

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

You're listening to Episode 6 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. Welcome back, friend. I'm glad you're here. In this episode we're discussing even though you and I and everyone else on this earth were created differently, our differences, especially as of late, have become a barrier in many of our relationships. Our differences, designed to be blessings, have somehow become obstacles. I'm ready to change that. How about you, friend? Can our differences make us better and not bitter? Let's get right into this week's episode.

In our church staff meeting a couple weeks ago I voiced to my coworkers my frustration with humanity. I felt I was at my end. I shared how I was (and still am) weary of how we as a people as a whole are letting the things of this world get in the way of loving each other. We don't have to look too far to witness division, hate, blame, and resentment between people. Our social feeds are full of it, as well as the headlines, our families, our churches, and our communities. It all makes me so very sad.

What ever happened to love your neighbor as yourself? And love God and love others? And treat others as we want to be treated? Why do we not live by these ideals, these God-given commands anymore?

After I spewed my feelings to my coworkers that morning, I vowed to myself and to God that I would not partake in the common ways of hate or division in this world. That I would choose to love Him and others, no matter how hard that might be.

Because truly, it doesn't matter to me if you're vaccinated or unvaccinated.

Or if you're a Republican or Democrat or belong to a certain political party. Or what color your skin is. I could care less about your socioeconomic status, what church you attend, or even if you attend one. It also doesn't matter to me if you are "conservative" or "progressive," or if you stay at home or if you work outside the home. And it also doesn't make one bit of difference to me if we share the same faith or not. (Of course, I would love for you to share my faith, but I will still be your friend if you don't.)

The thing is, I don't believe we have to be alike to be friends. We don't have to agree on everything to be nice to each other. I believe we can accept our differences and be better because of them. Not worse.

Call me strange, but I believe our differences make us better. They don't need to make us bitter.

Why do I believe that? Well, because God made each one of us different. We are each unique. No two of us are the same. I talked a bit about that in last week's episode, episode 5. So why do we either consciously or unconsciously expect for all of us to be all the same? Why do we think everyone should act like we do or look like we do or believe the same way we do? Why do we think others should have the same opinions as us, or follow the same guidelines as us? Because we're different, that's not going to happen.

Yet instead of believing our differences makes us better and embracing our diversity, we consider anyone who is different than us to be an enemy. Now, I know I'm generalizing here. Not all of us do this.

But you know as well as I do, we see this prevalent throughout our world today. But, friend, it doesn't have to be this way.

I believe there's a better way.

You and I may not be able to change the world, but we can certainly change how we live. We can change our thoughts and attitudes, which impact how we live. We can choose to live in a way that embraces differences. To believe our differences make us better. We can listen without getting offended, choose love instead of hate, and intentionally see beyond our differences to accept one another. It's okay to be different. It's a blessing to be different. Imagine how boring this world would be if we were all the same, believed the same, acted the same, and thought the same? No thank you.

We were designed to do life together. To be in community with one another. To spur each other on and to bless each other. When we embrace our differences, we learn, we grow, we mature. And God grows us and matures us to make us more like His Son, Jesus.

Can vaccinated and unvaccinated friends still sit across the table from one another over a couple cups of coffee? I say yes. Can a Democrat and a Republican have a calm and enlightening conversation about politics? I say yes. Or how about a Christian and an Ashiest taking a walk together, sharing their life experiences as they walk? Absolutely. These may be silly questions, but in all reality, are these kinds of situations happening today? I hope so.

Our differences make us better. They don't need to make us bitter.

So, friend, I have a challenge for us. That is if we choose to accept it. It's based on Romans 12:2:

Do not be shaped by this world; instead be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect.

Romans 12:2 NCV

I challenge us to change our thinking. Do we consider others who think, believe, and act differently than us our enemies? Do we treat them negatively or avoid them all together? Sometimes we don't realize our behavior until we pause and ponder.

I can't help but think of how Jesus lived. He didn't hang out with those like Him, because in all actuality, no one was like Him! He ate with sinners and tax collectors (tax collectors were considered the worst). He talked with Samaritans (they weren't acceptable to Jews back then). Jesus intentionally sought out the sick, the disturbed, those who didn't believe in Him or His message. Who do you think He'd hang around with if He was here today? His example challenges us.

Friend, I invite us all to be a little more like Jesus.

To refuse to allow our differences to separate us, and to change our thinking with the reality that our differences make us better. May we intentionally do life with those who don't think like us or believe the same as us. May you and I be the first ones to befriend others who are different than us. Because really, we have more in common than we think we do.

I know this may not be easy, and I also know it's vastly different than what the rest of the world is doing. It's counter cultural. But in doing so, I believe it will make a big difference, a lasting impact. It can start a ripple effect that cannot be stopped. And the thing is, when we live this way, not only will our corners of the world become a brighter, more beautiful place, it might inspire another to do the same. And that, my friend, can bring about change.

Our differences make us better. They don't need to make us bitter.

So, friend, what's one way you and I can live this out today? What's one change we can implement regarding our relationships? We may need to pause and think about this. Me? I know I can do better, but I'm willing to do what it takes to love others more effectively. I'm asking God to help me see others as He sees them, and for Him to give me His love for those who are different than me.

Change is difficult. But with God's help, I know it can be done. May all we do be done in love (1 Corinthians 16:14).

I invite you over to our Encouragement for Real Life Community Facebook group. We're talking more about this over there today. You'll find the link in the show notes. If this episode was helpful or encouraging for you, please rate, review, and share it so others can be encouraged as well.

Thanks for being here friend. You make this world a better place. God bless you.

Julie Lefebvre