

Loving on Purpose Podcast

with Bonnie Lyman

Episode 104: When Our Adult Children Don't Fulfill Our Needs

Hey there, this is Bonnie Lyman, and you're listening to the podcast, Loving on Purpose, episode one hundred and four. When our adult children don't fulfill our needs. 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.

Gosh, it's great to be back with you again this week to share another episode. Few bits of wisdom or experiences or things I've learned or to help you understand how your mind works, how to help you manage your mind. So that you can manage your life better. So, I didn't put that many Christmas decorations up.

In fact, I put a tree up, and it's a silver tree this year. Last year, the lights on our artificial tree kind of bit the dust. And so I decided to get a new tree instead of replacing all those lights. After we spent an hour of trying to get them to come back on, because of course, not all the strings went out, just some of them, just one of those little trials in life, just to keep you humble and see, uh, where your anger level meets your spouse's anger level.

It's, it's always the little things that can make us frustrated. And so it's, it's a shame that we have hard feelings between each other, those that are closest to us over some of the smallest things. But anyway, I put up a tree and I put up a nativity set, and I think I put up one wreath, and that's about all I did this year.

And so I'm not feeling consumed by Christmas and tired of it, but It has to be said, we got through another Christmas, didn't we? And so I've had a couple coaching calls, and with these particular clients, of course, it's fresh on their mind, some of the things I've taught them, that they actually had really much better than they thought.

Christmases. Of course, I don't talk to the people where there's never any issues between children and parents, between children and children, between children in laws and others in the family. I only talk with those people that are Are struggling, but I'm really proud of them for taking these tools that I teach them and apply it to their life in case you don't know, I send out at least weekly, usually 3 to 4 times a week, a newsletter that is very fun for me to write with various Bye.

Various thoughts on improving, um, just not our relationships, but improving our life. So, today I wanted to talk to you about when our adult children don't fulfill our needs. So I have to back up and start with What I thought my life would be like when my children became adults. And I think many of you can relate to what, um, I have to say.

I feel like I had normal teenagers where there was some tension going on. And there were some good times going on. And Because I'd been told that this is what teenagers do through in, in becoming an adult, this transition of becoming an adult can be kind of rocky because their

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hormones and their emotions are all over the place, I, I didn't take it so personal and I, I had the thought that, yeah, this, this would pass, they would, um, mature and, uh, we would go back to a more harmonious relationship.

And so I thought, you know, by the time they got married, and kids are getting married later these days, so they're even a little bit, um, older than when I got married, I was 22. And that's still pretty young, um, as far as emotional maturity, you could say, but I, I just thought they'd be calling me on a regular basis.

They would be sharing good times and hard times. Um, they would be including me in their life. They would maybe be Asking to join, say, if they were married, them and their spouse, once in a while, or if not frequently, perhaps, to go to the movie or go out to dinner, or maybe, um, if it was a daughter, invite me to go shopping with them, or, um, to share in some hobby, or Um, some decoration making project of sharing with me favorite movies, TV shows, just whatever.

But I felt like we would be having, and I can't say I, I pictured of. Um, you know, how often, but I pictured it several times a week, I think, at least. I didn't give a lot of thought to it. I thought it would just kind of go on, um, as usual. Um, uh, how they were acting when they were a little more adult, but I came to find out that that's not what happened.

I was not included. And that is probably the biggest complaint I hear from parents, and that was the biggest thing that I noticed, that they weren't sharing things. They weren't telling me when they bought a piano. They weren't telling me when they got a new car. Um, they, even those that live close, they weren't We're not stopping by very often.

And I know all kids are different, and this isn't the case for everybody. But, you know, because all kids are different, that made it even worse because I would look at maybe what my friend's adult children were sharing. And how involved they were in their life. And that was not going on, um, in between myself or my husband and our children.

I was finding that texts were Coming less frequently answered unless it was something very specific information I was asking for. Um, I noticed that phone calls from them just to see how I was doing became less frequent, and it was tied into. When their lives got more complicated, not necessarily more difficult, but there were just more parts, you know, perhaps they were married, perhaps, you know, they just don't have a summer job now, they have a real job, a serious job, one that they have more concerns.

And then, you know, they start having children that, of course, you know, I just thought that would be the center of my life, my grandchildren, and all the things I got to do with them. And yet, that wasn't working out the way I, I thought it would. I never really saw myself doing much of anything besides taking care of the basic needs of, um, of keeping my house and my life and my relationship and what responsibilities or what things I wanted to do for my husband.

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I didn't see. That changing, but I thought my spare time would be involved around my kids and their lives. And I know some of you had the same feeling. And then when that doesn't happen, because of our negativity bias, our brain tells us that something is wrong. And really, nothing has gone wrong. It's just different than what I had expected.

And so it was a bit of a wake up call to work through that, and then out of the blue When we did get invited to go to dinner with them or them and their spouse, it was like, Oh, yeah, everything's okay. You know, it was some fabrication in my mind, something I dreamed up that something was wrong. But it takes some work and some understanding to know.

What is going on? And I think the number one thing is to understand that our adult children are not responsible for our happiness. They are not responsible for fulfilling our needs. Whatever they may be at this time in our life, especially when all of our children move out of the house. And we become what they refer to as empty nesters.

There's nobody left in the nest. And so it can be a difficult time for adults. But the number one thing that we need to understand is that we Just like everyone else, every other adult, when we become an adult, we are responsible for fulfilling our own needs. And that's emotionally as well as physically.

Usually the physical part we get. A lot of us have a mindset, we have a boundary of, Or an expectation, maybe is a better word, that our kids, when they get to be a certain age, that they are expected to financially support themselves, but we also have this little underlying belief, but we still want them to help us emotionally take care of our needs.

And, and those needs may be to be needed, to be loved, to be included. Because those, you know, are, they are, they're the most important people in our lives, and we will always probably have more love for them and more concern for them than, than anybody else. But I believe that's why we were put into groups of families, that it narrows of, Of who we watch over, and when there is a need within that family unit, when everybody is an adult, that they can't take care of by themselves, that then we decide.

Whether we want to step in and help with that need, and most of the time we would, but it gets kind of tricky, as I said before, especially like when it comes to finances, you know, when, when is it? Enough, um, money gifted or loaned, enough. And for everybody, that's going to be different. And so, if we look at it this way, it's hard enough to take care of our own needs than also to be responsible to take care of someone else's needs.

And a lot of the time, what we think What, what they, what we think their needs are, that they want to be fulfilled, could be entirely the opposite of what they really are wanting or needing. The other thing is, I think a lot of times for ourselves, for our children, for any human, we, we get these emotions and these feelings that we know, let's just say we're unhappy, but we don't even realize what we're unhappy about or what need it.

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And so I remember somebody saying that we don't get married to make other people happy because it's just impossible to do. We get married so that we can have special people. To love. And I think it's the same thing. We don't have children so that when they're adults, they can fulfill our needs of being needed and loved by these people that we call family.

Now, I want to tell you a little story about this idea of when we really don't understand, or we think we know what other people are thinking, and most of the time we don't. And so that is why we can't fulfill someone else's needs, but that's also why they can't fulfill our needs. Um, at the turn of the century, I decided to have a New Year's Eve party.

And I am very social, and my husband is not that social, so I told him what I wanted to do, and he agreed, and we had like a potluck dinner, and we invited, hmm, maybe eight to ten couples, and I okayed him with him, because as So As a married couple, we just don't necessarily like being around the same people, so we agreed that these are people we would both enjoy being around, and I thought we had one of the best times ever, and so the next year, I thought So, um, yeah.

I'm going to have another New Year's Eve party. And so I mentioned it to my husband and his response was, I'd really rather not. That was one of the worst evenings of my life. And so here he was kind enough to show up and act as if he was having a good time and And so, you know, I was able to enjoy myself better, um, knowing that he was, he was having a good time.

But I was shocked at that remark. So, I think it's important that we remember where our feelings come from. They don't come They don't come from what somebody else says. They don't come from what somebody else does. They don't come from what happens in our lives. But our feelings come from the meaning of everything that is happening.

And so, once we start to go down that road of negativity, that perhaps there is something about my behavior that my kids don't like, or they don't love me as much anymore, once we start having thoughts like that, Then we almost become more needy around our, our children, because of any of the people that we know and like.

We want our children to love us and include us in their life. But they are adults, and they get to choose how they want to live. They want to spend their time, what's best for them, what's best for their family, you know. We, we do not come first. They are not responsible. So, one of the things as adults that we do is that we are often unwilling or don't like feeling negative emotions.

So, a really good mentally healthy life is not one where we're happy all the time. It's one where we're willing to feel the good times as well as the bad times, knowing that's part of the game. And so, we have to be willing to feel those negative emotions. And I have a process that can

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help you de-intensify. The strength or the intensity of a negative emotion, but it's just another emotion.

We are not going to die. And without those negative emotions, the positive emotions wouldn't be enjoyable. They'd be pretty neutral. The other thing we have to remember is there's always more than one perspective to any circumstance. In other words, how we view the world depends on each individual. And I don't care if we are related, we all have our own individual brains.

And our brains are interpreting. Everything that's going on, and there's no right or wrong way, but we get this fixed thinking in our minds sometimes that if our children's perspective is not in alignment with our perspective, we take that personally as the truth. They, they don't like us, or they don't like our perspective.

To not take it so personally, all we need to think is they just have a different perspective or a different opinion of what's going on. There is no right or wrong. In most situations that cause conflict in families, it's just a disagreement of not seeing it from the same perspective. So if we were willing to understand where our children were coming from, of what was going on in their lives, And why they were doing what they were doing, we would probably have less judgment about them and more understanding.

A lot of times we need. To try hard to put ourselves in our children's shoes, and if given those circumstances that they're going through, which were never going to be the same as anything we went through, then we would have a lot more compassion and love and a whole lot less judgment. But we've got this expectation because we were all raised in this little family.

