decide what you want to do about this relationship that maybe you're struggling with with your adult children. There is no reason to go on the rest of our lives struggling with our relationships with our adult children. Let's assume the best. Let's assume that we all love each other and we're just trying to figure figure out how to maintain our own boundaries and respect another ones. But I can help you with

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everything. So just go to [Bonnie Lyman.com](http://BonnieLyman.com) and book a call. I can't wait to hear from you.