

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

23. 10 Simple Ways to Remain Joyful this Winter

You are listening to episode 23 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. I welcome you back today, and I'm so glad you're here. In this episode we are discussing 10 Simple Ways to Remain Joyful this Winter. Even (and especially) if winter is not your favorite season. Because I believe we can still remain joyful even when the cold makes you question where you live.

Of all the people I know, I can only think of two whose favorite season is winter. Two people. Because the majority of us would rather skip over winter all together, right? We'd rather transition from the vibrant colors of fall, straight into the blooming season of spring. Am I right? But maybe, just maybe, God has a plan for us during winter. Maybe His plan is to use the season of winter to prepare us for the seasons of life ahead. So, let's pause a moment today through this episode to take another look at winter with fresh eyes and find some encouragement along the way of how to remain joyful this season of winter.

I'll start off this episode by stating truth.

Winter is not my favorite.

In fact, I could do without the season all together. Don't get me wrong, however. Winter can be beautiful here in Iowa. Especially with that very first snowfall. The first snowfall is always exciting. But by the time February rolls around, we (or I) can get quite tired of maneuvering through all the snow. It's at that point my sights become set on March and the promise of spring, just around the corner.

No matter how the photos depict it, winter in the Midwest isn't always picturesque landscapes of freshly fallen, glistening snow. It can be, but most often it's not. It's not always filled with hushed silence and peaceful sounds of snow cascading to the ground. It can be, but that's a bit rare around here.

Midwestern winters can be brutal and living in rural Iowa I question why I live here each winter. Snow, blowing snow, dangerously low wind chills, drifts as tall as vehicles, rural roads covered with ice is no place for this girl. It would be perfect for a panda bear, but for me? Not so much. I'd much rather spend the winter on the beach. But that's not reality for our family at this point. Reality is our lives are rooted here in the heartland.

I love living here so much that I tolerate the harsh Iowa winters.

But I can almost guarantee we will get snowed in at some point this winter. Last year we were socked in for three days. Good thing my husband and I could work from home. It's not uncommon for either my husband or me to get stuck in the drifted snow in our driveway or on the gravel road that runs in front of our home sometime through the season. Let me tell you, that's always fun. (Not really.) And it almost happened to me last week one day as I attempted to leave my home one morning. Only by the grace of

God did I not get stuck. But thankfully, we have kind neighbors with tractors and plows who help us when we need them.

Again, we live where some would call in the middle of nowhere. In a wide-open space where we can see for miles. That's great to capture sunrises and sunsets. But not so great when it comes to winter. Because when the wind blows, it feels like it's blowing through the entire house some days. When you step outside and the cold and wind hurts your face, you wonder if it might just freeze in place that way. We exist in parkas and scarves, gloves and snow boots for months. Our fleece blankets, crackling fires in the fireplace, and warm winter drinks are some of our best evening friends during this season.

What about you?

What does winter look like for you?

Maybe you live in a warmer climate than Iowa. Not gonna lie, I envy you a bit. Or maybe winter is mild where you are. Do you enjoy the winter months and all they have to offer? Or are you a little like me and you hope for a short winter so you can get on with enjoying the other three seasons of the year?

But does winter have to be something we tolerate? Could it be something we can learn to appreciate instead? Not only the season of winter, but what about those winter seasons in our lives as well? Those seasons of darkness, where it seems like nothing is happening on the surface, when hibernation feels more natural than staying in motion?

I believe winter can be more than a season we just put up with. I believe God gives us the winter seasons to grow us and prepare us for what's ahead. Just like the earth needs the season of winter to grow what's planted in spring, we need the season of winter to grow what God plants in us.

Maybe it's time to learn how to embrace winter.

Maybe it's time to be okay with the rhythm of winter.

And maybe this is the season to trust God to do His work through winter.

Because I believe God has a purpose for the winter seasons in our lives. He uses them for our growth, for our good, and for His glory. He doesn't leave us during winter. No. And He doesn't desire for us to be miserable through it. If God gives us winter, then we are called to live and function and thrive through the season. God is with us in winter, just as He is in summer.

I believe we can learn to remain joyful through winter.

And I believe God calls us to. Why would he give us three months out of the year for us to be miserable? Why would He give us a fourth of the year for us to just tolerate? I don't believe that's how He works. I believe He has good plans and purposes in every season of life... spring, summer, autumn, and yes, winter.

So how can we remain joyful through not only the season of winter, but the winter seasons of life? I came up with a short list of ten ways. Let's explore them together. If you're at a place you can write, feel free to jot them down.

Here are 10 simple ways to remain joyful this winter.

In no particular order.

1. Take care of yourself.

Our health matters, especially during winter months, so let's find creative ways to take care of ourselves. We can pay attention to what our bodies tell us. We can choose to be intentional about getting the rest, nutrition, and hydration that our bodies need. Taking vitamins and supplements help us internally. It's fun to find and try new recipes during winter. I love making new healthy soup recipes. Reading positive and uplifting books and articles help us better our overall health.

