

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

16. The Difference a Grateful Heart Makes

You are listening to episode 16 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. Happy Thanksgiving and welcome back! Yes, this is my Thanksgiving 2021 episode. I can't tell you how thrilled I am that you're here! I'm switching gears a bit this episode as I share some thoughts on Thanksgiving, some personal Thanksgiving traditions and memories, and some encouragement for our real lives as we go. May this episode inspire you and me to live with a grateful heart, not just at Thanksgiving, but all the year through. Let's get to it.

Three years ago the week before Thanksgiving I found myself walking through a myriad of emotions. Of relief, gladness, uncertainty, and a bit of melancholy as I was recovering at home from a heart procedure. I was relieved the procedure was behind me, but yet I was nervous it was. Praying the procedure worked, but unsure if it did, I just didn't know what to expect from my heart. You see, over the years my heart has had a mind of its own. It marched to the beat of its own drum at times, kind of like me. But all joking aside, I likely inherited my irregular beating heart from my mom, as she dealt with hers for years. And it's the issue that complicated things before she died.

So, this cardiac ablation was to prevent my heart from going into a tachycardia rhythm, a rapid heartbeat, because once it went into that rhythm, it wouldn't get back out of it. For example, the month before this, my heart went into that rhythm while I was sitting at my desk at work. It was if a switch turned on and my heart began beating as if I was exercising strenuously, at 170 beats per minute for hours, until the Emergency Department doc shocked it back into rhythm, twice.

I didn't care to ever experience that again.

So, that experience led me to have this procedure in November 2018. While I recuperated at home, I was comforted knowing my doctor thought the ablation fixed my problem. But time would tell. Maybe that's the reason I had many of my mixed emotions then. But the one emotion that's most memorable to me that week before Thanksgiving was this: thankfulness. I guess thankfulness can be a typical response for people when they go through a traumatic experience. My last thought I remember before going under anesthesia on that cold operating table was that I would either wake up in recovery or I would wake up and see Jesus standing before me. Thinking about it now brings a lump to my throat and tears to my eyes. But I knew no matter how the procedure turned out, it would be okay.

So ever since that year, Thanksgiving became more important to me. It was always a blessed holiday when we would gather together as a family, and sometimes we traveled to fun places over Thanksgiving. (I'll talk about that in a minute.) We created wonderful family memories together. But after this heart experience, Thanksgiving changed for me. I suddenly cared less about what food we were having at our Thanksgiving meal and more about us just being together as a family. I found myself more thankful for the little things in my life and the special moments only God and I knew about. What became most important stemmed from a heart change.

My heart changed, indeed, and not just because of my ablation.

God got my attention that year, and not only rewired my heart through the procedure, but helped it be a little more grateful too.

A grateful heart changes everything. It changes us from the inside out. You and I have many reasons to be grateful, don't we? But sometimes what we're thankful for can get buried under life's problems and hardships. Sometimes all we see is the junk in life and we sometimes miss the blessings.

But I think we can each safely say our lives have changed a lot over the last eighteen months or so with this pandemic. Our perspectives have shifted. We see things differently now. We likely appreciate the little things a little more. At least I hope we do. Sometimes it's hard to think back to before all of this began, but I think we are different people today than we were eighteen months ago.

We've learned a lot. We've grown a lot. And maybe our hearts have experienced their own rewiring of sorts. Maybe it took something like this for God to get our attention and to do a work inside of us. To inspire us to be a little more thankful and grateful. Because living with a grateful heart changes our perspective. Living with a grateful heart helps us notice the little things in life, which sometimes are really the big things. And living with grateful heart opens our eyes to God's amazing grace, peace, and love. Not to mention His blessings that He places right in front of us.

A grateful heart does change us from the inside out.

And it helps us live a full and abundant life. Because when we're filled with gratefulness, we can't help but see the good in our lives. When our hearts are grateful, we notice less of lack and more abundance. And have you noticed, gratefulness is contagious? Our grateful hearts affect others, and influence those around us to be more grateful and thankful too!

Today and this season are opportunities to live full of life with a grateful heart.

Because you and I have breath in our lungs. Our hearts are beating, and blood is pumping throughout our bodies. We are alive, friend! Alive! I say it's time we live like we are. Maybe we feel like we have been sleepwalking through life lately. Or we are missing out on life entirely. Maybe fear has replaced our joy or sickness has stolen our zest for life. But you and I only get to live this life once. We get to make each day count once. We don't get a chance to live this day over. Each day is a treasured gift. And what we do with today matters.

This reminds me of John 10:10b, the second part of that verse. Jesus said this: But I have come to *give you everything in abundance, more than you expect* —life in its fullness until you overflow! (TPT)

You and I have everything we need to live a full life because of Jesus, in fact, as that verse declares, He came to give us life in its fullness! Until we overflow! Because scripture declares this world is not our home (Hebrews 13:14), Jesus isn't necessarily saying this for our lives right here and right now. No. But because of Him, His followers will experience eternal life even more abundant and more than we can begin to expect! Yet, we don't have to wait to experience eternal life until we die. Following Jesus gives our lives eternal meaning and purpose here and now and extends to after we die. This is real life, my friend!

Living full of life is a choice we each make.

And it begins with a grateful heart. We understand who God is and who we are (or aren't), and when we do that, we realize our need for the help and hope He offers us. It's about having a grateful heart for what Jesus has done for us. A grateful heart for how much God unconditionally loves you and me. And a grateful heart for life and everything in it and everything we experience in it. That's a tall order, isn't it? But everything changes when our focus is on John 10:10b. Our focus changes, our desires change, our motivations and actions change. We begin to see life through different eyes, and we want what God wants for our lives. We desire His will more than our own.

