



004: How to Spend According to Your Values with Lauren Greutman (Transcript)

PT:

Hey Lauren. How's it going today?

Lauren Greutman:

Good. Thanks for having me. Always a pleasure.

PT:

Man, I'm excited to talk with you. We get to see each other and hang out at different times during the year at different events and things. It's neat to get to dive into your real financial backstory.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah.

PT:

First question is what's the one thing that you do, maybe that others may not do, that you feel has been the key to your financial success so far?

Lauren Greutman:

I think the biggest thing, honestly, that's been the key to financial success is that I always align my values with where I put my money. For that, we did things so bold as to sell our house because it was just too big for us and it was too much money and we could afford a smaller one. We really no matter what kind of money we make, we still spend the same exact amount. We have a van that has 160,000 miles on it that's falling apart, and I just don't care what anybody thinks about my van. We really I guess have set ourselves apart by just not really caring what other people think and doing what we do.

PT:

Right, but how do you stay tuned into those ... Well, maybe a better question is how'd you figure out what those values were to begin with?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah. I think the biggest thing for me is when we were ... Back years ago when we were in

\$40,000 worth of debt we had a custom-built house. We had 2 brand new cars, but yet we were \$40,000 in debt. When we started looking at the things we were spending our money on, it was like going out to eat, our housing, our vacations, our cars, but yet the things that we valued the most were our faith, our family, our friendships, and financial security. What we were spending our money on was not spending it on any of those things. In fact, it was going against everything that we really valued. We decided to just kind of change our whole lifestyle and say, "Okay, the things that we value are family, so we're going to get a smaller house that we can afford and that we are around each other all the time because we love each other and we want to be around each other." We have 4 kids. Then we value financial security, so we're not going to go and spend extravagantly. We're going to put it in savings so that we don't have to wait until we're 70 to retire. Those are the kind of, I guess the thought process that we had to go through.

PT:

Yeah, yeah. Staying sort of in tune with that, do you do anything regularly to check to make sure you guys are still kind of spending in line with that or living your life in line with those values?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah, we do. We call it the monthly budget night. The last Sunday of every month, Mark and I get together and sit down and hash out our budget together. Then we set up the plan for the whole next month. Before the month even starts, we know exactly where our money's going that month so that nothing is surprising. If something surprising does come up, then we have an emergency fund or savings to kind of help with that. Our month-to-month stuff, that's a regular thing that we do the last Sunday of every month we do the budget night is what we say.

PT:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). For folks who may not feel like there may be a lot of spending in line with their values right now, what would you say to them in terms of how to maybe go about doing that?

Lauren Greutman:

I think the first thing they need to do is number 1, figure out what your values are. You need to write those down somewhere. What are the things you value the most in life, and what your future goals are. A lot of time we have this thing that when we sit down and work with couples I sit down and we call it the financial bucket list. It's a list that sends your values out, separates it into 6 different categories. You write down your values, like financially, retirement, fun, vacations, family. You write down all of your values in these certain categories. Then we both know money isn't just money. It attaches itself to everything in our life. When you write down your goals, then you have to figure out those are the things that are valuable to you. I think people need to figure out what their values are, and then they need to figure out how to change their spending.

In order to change their spending, they have to know how much they're spending, so we always

have people go through and figure out the past 3 months of their spending. Then you can categorize, like, "Okay, I've been spending \$3,000 a month on groceries or whatever. That's obviously not helping me, so I need to cut that down to \$1,000 or whatever because eating out all the time is not a value of mine," unless you wrote it on the paper. Unless you're like a restaurant connoisseur or something.

PT:
Yeah, yeah.

Lauren Greutman:
That's kind of how I teach people how to do it, to figure out where their value system lies and how to align their spending.

PT:
Love it. I'm sure people could find resources for doing that, maybe the monthly checkup or just budgeting in general on your website, right?

Lauren Greutman:
Yeah, we actually have a 15-page budget pack printable that you get when you sign up for our email list. That comes with a spreadsheet and stuff, so it comes with all those worksheets that I'm talking about.

PT:
Cool. Take us back to the beginning, your financial story, that moment you realized you needed to become a master of your money.

Lauren Greutman:
Yeah. This is kind of funny. The moment that I realized, and I'm going to get ... My book, *The Recovering Spender*, is out on bookshelves, but I'm going to get a little deeper than what that book talks about. You get the sneak peek.

PT:
All right.