2. Get moving.

Staying active lifts our spirits and our affects our attitudes. We are generally more positive and inspired when we exercise or find a way throughout our days to move. How can we remain active in our current schedules? Can we take the steps instead of the elevator? Can we take a brisk walk around the block on lunch or on a break? What about a dance party in the living room with the kids one evening a week? Or getting creative with adding in some weight training while you're getting ready in the morning in front of the mirror. Oftentimes the more we move the more joy we experience.

3. Change the focus.

I'll be the first to say some days my focus could use some adjustment. Some days I focus on the wrong things. Like how miserable winter can be. But what if we looked at winter differently? Through eyes of possibilities and beauty? Through eyes that see potential and hope in both winter and in winter seasons of life. Not to only what's wrong and gloomy but what's beautiful and uplifting. A change in focus helps us see things differently.

4. Let the light in.

Not only into our homes but into our hearts. The more light we let in, the warmer life becomes. Open the curtains or blinds in our homes and invite all the light in we can. All the while, opening our hearts to allow the light of Jesus to shine in and through it into the lives of those around us. Light makes all the difference. And those of us who struggle with any kind of seasonal affective disorder understand how light does make a difference during winter. But yet, the darkness cannot overcome the light.

And this Light never fails to shine through darkness— Light that darkness could not overcome!

John 1:5 TPT

5. Enjoy a hobby.

Do you have a hobby? If so, what is it? What do you enjoy doing? Some people put together puzzles during the winter months, or enjoy curling up with a good book, or take up knitting or crocheting. What's your thing? If you don't have a thing, I invite you to find something you enjoy. Something that you can look forward to. Something that helps you remain joyful.

6. Get outside.

This is a tough one some days living in Iowa. Especially when the temps are frigid, and the wind is whipping. But getting outside and inhaling some fresh air can do wonders for our bodies, minds, and emotions. Winter offers us a number of fun outside options. Which one sounds the most fun to you?

Snow skiing, ice skating, taking a walk outdoors, building a snowman, making a snow angel, having a snowball fight, building an old-fashioned snow fort with your kids. Let's not be afraid to brave the cold and get outside this season. If nothing else, we'll make some fun memories we won't soon forget!

7. Find beauty everywhere.

Winter can be beautiful. But sometimes, as they saying goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Which means what one person finds beautiful, another may not. But even so, God offers us beauty in each season. Even in winter. Sometimes the most beautiful sunrises and sunsets in Iowa happen during the winter months. I love how freshly fallen snow sparkles and shines in the sun. And when snow is slowly cascading from the sky, well, that may be the most beautiful of all. What beauty can you find in winter today?

8. Spend time with those who bring you joy.

One great way to remain joyful during winter is to spend time with those who increase your joy. Who are those people? Who makes you laugh and smile really big? Schedule a coffee or dinner date with them. Each month I meet a certain friend for dinner, and I appreciate time with this friend even more during the winter months. She is one of the most positive, uplifting people I know, and she makes me feel special when I'm with her. I can't wait until next week's dinner date with her! Who is that person for you? Schedule some time with him or her soon.

9. Thank God.

A thankful heart helps us remain joyful any time of year, especially during winter. The more thankful we are the more joyful we are. They go hand in hand. What can you thank God for today? What gifts has He blessed you with in which you are incredibly grateful? In what ways can you thank Him today?

Oh, thank God—he's so good! His love never runs out.

Psalm 107:1 MSG

10. Make a bucket list.

Draw up a list of the things and activities you'd like to do this winter. How about make that snow angel because, goodness, you haven't done that since you were a kid? Or do a search of what's happening in the area this weekend that you could participate in? What's something you've always wanted to do during winter, but for whatever reason, you just haven't done it yet? Would getting away for a weekend encourage your heart? Or maybe take a winter's drive somewhere? Why not begin your bucket list today and start crossing the items off the list, one by one? This will surely help us all remain joyful this season. I began mine on Sunday. One thing I'd like to do this season is to get away for a long weekend and find some winter fun.

So, out of these ten ways, which one or two appeals to you? Which one or ones do you plan to implement this winter?

How will you remain joyful this season?

I'll share one more Bible verse with you. It's Philippians 4:8 (VOICE).

Finally, brothers and sisters, fill your minds with *beauty and* truth. Meditate on whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is good, whatever is virtuous and praiseworthy.

Philippians 4:8 VOICE

What if we applied Philippians 4:8 to winter? What if we filled our minds with only beauty, truth, what is pure, lovely, good, and praiseworthy this winter? Would it make a difference? I think it would. Instead of complaining about winter, we looked at it through fresh eyes and encouraging thoughts. This could just be our best, most beautiful winter yet. I'm all for it, are you?

We are discussing this all week long in the Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. I invite you over to be a part of the conversation and to connect with others who value encouragement in their lives. The link to this group is in the show notes.

If you have a moment to spare, would you consider rating or reviewing this podcast if you found some encouragement in it? Doing so will help others find this encouragement as well.

As we navigate this season of winter, I believe God has good things in store for us. He has good plans for our lives. I pray you and I wake up each morning this season, thankful for a new day filled with hope and opportunities to make a difference in this world. I pray you and I remain joyful all season long.

Thank you for joining me here today. I appreciate you. God bless you.

Julie Lefebvre