

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

21. Goodbye to 2021: A Time to Reflect, Grow, and Celebrate

You are listening to episode 21 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast, titled *Goodbye to 2021: A Time to Reflect, Grow, and Celebrate*. Well, Merry Christmas and welcome back! Yes, I'm still offering Christmas wishes since Christmas was just three days ago. I hope you had a wonderful holiday, and that you were able to keep Christmas simple. We discussed that here all month long. And I pray you were able to celebrate the birth of our Savior in special and meaningful ways. Now, here we are in the last week of the year. Before we say bid farewell and goodbye to 2021, I say it's a good time to reflect, grow, and celebrate. I invite us to do that in this week's episode. So, here we go!

A lot has happened in the last week around here. We had wonderful Christmas celebrations, special times with family, and I celebrated another birthday. That alone is a big day! And now this week we are getting ready to turn the calendar to a new year in a matter of days. Along with all of this, I have spent some dedicated time looking back at 2021. Do you do this too?

Do you look back over the year before moving into the new year?

For many years I never gave it much thought. I just zoomed through the last week of December right on into the first week of January. Sometimes I set resolutions for the new year, but that's about it. I didn't really take time to reflect on and celebrate the ending year before jumping into the next. So, if this isn't something you typically do, I understand. But I invite you to consider joining me in this activity this year. I invite you to pause and take some time to reflect on the year before we say goodbye to 2021.

For the last ten years or so, however, I've incorporated this intentional time of reflection, growth, and celebration into this last week of the year. I look back through my planner, I glance through my journal, I sometimes skim my blog, and I jot some thoughts down. And in doing this, it's always interesting to me what I learn about God, about others, and about myself.

Here is another reason I journal.

I discussed journaling in episode 11 and what an impact it makes in my day and for my life. My journal is the place where I share my thoughts, where I dream and plan, and where I pause and ponder. It's the place where I connect with God and my own thoughts, where I reflect, and where I celebrate. It's where I log lessons learned and where I give myself grace in black and white. My journal is also the place where I tangibly transition from one thing to the next. Like from 2021 to 2022.

If you've not tried journaling before, or if you've tried it but you didn't quite connect with it then, I invite you to try it, maybe just one more time, and see how it might bless you.

But no matter how you do it, before saying goodbye to 2021, it's a year is worthy of reflection.

Because this year has been unlike any other year we've experienced. Wow, just take a look back. 2021 was full of challenges and difficulties and trying moments, wasn't it? You might remember specific discouragements, disappointments, and distractions. I know I do. You might even recall moments heartbreak, heaviness, or hopelessness. I do too.

I sometimes find it's in the trying times I grow the most. Sometimes it's in the difficult seasons that God gets my attention and changes my attitude and perspective. I think it's safe to say He has changed us all through this past year, don't you think? We are different people than we were at the start of 2021. Pausing to reflect helps us learn from where we've been so we can grow into where we're going.

But as I look back through the year, what I see the most is God's faithfulness.

God was so faithful in 2021, wasn't He?

Deuteronomy 7:9 in the Voice translation reads, "I want you to know that the Eternal your God is *the only true* God. He's the faithful God who keeps His covenants and shows loyal love for a thousand generations to those who *in return* love Him and keep His commands."

Friend, how has God been faithful to you in 2021? How has He shown up in your life this year?

Because 2021 was filled with many, what I call, "God moments." Of course, God is with us in every moment of every day, but sometimes God shows up so unmistakably, you know it's Him. You know it is Him who is orchestrating situations and circumstances behind the scenes. You know He's at work and is working out His good in your life. It's unmistakable!

Where are these moments for you and me in 2021?

They're there. But sometimes all we can see is the hard stuff. Let's take a long look back. Let's notice these moments and celebrate these moments. Then thank God for them. Praise Him for them. Because the thing is, if we've seen Him at work in the lives of others around us, He's working in our lives as well.

My best friend's dad, Jim, used to say often, "God is no respecter of persons." That's from Romans 2:11. Which means God does not show favoritism and He treats everyone the same. So, if you see God intervening in the lives of those around you, you can trust He's intervening in your life as well.

So, where has He shown up in your life in 2021? Did He show up through the words or actions of another? Did you see Him in a sunrise? Where did God bring healing in your life? Physically, in a relationship, in your thinking? What breakthroughs did He orchestrate in your life? What did He teach you? How did He correct you? What promises did God remind you of?

Think back to the low points of the year, those valley moments. Where did you see God? Think of the mountain top experiences in 2021, those moments of victory and joy. How did God bless you through those moments?

Looking back over 2021, I'm quite amazed at all God has done in my life.