We expect them to think like us. It makes so much sense to us that we think alike and we have the same perspective because that's how we raised our kids. But as their brains develop, And they interpret the world, the values they were taught, the, even down to the TV shows they like to watch. We are all so different.

And so, of course, we're going to see things differently. But if we can remember that there's no right or wrong. Going on here, it's just a different way of looking at things.

So one perspective could be, in my case, I can't be around my kids enough. But a lot of that is my world has gotten smaller. Before I was with my kids, and my kids friends parents, and, and we all had similar mindsets. One of my needs to be around my family so much, it came to a point that I, I had to figure out another way to fulfill that need.

My married kids have their family, and then they have family with their siblings and us. And then they have family with their spouse's parents and spouse's siblings. So they got a lot of people out there that want to be included in their lives. And so it's their right to pick and choose how they want to spend their time.

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My world got smaller, and theirs. got bigger. And we don't want to forget the importance of peers. My kids will counsel more with each other long before they ask us for advice. But I kind of like that. But they do that because they think there's going to be more of an understanding. So we need to quit making it mean all about us.

We are failing just to get curious about their lives and to recognize them as adults and that they, it's, it's their right to live their life. and to spend their time including us or not including us. Sometimes deep down we have an entitlement issue. I deserve to be notified of my grandkids soccer games, because these are my grandkids.

Or because of everything I did for my kids, the least they can do. I tend to have a need to be validated by other people. I like being around people. So I discovered soon that that validation was not going to come from my kids. And I wasn't going to spend as much time around my kids. So I found friends that I could do various things with.

But bottom line to all of this, is remembering and believing hard that your children still love you. They just have different priorities of how often they want to be around you, how often they want to include you in your life. But it doesn't mean that they wouldn't be there if there was a real need where you needed their help.

Your responsibility. Number one, and they would love it, is for you to fulfill your own needs and not rely on them or anybody. It's nice when it happens. And we can show our appreciation, but it's not their responsibility to fulfill our needs. It's our responsibility. Our responsibility, like I've said a hundred times, is to love them and tell them as often as you can that they are great and wonderful.

If you have a lot of resentment, if you have a lot Of disappointment, if, if you're feeling sad, most of the time over the relationship that you have with your kids, you're robbing yourself of what loving another person offers you. When you make that love so conditional,

I even had a friend tell me when asked what I got for Christmas from each of my kids, and it came out that I didn't get a present from all of my kids, their response was, well, I guess They don't need to get a present from you next year. And my response was, that's not how I roll. It feels good and wonderful to give them a present for Christmas.

And I don't make it mean anything about their love for me if I did not get one. in return. So, one of the things we can do to fulfill your needs when your children become adults is to get a life outside of your children. If they don't want your help, go find someone that does, and you can still have that satisfaction of helping and serving somebody else.

Get a job, go back to school, get a gym membership, take art classes, get together with friends, travel more, volunteer more, or a combination of any of these. There's so many things

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to do. And then Remember, you've got to be willing to feel some disappointment if that's what you're feeling that you're not included enough in your kids lives.

I know that there's many of you out there that your kids have cut you off from any contact with them and, or your grandkids. And I know that that's painful. And of course it's painful, but you have to be willing to wait, you have to be willing to have some thoughts such as things never stay the same,

you know, you have to be willing to be Curious, just be curious of why it's going on, but you got to move on in your life. It is your responsibility. It's not somebody else's to fulfill your needs or include you in your life.

So the transition to becoming an, a parent of adult children is made difficult by your expectations of what you thought it was going to look like. It's also made difficult by you idolizing families that are close and are living the life that you wanted and thought would be happening. But nothing And I think if we can use the word different, it's just different than how I pictured it will, would be.

So, it's your choice. You can spend the rest of your life being disappointed in how your relationships with your adult children are happening. Or you can accept it by seeing it not as something that went wrong, but rather it is just different than what you had expected.

What is making you so disappointed is usually the thought, I thought I would be more included in their lives. We all have the same need. to be respected for who we are. We just have different needs. Your kids have different needs and desires and ways they want to use their time than you do. They're not trying to hurt you on purpose.

Parents often have a greater need to be included in their children's lives.

Then their children have to be included in their parents' lives.

It gives your adult children a sense of worth to know that they can live their life without needing a lot of parental support. I remember before we went on our mission to Africa, when we were in the MTC, we were advised that we were going to miss our children for the 18 months. We were going to be gone a whole lot more than they were going to miss us.

Nothing has gone wrong. They still love you, they just don't need you as much as you maybe thought you needed them. So I hope that you will take away from this that it's your responsibility to figure out how to live a satisfying life outside of your family. I wish the best to you. I know these struggles are hard, but it is possible to move on and find enjoyment in life.

Have a Happy New Year. And I'll talk to you next week.

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If you liked 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, And that you don't know how to apply what was talked about or where to start on, 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's 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 out how to maintain our own boundaries and respect another one's. But I can help you with everything. So just go to BonnieLyman.com and book a call. I can't wait to hear from you.