

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

25. If the New Year Hasn't Begun the Way You Hoped

You are listening to episode 25 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast, "If the New Year Hasn't Begun the Way You Hoped." Thank you for joining me, and welcome to the podcast today! So, how has the new year started for you? Has 2022 been wonderfully exhilarating, as a new year can be? With the hope and promise of a clean slate, a new beginning, a fresh start? Are you making progress in the goals you set? How about your new year's resolutions? Are sticking to them this year? Or has 2022 started a little slow for you? Are you feeling behind already in this new year? Have you experienced illness, or disappointment, or loss in these first few weeks of 2022? I'm sorry if you have. Maybe 2022 hasn't begun the way you hoped it would. And you are wondering, *is this the way the rest of the year is going to go? Because if it is, I didn't sign up for this.*

Well friend, if the new year hasn't begun the way you hoped, this episode is especially for you or for the person in your life who is a bit discouraged so far in 2022. May it bless you and encourage you to know, you're not alone in this. I'm thinking many are right here with you, including me. Even if your year has started off well, let's journey together in this episode as we find hope and encouragement for not only now, but for the rest of 2022. So, let's get into it!

"Happy New Year!"

We say these three words and speak this blessing to others each Christmas and New Year's season, don't we? We desire for those in our lives to have a new year that begins happy and healthy and full of hope. And we want that for ourselves, too, don't we? We want a happy new year.

And oftentimes I'm caught up in the notion that something magical is going to happen when we flip the calendar from one year to the next. Something amazing will occur when we ring in a new year. All of the problems of life will become a distant memory as we ready ourselves for the promise and the blessings and the good things the new year is going to hold. We carry into the new year hope-filled notions, expectations, and maybe even some predictions. We anticipate the blessings of a new year, thinking, *maybe this year will be different. Maybe this year I will experience the long-awaited breakthrough. Maybe this year will be the year I've been waiting for.*

Am I the only one who does this?

Am I the only one who knows this isn't reality, but gets caught up in this kind of thinking with a new year anyway? Thinking everything will be different and better and easier and more perfect when the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve?

But I know better. I know that's not truth. I know that's not how it works. But still, a part of me clings to that illogical hope.

Yet, here we are. In the last week of January and in the fourth week of 2022. How has the new year begun for you, friend? Has it been everything you wanted it to be? Or are you finding this new year hasn't begun the way you hoped it would?

I can't help to think about January two years ago in 2020. I started the year off strong with a goal to walk/run 75 miles that month. With a plan in place to get on the treadmill for three miles every day (minus a few days), I was ready to tackle this challenge. It wasn't easy, but I finished it on the last day, January 31. January 2020 was a happy new year for me. I felt I was on the right track for the year. 2020 was going to be incredible! I just knew it.

But we all know what happened in March of 2020. Seemingly out of nowhere, the pandemic came on the scene and shut us down. (Do you remember how the word pandemic at that time was a little foreign and scary and unnerving? It really wasn't a part of our vocabulary. Funny how quickly things change, isn't it?) What began as a happy and exciting new year, rapidly turned into a challenging and disheartening marathon of a year.

What about the start of this year?

Has it been a happy new year for you? I hope so! I hope it has started out wonderfully well for you, and I pray you began this year encouraged and hopeful. Hopefully you are making progress in your goals and dreams. May 2022 be your best year yet!

But for those of us whose year hasn't started off so well or the way we hoped, I am praying for us too. Because sometimes things happen beyond our control. Actually, most things do, don't they? That's just real life.

Oh, you did all the things. You began the year with big plans, fresh hopes, and beautiful dreams. Maybe you chose your word for the year and added a Bible verse to go with it. You prayed, you pondered, and you began the year encouraged. This would be the year full of hope, promise, faith, and optimism. Because goodness, we've had two rough years of pandemic living, full of loss, heartache, uncertainties, and changes. 2022 would breathe fresh hope into your weary soul. This year would be different than the last two. You just knew it.

But so far, 2022 hasn't been a cake walk.

Challenges littered your path and a few detours caused you to veer off course. A road closed or two forced you to backtrack and search for another way. Or maybe illness has knocked on your door and uninvitingly made its way in. Or quite possibly loss and devastation are a part of these first few weeks of your year.

You can't help but wonder, *is this the way 2022 is going to be? I was hoping for a different kind of year. I was thinking 2022 was going to be better.* But no. This new year hasn't begun the way you hoped.

I'm one who understands this well.

My new year hasn't begun the way I hoped, either.

Because on the second day of 2022, I spent the majority of it in the Emergency Department at our local hospital.

I haven't shared much about this, because I wasn't sure how it was going to play out. And I'm still not sure. My immediate family knows and a few praying friends. At the beginning of the month, I also shared this with my email group, because they receive content I don't share anywhere else. That was a safe place for me to be vulnerable in the first few days following that E.D. visit. (You can receive access to my emails in the Resources link in the show notes.)

But that Sunday, January 2, my heart flipped into the fast-paced rhythm that was supposedly fixed with my cardiac ablation back in 2018. I shared about this cardiac procedure back in episode 16. That morning, no matter what I tried, I couldn't get it to go back into rhythm on my own. My heart felt like it was going to pound out of my chest. It became hard to catch my breath, beating at 162 beats per minute. I felt lightheaded and unsteady. While my husband was at work and couldn't leave, my son took me to the hospital.

To make a long story a little shorter, they shocked my heart three times in the E.D. It wouldn't budge and go back into rhythm. The doctor assumed the weakened state of my body after being ill through the end of December was a contributing factor to my fast-paced heart. I discussed this illness in episode 21. So, after hours of trying everything, they sent me home with medication and a follow up visit with my cardiologist, with the hopes my heart would convert back to its normal rhythm on its own.

Talk about a year not starting the way I hoped.

An E.D. visit was not in my plans. Nor was an abnormal beating heart. Because I had experienced no issues for three years. And now all of a sudden, out of the blue, my health was questionable in every way.

The good news is that I woke on Monday morning with my heart beating normally. Thankfully it converted through the night. I believe God converted it through the night. With the help of intermittent medication, it has stayed that way so far ever since. I'm grateful. And I pray it doesn't happen again.

But so far, these early weeks of 2022 have been filled with doctor appointments, medication, concern, uneasiness, and a little worry. This heart episode has consumed my life. I had different plans for the beginning of this year. Plans to begin editing my book and finalizing my sample chapters for my book proposal. Plans for adventure and fun and making memories. (I still haven't celebrated my near-Christmas birthday in yet.) Plans full of hope, promise, and of a happy new year.

No, the new year hasn't begun the way I hoped.

But I recognize God's plans are different than my plans.

We may not understand God's plans or timing. I sure don't. But we can trust He knows what He's doing. We can trust He has us safely protected and in His care. And even though trials come, we know He is with us in them. I believe He doesn't cause these trials, but He allows them for our growth, our good, and for His glory.

This takes my thoughts to a Bible verse that encouraged me then and still encourages me today. John 16:33 in the AMPC (Amplified Bible, Classic Edition) says this:

I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace *and* confidence. In the world you have tribulation *and* trials *and* distress *and* frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage; be

confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.]

So, Jesus says here we will have tribulation, trials, distress, and frustration in this life. That's a given. It's also a given He has conquered it for us. He has deprived the trials of power to harm you and me. That encourages me so. I pray it does you, too.

Two more verses point us to truth when the new year hasn't begun the way we hoped.

Don't run from tests and hardships, brothers and sisters. *As difficult as they are, you will ultimately find joy in them; if you embrace them, your faith will blossom under pressure and teach you true patience as you endure. And true patience brought on by endurance will equip you to complete the long journey and cross the finish line*—mature, complete, and wanting nothing. James 1:2-4 VOICE

I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for. Jeremiah 29:11 MSG

Yes, God knows what He's doing.

And sometimes just recognizing that truth gives us the peace and assurance we need. Especially when the new year hasn't begun the way we hoped.

And if 2022 hasn't begun the way you hoped either, we can trust this doesn't mean the year will be a wash. It doesn't mean you and I can't live with hope through the remainder of this year. It doesn't mean the rest of 2022 will be like this. No. God has good plans for your life and mine. Because of Him, our future is full of hope and unending promise. Re-read Jeremiah 29:11 again. Do a bible word search on the word future. Or go to openbible.info and type in the search the word "future" or "plans for the future." You'll find timely encouragement for this moment and in the days to come.

There really is hope for you in days to come. So your hope will not be cut off. Proverbs 23:18 NIRV

Could it be we've been looking at the wish, "Happy New Year," all wrong?

Is it possible it could mean so much more? Maybe our focus has been on the "happy" that this world is about. And what this world considers happy. Hmmm. Could it be we've been focused on the wrong kind of happy? This Bible verse puts a different spin on it.

Happy is the person who can hold up under the trials of life. *At the right time*, he'll know God's sweet approval and will be crowned with life. As God has promised, the crown awaits all who love Him. James 1:12 VOICE

So, even if this new year hasn't begun in the way we hoped, maybe there's a bigger picture we're missing. Maybe God's version of happy for us is entirely different than what we think it should be. And don't you agree, His version is the one that matters most?

We still have hope, even when the new year hasn't begun the way we hoped.

I invite you over to the Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook where we are discussing this today. You'll find it to be an uplifting space filled with people like you and me who are seeking encouragement for our real lives right now. The link to this group is in the show notes.

If you found some encouragement or hope in this episode, I invite you to review it and/or rate it so others can find this encouragement too.

In closing, as I walk this unexpected, uncertain road with my heart in this new year, and as you travel on your own unique path, I pray we can take a step back and trust God. To trust Him with how this new year has begun and with how the rest of the year will play out. I pray we have eyes to see a bigger picture, of the good God is doing in our lives, even in the midst of trials. And may we claim Romans 8:28 for ourselves today and all year long.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (NIV).

God is working for the good in our lives, friend. He is. And that's the best news all day. Stay encouraged, friend. God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre