



Episode 006—The Role of Grace in Adoption and Allyship

Welcome to Adopted into Allyship, a podcast about loving others well and fighting for connection. I'm Jamie K Corbin and this is episode seven, Allyship's Enemy Number One: Denial.

Hey, friendly reminder—this is intended to be a safe place to learn, but I do talk about hard things because when you've been adopted into allyship, you don't shy away from conflict or pain. Healing and growth aren't compatible with avoidance or apathy. You can expect an uncomfortable amount of honesty and vulnerability, as well as an abundance of grace as we work toward becoming better allies together.

In this episode we're going to enter into the wisdom of the twelve step program, specifically looking at the first thing I learned in my recovery—denial is the greatest threat to our healing. Buckle up, friends, because this episode is going to elicit a reaction from you, one way or another.

Listen, I was twenty-six years old and had almost convinced myself that I had everything I ever wanted. Master's degree by the age of twenty-four? Check. Happily married to my bestest friend? Check. Teaching job in my preferred school district with a classroom full of young people who challenged and delighted me? Double check.

If it weren't for the stress and pressure built up from living with undiagnosed attachment disorder in a household with it's fair share of mental health issues, I might have been able to pull off the con of my lifetime and get myself to believe that everything was okay with me.

But, a decade before the Madrigal family showed up in our lives and Luisa showed us all what it looks like for a strong woman to face her weakness, the strength I had depended on my entire life, my ability to grit my teeth and push through hard things was starting to crack. The world I had put so much effort into building around me was starting to crumble because the foundation was non-existent at best and toxically neglected at worst.

The cracks developed quickly and showed no signs of stopping, each of them a seemingly random thing, but in all actuality a symptom that could be traced back to my then undiagnosed attachment disorder, trauma from my mom's health struggles that had me thinking I was going to wind up motherless far too young, and the ugly damage that comes with an addiction to control.

Yes, addiction to control is a thing, and if you are even the slightest bit curious, I would recommend checking out the book Compelled to Control by Keith Miller. It's a read at your own risk kind of book, and if you get through the first two paragraphs and go, "Oh, crap, I need a highlighter" like I did, and then read the next few pages and want to write me a strongly worded email about how dare I disrupt your life with this kind of insight...well, don't say I didn't warn you, but also know that finishing it can be a life-changing!

Anyway, all the cracks showing up in my carefully constructed and meticulously curated world led me to sitting in my doctor's office sharing with her all of the seemingly crazy things in my head that I had never, ever, EVER said aloud to anyone. I'm not even sure what possessed me to be so open and honest, maybe I was just experiencing such a high level of pain and my functioning in everyday life had sunk to such a foreign level of low, that I felt like I didn't have any other choice. I needed help and I needed it immediately.

I remember her saying, "Jamie, you don't need meds. You need counseling." and what followed was a conversation about reactive attachment disorder and childhood trauma. Fun stuff.

I remember leaving the doctor's office knowing that I should call my little sister and apologize for being in denial about my own need for mental health care, for actually believing that I was the only one in our family who didn't need counseling. So, I called her. I told her about all the messy cracks showing up in my life and what the doctor had said. She responded by offering grace and agreeing that I needed some help.

I found a counselor, realized she was not my cup of tea, and fired the counselor. By the grace of God, I eventually found my way into a twelve-step recovery program that used a book, also written by Keith Miller, called Hunger for Healing. The book and accompanying videos were from the 80's, so the wardrobe and hair alone made it interesting enough to show up and pay attention, but I was desperate for change and would have done both anyway.

As allies, we have a lot to learn. I had so much to learn when I showed up to my first Hunger for Healing meeting in January of 2013. I will never forget the internal conflict I experienced the first few meetings, listening to myself argue with myself about needing to be there, bouncing back and forth between agreeing and disagreeing. On one hand, my world was falling apart and I needed help. On the other hand, the women sitting in that living room and sharing so vulnerably about their struggles and their need for healing were absolutely terrifying to me. I was certain there was something wrong with them, something that we couldn't possibly have in common, and convinced that if my healing required doing what they were doing, I was never going to be healed.

Looking back now, it's obvious I was experiencing denial. Like, a ton of it. I was in denial that I had a problem, a big problem, in the form of an addiction to control, which was splintering into problems in my present and future lives, since control is an illusion and eventually it becomes apparent that one cannot control everyone and everything in their lives.

And, not only that, but my addiction to control had deep, nasty roots in some serious past trauma that was going to need not only an acknowledgement of its existence, but also a ridiculous amount of time and effort to deal with in order to bring the levels of stress and pressure in my life down to a liveable amount.

Not to mention the amount of ongoing work that I would need to be doing if I wanted to maintain a level of wellness.

Additionally, I was in denial about the role I needed to play in order to find healing. Obviously I wasn't going to be able to heal myself all on my own, but in order to access the holy assistance necessary to get the job done, I was going to have to surrender to God. Seems obvious enough, but how would I control everything if I do that? You see the problem I had with the plan, right?