Lauren Greutman:
I was in a direct sales company called Mary Kay cosmetics. Are you familiar with it?

PT:
Absolutely. I'm here in Dallas. Aren't they headquartered here?

Lauren Greutman:
Yes. Yes, I've been there before for Mary Kay conferences.

PT:
Yeah.

Lauren Greutman:
Have I told you this story before?

PT:
I vaguely remember it, yeah.

Lauren Greutman:
Okay. When I was 23, I joined Mary Kay because I wanted to really focus on making extra money. I was working as a drug and alcohol counselor. I was pregnant and I didn't want to work in that stressful environment, but we needed the extra cash, so I thought, "I'll do Mark Kay." I'm an all or nothing person, so of course I jumped right in and jumped to the top. In 11 months, I won a pink Cadillac.

PT:
Wow.

Lauren Greutman:
I drove it around proudly, but what people don't know is in order to win that pink Cadillac, I had to charge \$10,000 in one night. \$10,000 in one night. Yes, you're hearing that right. Now I had always had an issue with spending years before. I would get us into credit card debt, and it would be like \$2,000, so we'd get our tax return and then just pay it off. That was kind of our system that we would do.

PT:
Right.

Lauren Greutman:
This time was different because now I had \$10,000 of credit card debt that was on top of our other ... I don't even remember exactly how much we had. Probably 5 or 6,000 of credit card debt on top of that. Now we're in like \$16,000 worth of debt. In order to keep up the appearance and everything, my spending just got out of control. I would go shopping all the time. I would get my hair and my nails done. I had no idea how much money we had or what we were doing. We were going out to eat all the time. We were just out of control. Looking back, I say out of control, but I look back and I feel like from the people that I help now, regardless of whether Mark Kay was involved, they're in the same spot just having absolutely no idea where their money's going.

Fast forward. We are now in 2008 and I've had ... No, we're in 2006. I have a 1-year-old child, and my pink Cadillac was just repo'd from my driveway.

PT:
Oh my goodness.

Lauren Greutman:
You did not know that? Yeah.

PT:
No.

Lauren Greutman:
Because I quit the company, because I realize that first of all, it wasn't making me any money even though it was like I was a director. I was head up. I wasn't making a ton of money. I called the company and they came and repo'd the truck while all my neighbors were watching. That was pretty embarrassing to see.

PT:
Yeah.

Lauren Greutman:
We lived in like an upper middle class neighborhood, so everybody was talking. "Did you see her pink Cadillac got wheeled down the driveway?" It was like a big Mack Truck. They didn't just send a little tow truck.

PT:
Of course.

Lauren Greutman:
They sent one of those trucks that carries 15 cars down my little suburban street, so everybody saw it. Anyway, the pink Cadillac gets repo'd and that was the turning point for me where I'm like, "I'm done. I'm just done with all of this. I can't do it anymore." I came clean to mark, my husband, about all the debt. At that time, we were in \$40,000 worth of debt. It had gone from about 15 up to about 40.

PT:
He wasn't aware or he was mildly aware, or just not paying attention?

Lauren Greutman:
I always did the bills. We got married young, at 21. My mom was the one who took care of our family finances, so when we got married, I just took over the finances thinking that's what you do. Now I am not a good numbers person. Well, I am not. I'll take that back. I am now, but back then I wasn't, so I would just miss paying bills all the time and get late fees and bounce checks and spend on the credit card, not realizing how much I was spending. He knew that we were in a little bit of debt, but he had no idea how much debt we were in. I had to come clean to him and

tell him. That was a turning point for me. Then 2 years later, we were debt free. A year after that is when I started my website to teach people how to do exactly what we did to get out of it. I think psychological stuff is really what I like to focus on because for me, as a spender, it's like you have to kind of retrain your brain almost to think a different way.

PT:

Yeah. What kind of changes did you make mentally during that debt payoff, that 2-year payoff, mentally to make that happen? And what were some of the tactical moves you made, too?

Lauren Greutman:

Mentally, this was one of the biggest things that I had to keep telling myself. I talk about this a lot on my website. It's when the pain of staying broke becomes greater than the pain of changing your spending habits, that's when it's going to stick. I had budgeted and failed and budgeted and failed and gone over budget. I was one of those people that tried budgeting 10 times before I actually got it. It got to the point where I was just so sick and tired of playing that game that I was really willing to make the changes that I needed to make. Every time I picked up something, like a lip gloss, I literally would be in a store and be like, "Is this more important than paying my mortgage?" I would really have to make those decisions and say no to myself, which is really hard. Like really hard. In order to make it easier on myself, I had to set up certain boundaries. A lot of these boundaries I actually still do today.

PT:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lauren Greutman:

One of them is I can't go into Target alone. That's boundary number 1. They always say it's like-

PT:

I have that rule, too.

Lauren Greutman:

You do? The gates of heaven open up on me and the Dollar Spot just [drumps 00:11:33] in my cart. I don't go into Target alone. I don't go to certain stores, like IKEA or Hobby Lobby. More recently that I've struggled with is Sephora, which is a makeup store, because I love makeup so much. I set certain boundaries for myself of stores that I just can't go in by myself.

PT:

Right.

Lauren Greutman:

Because if I do, I know that I'm setting myself up for a temptation.

PT:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lauren Greutman:

Those are some of the big things that I did. I stopped using credit cards. We shredded all of our cards in a paper shredder and we went to using just a debit card, checks, and cash. Mostly cash. Actually, when I was doing research for my book, I found this interesting kind of little tidbit. I was doing this research on the brain chemistry of people who overspend versus people that like to be savers. What we found in this research is that people that are spenders actually have a different chemical brain composition than people that are savers. There's this place in the brain called the insula, and it's responsible for danger signals. If you are about to slam your hand in a van door or something like that, your insula will ignite and be like, "Pull your hand out. You're going to get hurt."

PT:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lauren Greutman:

What they found is when the insula kind of triggers, you get yourself out of danger.

PT:

Right.

Lauren Greutman:

What they find is that people that are spenders, they're insulas don't trigger very often. They don't see the danger of their spending when it comes to money. I learned this a few years ago. I'm like, "Okay, there's actually something in my brain that's not working. I need to set boundaries around myself so that I don't get myself into trouble."

PT:

Yeah.

Lauren Greutman:

Regardless of how good I am with money now, I still ... I have a business credit card that we use for business expenses, but I don't have a personal credit card. I don't use it. We use cash and checks, still.

PT:

Part of that, to your process, was there a system you were following? I know a lot of people do Dave Ramsey for debt reduction.

Lauren Greutman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

PT:

Were you doing Dave Ramsey or ... ?

Lauren Greutman:

We started off doing Dave Ramsey. I like some of his principles. There wasn't everything that I 100% agree with, but I do love his cash envelope system.

PT:

Right.

Lauren Greutman:

I really love that, and we use that a lot. That really helped us. The Baby Steps are great. Yeah, and the emergency fund and the debt payoff method. I agree with most of his stuff. We did go through a Dave Ramsey course probably, I don't even know, maybe 10 years ago.

PT:

Okay.

Lauren Greutman:

Then we took the Dave Ramsey course and then we went off the deep end again.

PT:

Right.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah.

PT:

Didn't stick until this last time with the repo, right?

Lauren Greutman:

Right. With the repo, right.

PT:

Man. I've got that image burned into my brain now. The debt piece has been huge for you, getting that knocked out. I know there's probably been some other big financial goals that you've had along the way that you've achieved. Could you talk about something else that you guys have done the past few years?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah. I mean, on top of paying off all of our credit card debt, we paid off all of our student loans. We paid off all of our cars. We have about \$45,000 left to pay on our mortgage.

PT:

Let's talk about that. You mentioned earlier in the conversation about moving into a smaller home.

Lauren Greutman:

Yep.

PT:

Was that during this kind of debt payoff period where you made that decision as well?

Lauren Greutman:

Actually, we had a custom house built for us back in 2005.

PT:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lauren Greutman:

It was right after our house was built, our builder went bankrupt and left half of the development unfinished. This was right around the real estate mortgage crisis. Within 3 months, our house was under water by \$60,000. 3 years later when we decide we want to get out of debt, we realize that we can't sell our house and even pay off our mortgage because we're that under water with out mortgage. During that time, Mark actually found out he was getting laid off from his job and we had to move back to New York. Because of that situation, we were able to qualify for a short sale on our house. We sold that house as a short sale and were able to free and clear pay off the mortgage. We didn't make anything on the sale, but we at least ... I think we might have had to pay \$4,000 or something to get out. We moved into a 800 square foot townhouse, which it was so tiny, but our mortgage went from \$2,200 a month to \$800 a month, including utilities. We freed up almost \$1,400 a month to just attack debt.

