

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

02 The Imperfect Real Life

You're listening to episode 2 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. Today we are discussing our real lives, and how we can remain encouraged and inspired when our lives aren't perfect. And how when we share our real lives with one another, we all benefit!

I wanted to start out this episode by asking the question, "Is your life perfect?" But, I already knew how you'd answer. You and I live in a broken world, so I know your life isn't perfect. And you know mine isn't either.

This reality of us living imperfect lives recently allowed me to recall a friendship from my past. This friend appeared to the outside world as if she was living the perfect life. She had the perfect home, the perfect clothes, the perfect spouse (according to her), and the perfect children (also according to her). She had everything. Or so it seemed. On the outside it appeared she was living the perfect life, and for a time I secretly envied her and her life.

But as I got to know her better, I began to discover her life wasn't perfect. I began to see she was one miserable person. Trying to keep up the façade of perfection, she was stressed, unhappy, and worn out. She never seemed to let her guard down, nor allowed anyone to see through her polished exterior.

Not surprisingly, but sadly, our paths grew apart as we continued to have less and less in common. But I haven't forgotten what her life and her example taught me. 1) No one's life is perfect, no matter how it may appear; 2) no one is exempt from real life, no matter how hard we try to avoid it; 3) living an imperfect real life is much better than living a pretend life.

What is a real life, anyway? Oxford Languages defines it as, "life as it is lived in reality, involving unwelcome as well as welcome experiences, as distinct from a fictional world." I think my friend was trying to live in a fictional world.

Maybe you've experienced something similar. Maybe someone you know appears to be living the perfect life. And quite possibly you wonder, *what's wrong with me?* Even though deep down you know no one has the perfect life, you begin to wonder *why is my life not perfect?*

Well, if your life is anything like mine, we wake up in bad moods, or the frig quits working as it's full of food or when company is coming over, or the car breaks down on the highway, or you made a big mistake at work, or you can't seem to get it together, or whatever the "it" is. We want life to be perfect, don't we? But, some days it's far from it.

No one's life is perfect. Not mine. Not yours. Not your neighbor's down the street. And neither is that person's life who appears to be perfect so on social media.

I'm reminded of what Jesus said in John 16:33b, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (NIV) We will experience trouble in this world. We can't avoid it. If Jesus told us all we will have trouble in this world, it will be so. He didn't say just Julie and no one else will have trouble, or [insert your name] and no one else will have trouble. No. He said we will all have trouble.

What we can do, however is to cling to the promise of that verse. Jesus has overcome the world. Another version says, "I have power over the world." (WE)

So, this says to me no matter what happens in my imperfect life or in this world, Jesus has the power to overcome it. This gives me such hope. This helps me live out this real life, in all reality.

So, I guess we're all normal if we live an imperfect real life, right?

So, if your imperfect real life seems a bit messy or mixed up or mishmashed, you're in good company. The thing is, you're not alone in your imperfect real life, and neither am I in mine. Not only are we in this together, but we can trust Jesus is with us as well. That same verse reminds us how Jesus said to "take heart!" That means "to gain courage or confidence; to begin to feel better and more hopeful." (Merriam Webster) So to summarize this verse: be encouraged, He has power over the world.

I believe when we share our imperfect real lives with others, they begin to understand they aren't alone. So, we don't always have to look perfect or be perfect on social media. I say it's okay for others to see we are real people, just like them. That we don't wake up with perfect hair and makeup on. That our homes get messy, and our laundry baskets are often full. We burn the grilled cheese and some of our dinners are flops. We have weeds in our gardens (or at least I do) and our homes aren't always pinterest-perfect.

I'm reminded of a post I saw from Beth Moore in Instagram yesterday. She took a photo of herself with a shower cap on her head to protect her hair from the Texas humidity as she was out in her garden. And she posted it! Yes! Beth Moore doesn't have the perfect life either, and she's willing to share that with us.

When someone sees us make a mistake or sees how we might not have it all together, they likely breathe a sigh of relief, realizing they are not the only ones living an imperfect real life. Not that we want to go around sharing our bad news and blunders, no. But doing so in the right setting, in the right context can help another. And it helps us seem more relatable, too.

This is why I chose the tagline Real Encouragement for Real Life on my website and the name Encouragement for Real Life for my podcast. Because our real lives are something we have in common, even though they may be vastly different. We each are blessed to live the lives we've been given, even in the imperfectness of it all.

This is also why I'm found on social media talking often about being real in this life. Real is refreshing. Real is inviting. Real is freeing. When we can remove the masks we attempt to hide behind and just be who we are, real and authentic and transparent, life becomes an adventure. It's no longer something in which we must strive to keep up a certain standard or appearance.

I believe being real with one another brings out the best in each other. And it often opens a door to connection as we find out we aren't alone in our issues, and we have more in common with each other than what we first thought.

Framing our lives in this perspective can help us embrace an imperfect real life. After all, God gives us these lives to live for our growth, for the good of others, and for His glory. Each moment is a gift from our Creator. We can trust He has good things in store for us. We can trust He has good plans for our lives. And we can trust He has us in the palm of His hand. No matter how imperfect our lives are.

I still pray for that friend when she comes to mind. I pray for God's presence and peace in her life. Maybe she's moved on from living that kind of life. I hope so and pray so. And you know? That's a good thing we can each do is pray for those whose lives appear perfect. We may never know what hidden battle they may be fighting. And we may be the only ones praying for them.

This isn't about comparing ourselves to one another or competing with one another. This is about embracing who we are, living a real, transparent, authentic life, and allowing others to see we don't have it all together. Allowing the connection between one another.

So, friend, let's embrace our imperfect real lives together. May we share them with each other. May we be authentic and transparent with one another. And may we always thank God for our imperfect, yet beautiful, real lives.

Julie Lefebvre