Also on the list of things I was in denial about: just how much God wanted me to find healing, his ability to make miracles happen, and his intentions to use my healing not only for my good, but for the good of those around me. There were just a lot of things that my denial was keeping me from seeing.

That's how denial works. Denial is a deceptive tool of the devil. And it's so tempting. Denial protects our sense of comfort. Our sense of power. Our sense of control. Denial makes sure that we don't wander too close to accidentally changing up the status quo, because denial likes things exactly the way they are: busted, broken up, and painful—for everybody.

How did we fall from Eden?

The devil denied God and then got Eve and her passive, irresponsible, and neglectful husband to do it too.

The devil got Eve to deny what God had said about eating from the forbidden tree.

The devil got Adam to deny taking any rightful responsibility for the situation, and even gave Adam the nerve to try to pass the blame onto God.

Denial is a tactic of the enemy to keep the Kingdom of God far from our reality.

You can't fight against oppression if you don't see it.

You can't fight for justice if you don't believe injustice exists.

That's dark, right? And, it keeps going.

You can't live a life blessed with healing if you don't know that you need to be healed.

And you certainly can't help heal the world, if you, yourself, aren't on the path of healing.

The truth is, one cannot make progress in any type of healing if one remains in denial.

And allyship is all about healing. It doesn't matter who you are trying to be an ally for, whether it's your adopted child or family member, or a member of a community that has been placed on the margins of a society through purposefully constructed oppressive systems, allyship is about healing. Healing our wounds and theirs, because the kind of evil that creates a need for allyship harms us all.

The root of denial is untruth. It's dishonesty. Denial lies. Eve was able to deny God when she took the bait and believed the snake's lies. This is important to understand because we have to realize that since the beginning, we have been lied to by the devil. God help us, our acceptance of the lies has caused us to pass down generation after generation of hurt and harm.

Our denial is deep within us. If you want to know how deep your denial is, pay attention to the intensity of your reaction when it is threatened to be exposed. I'll give you a concrete example, stay with me here!

I have never shared words from my outlines and pre-writing in a final piece, but I feel like it would serve a worthy purpose here, so I'm going to break one of my writing rules and share a sentence from the notes I jotted down when I started putting together this episode.

A quick heads up about my writing process, since I have said before that you can expect me to put a lot of learning and thought into my words before I bring them to you and I don't want you to feel like I am going back on my word.

I sometimes outline pieces weeks before I draft them. I have been known to leave a conversation mid-sentence to run to my computer and type out ideas that I feel prompted to write, because I know if I don't get the emotion of them down quickly, life will carry on and I will have lost the inspiration. Most things I publish start with an emotion and then get worked and reworked until I feel the wording is approachable and effective, but still authentic to the original emotion.

When I sat down to draft this particular episode I laughed out loud because I had no memory of writing these words in the outline, but they were helpful in guiding me as I worked through the important topic of denial.

I wrote, and I quote, *"White folks be in denial about all the things, all the time—as a form of self-preservation. But that causes SO MUCH damage."* end quote, and with 'so much' in all caps.

Now, before you get all up in arms and send me a nasty-gram, again, let me just say that I would typically work on my language and messaging off that initial thought, and I would never just blurt this out publicly. And, yes. I agree. It's an overgeneralization.

As your reactions may or may not be proving right now, nobody in their right mind, who cared deeply about developing allies for the world would read those words aloud. They spark defensiveness. They cause people to raise their guards up and that goes directly against the goal of fighting for connection.

But, I was looking for a way to illustrate the relationship between the deep root of our denial and the intensity of our reactions when our denial is threatened to be exposed, and this sentence serves a second purpose, which is to state a hard truth.

But first, everyone take a few big breaths.

Okay, the hard truth is that we live in this amazing country with a less than amazing grasp on the reality of how this country came to be and what it cost it's citizenry in the process. Many of us are walking around in 2022 with an incomplete, if not entirely erroneous, understanding of our country's history and what it means for our present and future.

In order to live with the fact that the country we are constantly asking God to bless was created through some seriously ungodly actions, there has had to be copious amounts of denial poured into the melting pot narrative.

The all caps damaging result?

We're living in it. Ongoing oppression that breeds injustice, inflicting pain on God's children and mocking the imago dei, generation after generation, and too many people in denial about their holy inheritance of the work to be done, of the fact that they are the ones called to rush toward the problems and pain with healing, like spiritual medics.

That's what we are called to do in allyship. That's why we are here. We are not here to find the latest hashtag or facebook frame to cover our profile pictures and tell the world how much we care about others, we are here to learn to be better allies in denial-opposing, difference-making ways for the people we love. And, just in case some of us might be in denial about this fact: we are called to love everybody.

Everybody means everybody.

Allyship is love in action. Okay, I told you at the beginning of this episode to buckle up because you were going to have a reaction to the topic of denial one way or another, and I don't want to be a liar. If you have yet to react, I envy your composure, and yet, I'm sure this next suggestion might challenge you a bit. It better, otherwise, what are we doing spending all this time together, right?

Our action steps into allyship here are short and sweet. But I wouldn't say simple.

First, prepare your heart and then get brave. Real brave, because I have two ideas about how to expose and challenge your denial and neither of them are fun.

But, in all fairness, if you have been following my writing on allyship for any length of time and you are expecting this stuff to be fun, I question whether you have been paying attention. Allyship is rarely fun and always necessary. So, let's go!

Not fun idea, numero uno! This is where I would recommend you start if the concept of denial being allyship's enemy number one is new to you. It's where I started with my twelve-step program and, I know I didn't mention this, because I'm not super proud of it, but I spent four years working through my twelve steps. I went to meeting after meeting while other people ran laps around me with their progress, and we went through the twelve steps multiple times together. All that to say, I have done this exercise many times, and I know that if I can do it, you can do it. This is brave, beginner-friendly stuff, so don't come at me with the complaints or whiny voices, just take a brave breath and do it!

Okay, ready? Gosh, I'm so glad there is some physical distance between us. Alright, here's what you do: Ask someone close to you to point out your defensiveness for an entire week, silently receive that feedback, write it down on a single document as it is shared with you, and at the end of the week, voila there is your list of things you are in denial about.

I told you. Not fun. I wish I could see the looks on all of your faces right now. It never goes well when I share this with my friends. But, if you want to find your denial, that's the most effective way to do it. Let's just leave it at that for now.

Moving on to...not fun idea, numero dos! This might be a more advanced action step, depending on how honest and vulnerable you are willing to be and how you stomach your own disobedience against God. If you can find a way to be incredibly honest, and your stomach gets weak at the idea of being out of alignment with God's will, then there is a lot of potential here to find areas of denial that need to be flooded with the best kind of grace, and this could be a turning point for some of you in your allyship journeys.

Grant yourself permission to be entirely ugly and honest about how you feel and prayerfully make a list of people you love and people you don't love, Arya Stark style. If that language is too harsh for you, consider using the words, "people you struggle to love as much as the people you really do love".

Compare your lists and see if you can find patterns between who you love and who you don't love and what you are in denial about, then state the problem out loud.

I'll state my problem out loud, so you don't feel alone in our shared human ugliness.

I love people who: agree with me, make me laugh and/or laugh at my jokes, and challenge me to grow, but do it in a way that takes my massive levels of insecurity into consideration

I struggle to love: people who I judge to be not trying at all to understand where I'm coming from, people who seem satisfied with the status quo, people who idolize power and comfort, people whose theology does not prioritize love, justice, mercy, and grace

The problem is I'm in denial that everyone means everyone.

Yuck. The truth is, a year ago, I had a real come to Jesus moment. I was on a Zoom call with a few people in my "love" category and we were sharing a time of lament about racial injustice. I was trying really hard to pass the burden of loving the people in my "struggle" category off to others, because how could I possibly? The sound of the words coming out of my mouth hadn't even completely dissipated before I felt the Holy Trinity convict me and say, *"Umm, actually, Jamie. Everybody means everybody. Those are your people too. They belong to you and you belong to them. Welcome to your new assignment."*

I call it my Jonah moment, and it's what prompted my choice to make writing about allyship my thing, instead of something far more fun like food blogging. Oh, the number of times I have thrown my hands up in the air and told Kelvin, "I could have been a food blogger!"

But the healing you guys, it's all about the healing—ours, the people we love and the people we don't love, the world's. We are called to play a part in it. And, once we can get past our own denial, we can move on to asking our creator to partner with us in big ways so that we can get on with the healing work of allyship.

Father God,

You have never been and never will be in denial about your love for us, or our role to love others.

We thank you for offering us such clarity about something the enemy has lied to us about for generation after generation. The truth is that you love us, you love others, and our mission is to love one another well, to fight for connection in a world that is hell bent on seeing us fight and fail to love one another.

God help us see that if we don't find a way out of our denial, if we don't choose allyship as a means for loving those who are different from us, we will find that what we have in common is a sense of hopelessness and loneliness.

God we pray for you to go ahead of us in our allyship journeys and clear a way for us to see and respond to truth. Soften our hearts, open our eyes, adjust our attitudes.

Remind us of the grace we have been given so that we can offer it to others as we journey together, you know how badly we need it.

Help remove our denial so that we can do our part to heal what's broken inside of us and out in the world.

In our brother Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Thank you for joining me for another episode of Adopted into Allyship, produced by Day Three Studios. It's an honor to be your ally as you push yourself to listen, learn, and love in a way that helps you become an equipped, reliable, and action-oriented ally.

If you found this episode helpful or encouraging, I would be most grateful if you would take a minute and rate the podcast, leave a review, and share it with those you know who could benefit from joining us as we work toward loving one another well and fighting for connection. I will be back with more next Thursday, but until then, I would love to connect with you on social media. I usually hangout on Instagram, but you can find me on most platforms @jamiectorbin and of course, I share more thoughts on the topic of allyship, including a free guide to listening and a monthly newsletter about helping your kids become allies, on the website, jamiectorbin.com.