PT:

Nice.

Lauren Greutman:

After we rented that townhouse for a year is when we bought our current house. We bought it for under \$100,000. It's a very humble little house, but we just didn't want to spend a lot of money. We have more than half of our mortgage paid off in the past 5 years.

PT:

Wow. That's impressive.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah.

PT:

The willingness to make that move but then also stay aggressive with your payments and stuff.

Lauren Greutman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). One other-

PT:

Go ahead.

Lauren Greutman:

One other big financial thing that I want to talk about is that happened about 2 and a half years ago when my husband was able to quit his job and come home and work with me. That was our biggest thing that because of my blog and using that to generate extra income, it actually was able to make enough so that we run it together now and it's our full-time job. That's been an incredible blessing for us to be able to be together and raise our family together and just pretty much do whatever we want.

PT:

Yeah.

Lauren Greutman:

I love it.

PT:

Yeah, absolutely. That's huge. That's massive, life-changing stuff.

Lauren Greutman:

Yep.

PT:

Give us some perspective. When the car was repo'd, you were technically still doing a little bit with Mary Kay. Were you also working as well still at that point?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah. When the car was repo'd, I actually just quit the company outright.

PT:

Gotcha.

Lauren Greutman:

I was done. Yeah.

PT:

You quit Mark Kay?

Lauren Greutman:

Right.

PT:

Were you still fully employed somewhere else?

Lauren Greutman:

No. Actually, I had to go out and get a job.

PT:

Okay.

Lauren Greutman:

Which was really painful for me. I actually went out and I had a lot of server experience before. I went out and got a job as a waitress at a Ruth's Chris Steakhouse.

PT:

Gotcha.

Lauren Greutman:

I worked 5 or 6 nights a week for about-

PT:

With the newborn at home?

Lauren Greutman:

With a newborn for about a year and a half. I was the only female server in a staff of 21 very rude guys. This is kind of a side note, but I think you'll think this is funny. I was the only girl, and they always would treat me like crap all the time.

PT:

Really?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah, all the time. It was like a good 'ol boys club. I started making pies every Saturday and would come in with 5 homemade pies, and then I was everybody's best friend. I started making good money.

PT:

My goodness. You got first choice at tables those nights.

Lauren Greutman:

Exactly. I did it every single week. We did it for a year and a half. I made pies every week for these guys. Some of them are still good friends now.

PT:

Wow.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah.

PT:

I like pie.

Lauren Greutman:

I'll bring some pies to FinCon next year.

PT:

Okay. That's cool. Mark, your husband, he was doing what during that time? What kind of work was he doing?

Lauren Greutman:

He is an actuary.

PT:

Okay.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah. Lots of numbers, which is funny. He's really good with numbers, so I don't know why the heck he didn't start the budget when we first got married, and love spreadsheets. We're complete opposites. He's a saver, loves numbers, loves spreadsheets, and I'm a spender who hates spreadsheets and doesn't like people telling me what to do.

PT:

Mark obviously was tired of people telling him what to do because he wanted to be home working with you, right?

Lauren Greutman:

Exactly, exactly. It worked out really well.

PT:

Not that you don't still tell him what to do or anything.

Lauren Greutman:

Right. If he was sitting here with me, he'd be like, "Yeah, right."

PT:

Yeah, talk about his choice to try to come home and be working with you there on the site and how you guys have sort of navigated that, because that's a big leap without a steady paycheck coming in.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah. Thankfully my blog had been around for about 4 years and had been making for the previous 2 years about the same as his salary. We were able to pay down our mortgage and make sure that we got all our cars paid off and put a lot in savings. We were done having kids at 3 kids, but then we had a little blessing baby. She was actually colicky. She cried pretty much the first year of her life. I was trying to run the business and he was working. He would leave at 6 in the morning and not come home until 6 at night. He had an hour commute either way. I have 3 other kids at home and I'm working full time on my website. We just had to sit down, and it went back to the value thing again. Is this the life that we want to live? If nothing changes right now, we're going to go crazy. We sat down and talked about it and kind of took a look at my blog income and what we could do and crammed some numbers together and figured out that we could make it work. He put in his notice, and we haven't looked back since.

Yeah, it was in part because we were making the same amount of money, but it was a lifestyle choice for us. We just thought we want to be around our kids as much as we can. He was missing out on them. He was only seeing them maybe an hour a day, and he wanted more. It was a lifestyle change for us.