I want to get back to that kind of living. How about you?

1 Thessalonians 5:18 NIV says this: give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Let's be people who give thanks in all things, not necessarily for all things, but in all things. We may not be thankful for hard times or circumstances, but we can be thankful in them. We may not be thankful for the bad news we receive, but we can be thankful in them.

This is perfect timing with Thanksgiving this week!

After all, dictionary.com defines thanksgiving as:

- the act of giving thanks; grateful acknowledgment of benefits or favors, especially to God.
- an expression of thanks, especially to God.
- a public celebration in acknowledgment of divine favor or kindness.
- a day set apart for giving thanks to God.

A grateful heart is the source of thanksgiving, the day and the way of life.

Yes, Thanksgiving is more than just a holiday.

As we look toward Thanksgiving (the day), I am well aware this holiday is not the happiest for us all, and the holidays that follow it in the Christmas season may not be happy for us all either. If this is you, I see you. I am praying for you, and friend, I can somewhat relate as some of our past holidays weren't the most joyous occasions for me, either.

Some of us are trying to navigate the first Thanksgiving without a loved one. Some of us aren't gathering with family this year because of varied reasons. Also some of us have circumstances that prevent us from celebrating the holiday in the ways we would like to. There are many reasons why Thanksgiving may not be a joyous holiday. So, I am sensitive to the mixed emotions that accompany holidays like this.

In past years, after the passing of my mom in 2006, Thanksgiving became a little weird. We always spent it with her. So, without her presence, we were not only missing her, but we were forced to begin new traditions. Those traditions have changed over the years, but one fun thing we typically do is eat our noon Thanksgiving meal at Cracker Barrel. Yes, Cracker Barrel, the restaurant. Call us strange, but they serve a great Thanksgiving meal and we have fond memories of those meals together.

The thing is, we would either travel somewhere fun here in the Midwest and stay for a few days or drive to our closest Cracker Barrel just for the noon meal which is 1-1/2 hours away. As our children grew,

because of their schedules and other conflicts, the trips away got less frequent. And now with this being our grandson's first Thanksgiving, we are foregoing that tradition for this year, and we are hosting Thanksgiving in our home. My husband plans to smoke a turkey, which thinking about it makes my stomach growl. We will have all the fixins and this year we will be able to enjoy the leftovers! (No leftovers are a down-side to eating Thanksgiving meal out.)

So even as we celebrate this holiday differently, may we make giving thanks a priority.

A grateful heart can't help but give thanks.

So, how will you and I give thanks this year? Maybe we haven't thought about that. Sadly, I've experienced Thanksgivings where I was so busy or so distracted, I didn't give thanks for anything at all that day. And I don't like the way that feels. I desire to give thanks, especially on a day that's set aside for it. So how do we do that?

Well, we each could make a list of what we're thankful for, and then thank God for each item on the list. We could share what we're thankful for at a Thanksgiving meal. Another idea is to make it an end-of-day daily practice, not just on Thanksgiving, but every day. By jotting down the blessings we noticed during the day and thank God for them before we fall asleep. Or we could begin the day thanking God for His gifts and all we are grateful for. what we are thankful for.

This reminds me of a bedtime routine we used to do as a family when our children were young. I can't quite remember how it started, but during our family prayer time together each night before bed, we would share our "thankfuls." These "thankfuls" were anything that came to mind for which we were, you guessed it, thankful. Such as our schools, our teachers, our friends. Or our jobs, our family, our health. Or our farm cats, or our toys, or our warm house.

I miss those bedtime thankfuls. That practice helped us count our blessings and ended our day thinking about God and His provision and faithfulness. Maybe it's a good time to incorporate a few "thankfuls" into our daily routines today.

What's one thing in this moment you can pause and thank God for right now?

You know? The Bible is full of thanksgiving and thankfulness. And on my Resource page at julielefebure.com, you'll find a printable filled with 15 verses I found that are perfect for Thanksgiving. That link is in the show notes. But here three of them that encourage my heart, and I pray they encourage yours as well.

I thank you from my heart, and I will never stop singing your praises, my Lord and my God. [Psalm 30:12 CEV](#)

Let us come before him with thanksgiving and sing joyful songs of praise. [Psalm 95:2 GNT](#)

I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. [Psalm 9:1 NIV](#)

May Thanksgiving 2021 be a turning point in our lives. May we look back someday on this season and see that we chose to live each day full of life and with a grateful heart. Again, because living this way not only transforms our lives, but it impacts the lives of those around us. How we live today directly affects our spouse, our children, our neighbors, our coworkers, our friends, our families, and even those we

don't care for so much. Living with a grateful heart also helps us be encouraging, uplifting, and hope filled. It may cause people to ask you what's your secret for staying so positive!

In our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook we're sharing ideas and ways to live with a grateful heart. I invite you over there to join the conversation. It's a positive and uplifting place to connect and converse. The link is in the show notes.

In closing, I praise God the cardiac ablation three years ago fixed my tachycardia problem. Thankfully, I've not experienced that since. I'm thankful for the rewiring God does in our hearts, too, to help us be more grateful. I pray your Thanksgiving will be full of joy and thankfulness. And as I celebrate this holiday, I will be thinking of you and thanking God for you. I'm incredibly grateful we get to journey together. You are a blessing in my life! God bless you in this season.

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