

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

13. Help and Hope for Discouraging Days

You are listening to episode 13 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. Thank you for being here. How are you today? I pray you are well and are staying encouraged. Last week I was a bit overwhelmed as I witnessed many in my path who were feeling quite discouraged. I knew this had to be subject of my next episode on the podcast. So, here we are today, talking about discouragement, and how to find help and hope for the discouraging days of our real lives.

Because we all know we have them, right? We try to avoid those kinds of days like the plague, and we wish somehow our avoidance would one day pan out. So, if you're experiencing discouragement today, or have recently, I pray our time together here blesses you. And if you're living encouraged right now, may you share this episode with someone who could use some help and hope in her life today. So, let's spend a few minutes together to find encouragement for our real lives right now.

Yes, so how are you today?

How is life in your corner of this world? So often when someone asks how we are, we politely reply, "I'm fine" or "I'm good." Then to avoid any further inquiries, we quickly spin the conversation back to focus on the other person by asking the same. "How are you?" (Or, am I the only one who unintentionally does this?) Because sometimes we just can't tell the whole story or we'll end up in a puddle of tears right where we are. And some days we don't have the energy to share how we are really doing or we don't care to go into all of the details. Right?

Well, friend, I truly care about how you are. You don't need to recite the typical "I'm fine" answer here. You can answer honestly today. Now, I know you can't respond to me directly through the podcast, but if you could, how would you answer? If nothing else, answer honestly to yourself.

Part of living a real life means not all days are butterflies and rainbows. Not all days are sunshine and roses. We know real life is a mixture of discouraging days and hope-filled days. And quite frankly, discouragement appears to be aplenty these days. Many of us are walking through tough times. Discouragement might be moving in and taking up residency in our minds and hearts. We wonder *will it ever get better?* On top of this, some of us may feel unloved, alone, forgotten, unworthy. Life has gotten too serious, too monotonous, too overwhelming.

If this is you today, may it first help to acknowledge you're not the only one feeling this way. Sometimes it helps knowing others are right here with you. Not so long ago someone's negative and destructive words directed at me affected me and my life in such a damaging way. This person had no business saying the words that were said, as this acquaintance really didn't know me. This acquaintance didn't know my circumstances, nor my past. This person chose to look from the outside in and made assumptions that led to words that were unwarranted. It's no wonder I became disheartened and discouraged for days. All because of someone's hurtful and damaging words.

So, I understand the reality of discouragement. Discouragement is real. And it's one tool the enemy of our souls likes to use against us. Because if he can discourage us, he can devastate us. If he can keep us down with discouragement, then you and I won't be any sort of threat or problem to him. In fact, I believe discouragement is one of the enemy's tools many of us have surrendered to. We just may not be consciously aware of it. We'll continue this line of thinking and dig into this a little deeper in next week's episode. So stay tuned.

What do we do in the midst of discouraging days?

Well, if you're finding yourself discouraged, or have experienced a string of discouraging days, let's together seek some help and hope. Let's cling to truth and shed some light on the darkness of discouragement. Because we know what light does to darkness right? It dispels it. Light breaks through darkness. Just look what a flashlight does in the dark. It shines to light our way.

So, let's find some light today. Let's look at life through a different lens. Through a lens of hope and promise. And I can't think of a better way to do that than through scripture. And the one I'm thinking of is one of my favorites! It lifts my spirits me when discouragement sets in.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9 NIV

Did you catch that? The Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. There's no place we can go that God is not with us. He is with us always. Even when we don't think He is. Even when we forget He is. And yes, even when we feel alone, forgotten, unloved, or unworthy. This is one truth that sheds light into the darkness of discouragement. Why? Because if God is with us, we have every reason to be encouraged. We have every reason to have hope. Why is that? Because God is the God of hope.

This leads me to the second verse that encourages my heart in discouraging days.

May the God of your hope so fill you with all joy and peace in believing [through the experience of your faith] that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound *and* be overflowing (bubbling over) with hope. Romans 15:13 AMPC (Amplified Bible, Classic Edition)

The antidote, the remedy for discouragement is hope. When you and I have the hope that comes from God, discouragement may come knocking, but the door to our hearts remain securely closed in that hope. And the thing is, the closer to God we get, the more hope we have.