PT:

Sure.

Lauren Greutman:

I'm so thankful. The first year was hard, but I'm so thankful that we did it.

PT:

Should you have done it sooner?

Lauren Greutman:

I don't know if Mark would have done it sooner, to be honest. I think it was having Abby, our youngest child, that really made him, "This is not working," because it got to the point where it's like, "Mark, if you don't quit your job, I'm selling the website. I can't do it anymore." Then we saw the job is stuck. Your income is stuck. Websites you can grow and grow and make more money and make your own hours, and it just seemed like a better option for us for our family. I don't think he would have quit had it not been for that, "This is what's going to happen if we don't."

PT:

Right. What kind of drastic measures, because obviously when you leave a steady paycheck like that to start living on one income at that point, what measures did you guys take? Did you do a spending freeze? Did you sell some things? How'd you kind of buckle down those initial months, I guess, or did you?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah, you know what? We pretty much have been running the same exact budget for the past maybe 8 or 9 years. You know what, I'll go back to the past 6. When we moved from that big house, we have never been a couple in the past 6 years that if our income goes up we spend more. If our income goes down we spend less. We've been living on the same exact budget for the past 6 years. Really, we're a pretty frugal family. Honestly, we didn't really need to cut back because the lifestyle we were living, we could afford. Like I said, we don't really go on extravagant vacations or spend a ton of money on food. We're pretty simple. We didn't have to change anything, but one of the biggest things we had to figure out was things like life insurance and health insurance. What are we going to do with those kind of things? That was kind of the biggest hurdle we had to overcome, I think.

PT:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). You were already kind of spending at that one income level, it sounds like.

Lauren Greutman:

Exactly. We weren't spending. All of my blog income was going into the bank, pretty much.

PT:

Nice. By that point you had paid off all the debt or most of the debt?

Lauren Greutman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). All the debt.

PT:

With the exception of the mortgage.

Lauren Greutman:

Right.

PT:

With the smaller home.

Lauren Greutman:

Right.

PT:

Now you're moving your way toward knocking that out.

Lauren Greutman:

Exactly.

PT:

Man, so many followup questions. I kind of want to hit on the insurance and health stuff really quick. How did you guys navigate being self employed and not having an employer to provide insurance for you?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah, one of the big things that we did was instead of getting insurance through the marketplace, we use Christian Healthcare Ministries. Our kids were through the state of New York, they have really actual good plans that you can purchase from the state of New York. Our kids are actually on a state program with Fidelis. We might pay \$200 a month or something like that for our kids' insurance. Then we pay \$170 a month for our insurance, that's for both of us, through Christian Healthcare Ministries.

PT:

Excellent.

Lauren Greutman:

It's not actually an insurance plan. I don't know if you've talked about it on the podcast or on your blog, but it's a group sharing plan. For us, we pay \$170 a month, and then we pretty much pay everything out of pocket. If there's an expense that's over \$1,000, an incident, then they cover everything over the \$1,000. Mark actually had an incident a few months ago where we had to call 911 and take him to the hospital. That incident itself was \$8,500. We only paid \$1,000 of it. CHM, with the pool of funds that they have, paid the rest of it. We went that way, and it's been working out beautifully for us.

PT:

Christian Healthcare Ministries. That's Medi-Share, right?

Lauren Greutman:

No, it's a totally different.

PT:

It's a different one. It's a different one.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah. There's Medi-Share, there's Liberty, there's Samaritans.

PT:
Yeah.

Lauren Greutman:
Then there's Christian Healthcare Ministries.

PT:
Okay.

Lauren Greutman:
Each one has a different benefit. We like CHM because we are a business. We can claim it on our taxes as business insurance because we send the money directly into Christian Healthcare Ministries as a company. Places like Samaritans, you send it directly to a person, so you can't claim it on your taxes.

PT:
Gotcha. Makes sense.

Lauren Greutman:
Yeah, so it works better for us.

PT:
I should maybe look into that because we're on Medi-Share.

Lauren Greutman:
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

PT:
Yeah, we can't deduct that.

Lauren Greutman:
Yeah, but you can CHM, which is what we like.

PT:
okay. All right. I'll look into that. I've written about Medi-Share on my site, but hadn't explored too in deep the other options.

Lauren Greutman:
Yeah.