It kinda chokes me up. As with each of us, I live what I call a real life, full of ups and downs. Full of blessings and blunders. Full of joys and sorrows. My life is not perfect by any means, yet I'm grateful for the life I get to live. I've walked close with Jesus this year, probably closer than any year prior. I needed to, because coming off of 2020, I so needed His peace, His provision, and His presence. I was a mess!

Walking with Him this close, however, I've experienced a joy that I cannot describe and a peace that passes all understanding.

God has healed areas of brokenness in my life this year, He has moved me into unknown territories, He has grown me in uncomfortable ways, and He has stretched me beyond what I thought I could do. God has closed doors and opened others. He has grown me in my faith and in my trust of Him, and He continues to spur me on in encouraging others. He has grown my writing, ways to use my words, and has crossed my path with some pretty amazing people.

I can't wait to see what He's going to do in 2022.

But if I hadn't taken time to intentionally look back over the year, I would not have realized just how much God grew me or how far He has taken me in twelve months' time. Reflection is a key component of growth and appreciation.

I invite you to take some time to intentionally reflect and celebrate all God has done in your life in 2021.

Then jot down somewhere all that you notice. Because this is where you have a tangible account of God's faithfulness in your life. Not only will this encourage you in the moment, but it will also remind you down the road of just how active and faithful God is in your life. Especially on those days you begin to wonder if He's still there. You know? We'll never get to live 2021 over again, so it's worth reflection and celebration. It's worth praising God for all He has done.

Isaiah 25:1 in the NCV says, "Lord, you are my God. I honor you and praise you, because you have done amazing things. You have always done what you said you would do; you have done what you planned long ago."

God has done amazing things, hasn't He?

Saying goodbye to 2021 healthily, will help us begin 2022 with a fresh, renewed perspective.

Not only that, doing so helps us grow. God continues to mold us and shape us into the people He desires us to be. Closing the door of one year in intentional and encouraging ways helps us begin the new year with open hearts and open hands. Ready to receive what God has for us in the year to come. Plus, it gives us a launching pad for the new year and the next twelve months.

Are you one who sets goals for the new year? Or resolutions? Do you break a big goal down into bite-sized pieces to work towards monthly or weekly? I'm cheering you on if this is what you do and if this is the way you're wired. I'm glad God designed us all differently.

For me, I stopped setting outcome goals and resolutions a number of years ago. Because I ended up feeling defeated and discouraged if I missed the goals or didn't keep the resolutions. *Because who needs additional reasons to feel bad in life? Not me.* So, my goals are different than they used to be. They are more of "process" goals. My goals for 2021 were:

- Actively participate in an accountability group for my writing.
- Connect with what I enjoy by writing something every day.
- Connect with others through encouraging posts on social media.

- Remain connected to God through prayer and Bible study.
- Connect with myself by living healthy, journaling, reading, seeing myself more as God sees me.
- Saying no to things that don't bring me joy.

Looking back, I think I did pretty well with all of these goals.

As I shared them, maybe you noticed one word that was common in them? Well, that was my word for 2021. It was CONNECT. Do you choose a word for the year? A word that either God inspires you with or one you choose yourself? CONNECT was a perfect word for me last year. Absolutely perfect.

As I am personally preparing to say goodbye to 2021 and hello to 2022, I'm in the process of choosing my word for the new year. And actually, this is the subject of next week's podcast episode, episode 22. I'm devoting an entire episode, the first episode of 2022, on choosing one word and starting our new year off positively. Come back next Tuesday to find out more. I'll also share my word for 2022. (I just realized we're ending 2021 with episode 21 and beginning 2022 with episode 22. How cool is that?? I love noticing these little things!)

So, if you set goals or choose a word for the new year, have you done so yet? Do you have some ideas for what you'd like to accomplish or experience in 2022? I would love to read about them and cheer you on. We are talking about this in the Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. I'd love for you to join the conversation over there.

This week is such a special time as we transition from one year to the next.

As we begin to say goodbye to 2021, it's a good time to reflect, give ourselves room to grow, and celebrate 2021. It's a great way to draw away with God for a few minutes and ponder all He has done in our lives. And it's a perfect time to rest if you can and take some time for you. Even if it's just a few minutes.

I am praying for you this week as we say goodbye to 2021 and begin 2022. I pray God encourages your heart, brings healing and wholeness in Jesus' name, and blesses you with His peace, His provision, and His presence. May you draw near to Him this week and in the year ahead and be reminded of just how much He loves you.

Thank you for journeying with me through this adventure called life. I'm glad I get to do this real life with you. Again, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre