

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

You're listening to episode 7 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. Hello, friend! Welcome back. In this episode we are peering into the reality that sometimes letting go of something in our lives is for the best, yet it may not be easy. I share a personal story of when I recently let go of something that was a part of my life for many years. If you've just let something go, or if you're contemplating doing so, I pray my experience encourages you. I invite you to journey with me in this episode as we find help and hope and a whole lot of encouragement in the process of letting go. Let's get to it.

Friend, are you pondering letting go of something in your life?

Do you believe it's time to step away from a certain activity or habit or circumstance? Are you facing a decision about letting go of something that's meant much to you for a long time? Or have you already let something go, and you wonder, *now what?* Does life feel a bit weird or empty without it? Or have you been forced to let something go, like a job or an opportunity? Not to mention letting go of your child as he or she begins preschool, or Kindergarten, or moves into college this year?

Letting-go moments like these can be filled with all sorts of emotions and feels, both good and not so good. If you're in this place, my friend, you have many walking alongside of you.

A friend of mine recently handed over her "keys" to the ministry she started a number of years ago because God is opening other doors for her. That was a tough letting go, accompanied with many tears. Another friend said goodbye to a job and coworkers she loved to accept another position she prayed would open. Again, a difficult letting go with mixed emotions. Yet, another friend moved her oldest son to college for the first time last month. She's excited for him, but she's struggling in letting him go.

Friend, no matter what you're letting go of, or have already let go, it's likely not an easy thing to do. Letting go can be difficult. Letting go isn't for the faint of heart. It will likely take effort. It may grow you and stretch you. And it may turn life a little upside-down for a season.

Because, oftentimes, what follows letting go is a time of transition.

A time where the letting go causes whatever it is to be absent from our lives. Sometimes we experience a void which can lead us to feelings we're not sure about. Life can feel weird, unfamiliar, and unknown.

Remember back in episode 4 when we discussed Living Overwhelmed? In that episode I referenced a story about how I was feeling overwhelmed with my schedule for this fall. (I invite you to listen to it if you haven't already.) If you don't mind, I'd like to share the entire story with you, because I think it's one God can use to encourage us.

To recap, looking ahead to this fall, my schedule was full of all good things. In examining it, however, I couldn't imagine doing it all, let alone attempting to do it all well.

I felt something had to change... I just wasn't sure what.

In July it was clear God was prompting me to step away from leading our small women's group at church on Monday evenings, so I resigned my position as leader. But still, my schedule was crammed full. I care for our grandson two days a week. Committed to my leadership role in Bible Study Fellowship, I would serve our class those same two days in which I would take our grandson with me. I'm the Director of Communication for our church and work in that role part-time. I'm writing a book. I was starting a podcast and a new Facebook group. I had committed to fall speaking opportunities. And I was working on plans for restarting my in-person quarterly events.

See what I mean? It was all good stuff.

Adding it all up, however, it was a bit too much.

So, I asked God for direction. *Was I to let go of something? Was I to forge ahead with all of it?* And I prayed something like this:

"God, thank you for the opportunity to serve You and others through these many ways. I don't see how I can do all of these, yet I don't want to walk away from any of them. I want to do what You want me to do. If I'm to keep them all, then I know You'll equip me. But if I'm not, please show me what I need to let go of. I desire Your will, not mine. Lord, if I don't hear anything from You, I'll continue my schedule as is. I completely trust You. In Jesus' name. Amen."

I prayed it often and waited. I prayed it some more and waited.

Surprisingly on an ordinary Monday, August 2 at 9:38 a.m. to be exact, while I was feeding our grandson, God answered and made it crystal clear what I was to do. That was to let go of my leadership role in Bible Study Fellowship. *Wait, what?? God, You're asking me to step away from serving You in this way? But this is all I've known for years.*

This direction may not seem like a big deal to most, but to me it felt like I would be cutting out a piece of me. After all, I have been a BSF leader for 21 years. God matured me through the study of His Word through BSF. He taught me leadership skills and communication skills I couldn't have learned anywhere else. He taught me how to study the Bible and apply it to my life through BSF. And He helped me teach my children the Bible through their children's programs.