PT:
It's good to hear a positive review of that. Then life insurance, what did you do there?

Lauren Greutman:

We just actually found an independent insurance broker and buyer. She shopped around and got us a really great plan. We just pay life insurance every month. Life insurance is so cheap. I don't even know how much we pay, but I think it's under \$100 a month.

PT:

Okay. Did you-

Lauren Greutman:

We do that.

PT:

A policy for each of you? Or how did you do it?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah, a policy for each of us. It's not whole life. We're not big proponents of whole life, so we do terms. We each have our term policy out on each other. Then we don't have vision or dental. We just pay out of pocket for that. We just keep a savings account that we put money aside for medical stuff, and it just works out better for us.

PT:

Cool. I want to go back to the house that you downsized to because that's attractive to me, and I know that's probably attractive to a lot of people. They may look around their neighborhood and say, "There's really nothing in my neighborhood, in my school district that is a suitable downsize."

Lauren Greutman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

PT:

How did you guys navigate that and get comfortable moving into the type of neighborhood that had more affordable housing?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah. We live in Oswego, New York, which is as far upstate New York as you can get pretty much without going into Lake Ontario. When we were moving back to New York, we looked at a few different options on where to live. Mark is from Oswego and I'm from a place called Saratoga Springs, New York, which has higher housing costs. Mark worked in Syracuse, which is about an hour away from Oswego, and the housing costs were really expensive there as well. When we were looking on where to move to, we really took housing costs into ... We just were like, "Where are we going to be able to live the cheapest?" That was one of the big reasons why we chose to live in Oswego is because we wanted out housing to be really affordable.

Another thing, I think people think like they want to live in a certain neighborhood because of schooling and that kind of thing. I get that. I was like that years ago. We had a gorgeous neighborhood with a gorgeous school and all that stuff. We looked in an older house. Our house was built in 1920. It's almost 100 years old. It's got character, and it's got a lot of things wrong with it cosmetically, but we work on those things and we save up for them, and we do them ourselves. It just feels better for us. I would rather put money in a savings account and save it for retirement than put it into my house and never get it back, really. That was what we had. It was another one of those value things. We wrestled with it. We've even gone house hunting a few times since we've lived in this house. we've lived in it 6 years. It's getting a little tight for us with 4 kids and only 1 bathroom, but every time we go to look at a house, I get sick to my stomach because it just means more money, and I am not willing to pay for that right now.

PT:

Yeah, and you've almost got this one paid off, right?

Lauren Greutman:

Exactly. Our kids know nothing different. They just don't know anything different. They're friends are all there. We live across from a park. They really put it in perspective for us. I think last time we went house hunting was a year and a half ago. Our son even said to us, "Why are we getting a house? This one's fine. We don't need a new one. All my friends are there." We're like, "Okay. We're done." We think a little a little bit about it, and then we go look, and we're like, "I just don't want to spend money on that. I'd rather go to Spain or something."

PT:

Yeah.

Lauren Greutman:

Travel. I don't know. It's just not a value of ours, I guess.

PT:

Right. Your kids are ... What's the youngest one's age now?

Lauren Greutman:

She's 3.

PT:

3.

Lauren Greutman:

We have 11, 7, 5, and 3.

PT:

Okay, cool. You've got 15 years you're kind of staring down here. I'm in the same boat, so I can say that.

Lauren Greutman:

Yep.

PT:

Of sort of having them ... They are in public school, right?

Lauren Greutman:

No, actually we went them to a small private Christian school.

PT:

Small private, but you're totally satisfied with the school and you see them being part of that going forward?

Lauren Greutman:

Yep.

PT:

You see yourself sort of in this same mode for the next 15 years or so, I would say?

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah, definitely. We actually work with an independent guy to help us with our investments and stuff now.

PT:

Okay.

Lauren Greutman:

He kind of helps manage our investments. Our goal now is to be able to put aside half of our income every year to be able to retire if we wanted to in 10 years. I know that that's not the average person, you know what I mean? I'm very well aware that that's not the average person, but I also think that we've worked so hard to get to where we are right now that we could go afford a bigger house and have brand new cars and all that stuff, but we just ... Why? For who?

PT:

Right.

Lauren Greutman:

To impress who? I don't know. We're fine with what we have. We feel very thankful that we're not stuck in this starter home kind of mentality that people think, like, "This is a great starter home." Yeah, but what if it's my only home? That's okay, right?

PT:
Absolutely.