That's why it's so important for you and me to talk to God daily in prayer. To read scripture. To keep our eyes fixed on God and not our circumstances. It's important to hang out with others who point you back to God. And it's imperative to allow Jesus to infuse our hearts, minds, and souls with eternal truths. Truths that continue to spur us on when discouragement tries to set in.

Hope is what keeps us encouraged.

So, if you're feeling discouraged today, friend, I invite you to give that discouragement to Jesus. This may seem silly, but here is how I do this. And I actually learned it from my Christian therapist. (Yes, just like a see a doctor for my physical health, I see a therapist for my mental and emotional health.) Here's the tool I suggest to use. In your mind, put that discouragement in some sort of container. Put the lid on it

and hand it over to Jesus. Tell Him it is His to handle because you don't want it any longer. Give it completely over to Him. Picture it all in your mind. Then thank Him for taking it.

It may sound silly, but friend, this works. Some days we just need to hand over the things that we can't or aren't expected to handle on our own. And sometimes that's done by mentally doing that to release us of the burden we've been carrying for far too long.

When I do this I mentally put whatever is oppressing me into an old suitcase with pink interior. I then visualize carrying the suitcase down my driveway, hand it off to Jesus, and He takes it. This mental activity frees me up and allows me to let go of whatever I'm struggling with... discouragement, someone's destructive words, old habits, etc. I used this tool in the scenario I mentioned a few minutes ago in regards to the hurtful words spoken to me. I pictured throwing each and every hurtful word into that suitcase. Then closed it, walked it down our driveway, and handed it to Jesus. Those words have no more power over me anymore. Why? Because Jesus has them. Not me.

You and I don't need to carry discouragement or anything else oppressive one minute longer. Find a way to do this that makes sense to you. I believe it'll make a big difference for you like it has for me.

Hope is also found in prayer.

Have you ever finished talking with God and found yourself feeling more hopeful than before you prayed? That's what happens when we pray. God fills us with hope when we talk to Him. So, whatever your situation or with whatever you are feeling discouraged, talk to God about it. It doesn't have to be fancy or formal. Just have a conversation with Him like you would a friend. Tell Him about your discouraging days and how you are feeling. Ask Him to fill you with hope and to encourage your heart. And watch Him do what only He can do.

Then we turn our thoughts to Philippians 4:8.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Philippians 4:8 NIV

Hope influences our thoughts which encourages our hearts.

Just because we may have had a string of discouraging days, it doesn't mean we need to keep experiencing them. That's what the enemy of our souls wants. He wants us to stay stuck in the discouragement. But that's not what God wants. God desires for us to trust Him. To lean on Him, even when we don't understand. And to have faith that He is working all things out for good.

We are confident that God is able to orchestrate everything to work toward something good *and beautiful* when we love Him and accept His invitation to live according to His plan. Romans 8:28 VOICE

Discouragement doesn't have to rule our lives, friend. I pray we trust God to lift us out of the pit of discouragement and set us on the path He has for us. His good path according to His plans.

Would you allow me to pray with you? I've not prayed in a podcast episode before, but I think it's a good day to make it a first. Father God, I thank You for Who You are. Thank You that we can trust You and have faith in You, that You are working all things out for good in our lives. Even when we don't see it yet. Because You are in control of all things, we give to You any form of discouragement we are experiencing

today. We're tired and weary of walking through it, Lord. We know discouragement doesn't come from You, so we understand it doesn't belong in our lives. So, Father, please take this discouragement. Lift us out of its darkness and set our feet on the path You have for us. Fill us with Your hope, and align our thoughts to that hope. Encourage our hearts today, Lord. Thank You. We love You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thank you for joining me here today. As always, I invite you over to our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. We will be discussing this subject all week long. We call it the most encouraging space on the internet. The link is in the show notes.

Also, if you found encouragement in this episode, I invite you to rate it and review it so others can find it too. Would you also consider sharing it with someone who could use some encouragement today?

Next week we will look into discouragement a little deeper and why encouragement is so important. I invite you back. In the meantime, take it one day at a time and stay encouraged. God bless you.

Julie Lefebvre