And now I was to let all of that go?

Yep, I was.

This is how it went down. As I was feeding my grandson, Nolan, some apple, pear, broccoli puree, my thoughts were naturally focused on him. On a typical Monday morning through the school year, I have a meeting for BSF, and in a matter of weeks it would be resuming. As I gave Nolan another spoonful, I got to thinking. If that morning would have been a BSF morning, Nolan would have missed this meal and he would have missed his early morning nap. Plus, an hour earlier I would have been racing out the door with him trying to get there on time. You know? I've been there and done that with our children. I'm not willing to do that with Nolan.

A surprising and brief thought then slipped into my mind, and I silently asked God, "Am I to give up BSF leadership?" And unexpectedly, a peace immediately washed over me. I knew the answer. I didn't hear God's audible voice, but I felt His peace. Just to be sure I wasn't missing it, as I gave Nolan another

spoonful, I changed up my thinking and thought all the thoughts about continuing to serve in that leadership role this year, and as I did, anxiety and a dread-filled heaviness overcame me. This confirmed the answer.

Letting go was the answer.

It was the best answer because it was God's answer.

But it was a difficult answer for me to swallow and a worse one to share with those near me. And each time I shared it, I questioned. *Did I really hear from God? Was this really what I was to do? Twenty-one years is a long time. This routine is all I've known. How will I function without it?* BSF was a part of me. Kind of like a band-aid that's been stuck on for a long time. Ripping it off hurts. Tearing it away from our bodies doesn't feel good. We've simply gotten used to it being there and life feels a bit strange without it.

But that doesn't mean the band-aid needs to stay on forever. Because once we remove it, we begin to get used to it not being there. And sometimes removing it is the best thing for us.

Letting go is okay. Letting go can bring growth. And letting go might allow something even better to come into our lives. Even though it's difficult and far from easy, letting go may be God's best for us. Because whatever God has planned for our lives, it's better than sticking with what we've always done if He's leading us elsewhere.

What's that saying, "If God leads you to it, He will lead you through it."

If God calls us to let go, He will lead us through it.

When the doubts and uncertain thoughts crept in and when I questioned if I was doing the right thing, one truth continued to comfort me: God has good plans for my life and all I need to do is to trust Him.

Proverbs 3:5-6 is one scripture I continue to read often.

Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track.

Proverbs 3:5-6 MSG

I trust God will keep me on track.

Bible Study Fellowship began last week without me in their leadership circle. I miss it, and it's an adjustment transitioning to a role of class member. Yet, I still feel God's peace about my decision. The decision He guided me to make. I don't question it anymore. And actually, excitement has replaced the uncertain feelings. I feel a kind of "holy freedom" I haven't felt in some time.

This has led me to three conclusions:

1. I've shared this one before. God will reveal His plans for our lives in the right time and in a way we will understand. He won't make us guess.
2. God's plans for our lives are always best, even when we don't understand them and even when they are not easy. We can trust He knows what He's doing.

3. God extends His peace to us--a peace that surpasses all understanding--when we follow His leading. Oftentimes His peace is the indication we know we are smack-dab in the center of His will for our lives. And friend, that's the very best place to be.

Are you contemplating letting go of something, friend?

Is God calling you to step away from something in your life? Or have you let go of something recently? Please know I am praying for you. Even though it may not be easy, and it may feel as if you're removing a piece of yourself, if God is calling you to do it, He will meet you in it and guide you through it. I pray He gives you His discernment, His wisdom, and His peace.

And if you're learning how to let go of a child to school or college, my heart is with you. Speaking from experience, that one is a tough one, but God will help you loosen those heart strings one at a time. He will replace your heartache with His peace. Stay close to Him in this season, my friend.

In next week's episode we will pick up from here as we discuss thriving through seasons of transitions. If you're in a season of transition, you won't want to miss this episode. Invite your friend who's in one to listen, too.

If you are encouraged through this episode, I invite you to rate it and leave a review. And we are discussing letting go in our Encouragement for Real Life Community Facebook group all week long. Come on over to join the most encouraging place on the internet! The link is in the show notes.

Thank you for joining me here today, friend. God bless you.

Julie