Lauren Greutman:
Yeah.

PT:
Let's talk a little bit more about the future goal then. You mentioned potentially retiring in 10 years. You could potentially be retired even before your kids finish high school.

Lauren Greutman:
Right.

PT:
Or have the option to retire.

Lauren Greutman:
Have the option. I don't think I'll ever retire because I'm just a busy bee.

PT:
Right.

Lauren Greutman:
But the option to retire if we wanted to in 10 years.

PT:
Right, right. That means traveling as much with the kids during the summer months or breaks. Yeah, that's cool.

Lauren Greutman:
Yeah, and on top of that, be able to fully fund our kids' college 529 plans so that they don't graduate with this crushing student loan debt.

PT:
Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lauren Greutman:
That's definitely a job of ours, and to be able to teach our kids from the mistakes that we've made is really a goal of ours, too, to pass it on. I think that they get it. We talk about it all the time. We have big goals, but we know that if we work hard ... I think so many times people get stuck in their current financial situation that they can't feel like they can ever change. That's just not true. There are so many opportunities out there now to work and make extra money. That

pain of staying broke has to go away because there's so many opportunities out there.

PT:

I love that. Let's share with folks, if you have them, more tools and services that you use or have used kind of along the way to help you obviously it sounds like you've developed some of your own stuff along the way.

Lauren Greutman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

PT:

What kind of tactical tools and services do you guys use on a regular basis?

Lauren Greutman:

Okay. One of the things that we use ... There's a few different things. We actually just switched to using Tiller. Are you familiar with Tiller at all?

PT:

I've heard of it, yeah.

Lauren Greutman:

Okay. What we love about this is that every day you can ... Tiller is a spreadsheet, kind of customized spreadsheet. Every day our bank account transactions from that day go into a spreadsheet at a certain time every day. Then it categorizes them for you. You can easily keep track of your finances without having to go through and make your own spreadsheet. They'll make one for you and customize it and everything. We use that to kind of balance out monthly budget. I actually developed ... I don't have one right in front of me, but a planner that is like a personal finance planner. We use that keep track of our schedules and what we're having for dinner. We're big proponents of meal planning. We use that. That's called the Personal Finance Planner. Some other things that we use: we have some accounts in Betterment for investing. For life insurance, I don't even remember what we have for life insurance. We use an independent person for life insurance. I'm trying to think of what else. Christian Healthcare Ministries. Good 'ol cash is what we use the most, honestly. We just do a lot on pen and paper and shared Google docs as well.

PT:

How'd you find the financial planner that you use?

Lauren Greutman:

I made it.

PT:

No, not the book planner. The advisor that you use.

Lauren Greutman:

The advisor? We've been watching him for a couple of years. He's a friend of a friend. We've been spying on him for a few years to see how well he does. We've had a couple recommendations from people that know him, so that's how we use him as well.

PT:

Cool.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah.

PT:

Switching gears a little bit, obviously you've become a financial pro here and built an entire brand around being a financial expert. If you had to pick one thing and say, "This is kind of an area where I still kind of suck at from personal finance," what would you say it would be?

Lauren Greutman:

Goodness. I thought you were going to say one part where I'm really good at. I wasn't prepared for the "suck at" question. I think the big thing for me is that I still can't use credit cards. There's so many people that do all this credit card churning and points and free airlines and all that kind of ... I just cannot do that. I just know my weakness, and so I just know that I just can't do this. That's one thing that I really suck at is being able to use a credit card and use it for my benefit. I just don't even touch it.

PT:

Yeah, yeah. But you look for other ways to get rewards in your life, surely, from your spending.

Lauren Greutman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

PT:

Can you maybe talk about some of those things you do.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah.

PT:

Whether that's using a coupon site or whether that's using some kind of reward site.

Lauren Greutman:

I use Swagbucks.

PT:
Okay.

Lauren Greutman:
I use that as my search engine and also take surveys and stuff through there, and I shop through there whenever I'm shopping. At this point, I already have \$400 in Swagbucks in my account that I'm saving-

PT:
From how long? How long has that been?

Lauren Greutman:
From this past year.

PT:
Gotcha. Is that typical about what you can earn?

Lauren Greutman:
I would say yeah.

PT:
4 or 500 a year?

Lauren Greutman:
I would say around 4 or 500 a year. I keep it in there, and then I cash it out for gift cards for Christmas.

PT:
That's nice. That's a good Christmas cash there.

Lauren Greutman:
Exactly. I do that for Christmas savings. I already have my Christmas money already set aside, and I don't have to worry about it. I'm trying to think of what other things that I use. I coupon. I still do. I don't coupon as much as I used to. I love Aldi. Do you have Aldi there?

PT:
Oh yeah.

Lauren Greutman:
Okay, yeah. That's my favorite. That's my favorite place on Earth. We love that.

PT:
You can go there by yourself.

Lauren Greutman:

I can go to Aldi by myself, yes. That's fine. Sometimes I'm like, the special buys, I'm like, "I can't buy that. It's not on my list. Can't buy it." I do use some of those. I use certain apps. I can pull up my phone right now. I use ibotta.

PT:

Yeah.

Lauren Greutman:

Checkout 51 and this app called the Flipp app. The Flipp app has all ... You can compare prices across stores. If you're at Walmart and you're like, "Hmm, I wonder if this is cheaper at Aldi," you can just search and see between the stores. I use that. To get coupon match-ups for stores that I shop at, I use this app called Favado.

PT:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lauren Greutman:

That's F-A-V-A-D-O. When I'm trying to find deals we do that.

PT:

Were you a Perk Street user when it was out?

Lauren Greutman:

No. No, I wasn't.

PT:

Someone needs to come up with a debit card reward program again.

Lauren Greutman:

Yes, I know. I know, they really do.

PT:

You should do that.

Lauren Greutman:

I should do that? Why not? I'll add it to my list, right? There's also this new cool app, which I really like. It's called ProActive Budget.

PT:

Yeah.

Lauren Greutman:

I actually met them at FinCon, and I've been looking into it because it's kind of like the cash envelope system, but with a debit card attached to it. I think we're going to try it out because sometimes it's frustrating when you use cash that ... Mark is already at the store and he didn't know he had to get this one thing, but he doesn't have the cash envelope for whatever, so then he has to come home and get it. That might be something. We're looking into that.

PT:

Yeah, we've heard a lot of recommendations for that new tool.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah.

PT:

Look out for that. Looking back over this past several years, making these changes way back in the car repo days.

Lauren Greutman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

PT:

Moving houses and kind of all the financial ups and downs you guys have had, how do you feel about it all now looking back?

Lauren Greutman:

I feel incredibly grateful, honestly. I think I'm a big believer that if you used you mess the right way, you can really turn it into a message to help other people. With how many people come to our website every day and how many emails I get every day of people feeling like they can really relate to me, because I'm a different kind of finance expert. I'm a spender. I'm someone that's not typically good with money but yet has found a way to teach others how to be good with money, even though we're not naturally good with money. The people that read my book and say, "I've never been able to talk to a finance expert that I feel like gets me, and I get you." That, to me, I feel like everything that we went through and learned is all for a purpose. I'm incredible grateful for it because now we get to live our life to teach people exactly what we've gone through. That is the greatest blessing to me that I really get to pass on the information and be a voice for people that feel like they can never, you know ... No one can ever relate to them. That's really awesome. I'm incredibly grateful.

I embarrass myself sometimes sharing too much information about my past spending stuff, like shoplifting and all that jazz that I used to do, but it'd good. I try to be really real with people that come to my website and read my stuff, and be like them. I'm very grateful.

PT:

Well, I'm grateful for you for being on the show and for sharing your story. I know it's going to help a lot of folks. Keep doing what you're doing. I love it. I mean, it's the whole point of my podcast is to have these conversations because I really earnestly believe this is what creates change.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah.

PT:

It's what's worked in my life as well is having these frank conversations about money and kind of tearing down the walls that separate us from being educated about it.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah.

PT:

Thanks for being part of it.

Lauren Greutman:

Thanks for having me.

PT:

Yeah. Where can folks find out more about you and maybe that shoplifting story you just dropped on me there?

Lauren Greutman:

Surprise.

PT:

Yeah.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah, I talk actually about that story in detail in my book, which is called The Recovering Spender. People can find me at laurengreutman.com. On there they can download that printable budget pack that I told you about and also we have tons of articles. I have a YouTube channel and a Facebook page, and I do Facebook Live and all that kind of stuff. Then they can check out the planner at thepersonalfinanceplanner.com.

PT:

Good stuff. I'm sure they will.

Lauren Greutman:

Yeah, thanks so much.

PT:

Thanks, Lauren.