

# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

## **34. So, What Were You Doing Two Years Ago?**

You are listening to episode 34 of the Encouragement for Real Life podcast, *So, What Were You Doing Two Years Ago?* I welcome you back! Thanks for tuning in today. So, what were you doing two years ago? Do you remember? Seems like so long ago, doesn't it? Yet it feels like not so long ago when we think back to those early days of the pandemic. We likely recall how life shifted for most of us two years ago. For some life came to an abrupt halt, and for others, life sped up significantly. For some of us life became a blur, and yet for others, we saw life through eyes of sharp clarity. I don't think we will ever forget March of 2020, do you? Well, this is the subject of this week's episode, and friend, as we journey through it together, I pray you are inspired and encouraged in your real life right now. We both may just realize how far we've come and how far God has brought us to this moment right now. Let's get right to it.

I remember it well. Sitting in the fourth row in our local theater in between my husband and my daughter on Saturday evening, March 14, 2020. We were all enjoying the Christmas gift we gave her and our son-in-law, tickets for One Night of Queen. This tribute band took us as close as we'll ever get to the iconic British band. The music was spot on, the company was spectacular, and watching Alissa and Morgan (our daughter and son-in-law) was even better than the performance on stage. They are big Queen and Freddie Mercury fans. Hence the name of their mini-Golden Doodle, Freddie.

Early in the show, however, a text from our pastor lit up my lock screen. "We are canceling worship tomorrow morning. Can you make an announcement?" *Wait, what? We're canceling church tomorrow?* I opened the text and instantaneously, goosebumps covered my body. We were canceling worship the following morning because Iowa's infection rate of the virus was large enough to take action. He attached links with statements from our governor.

In that moment, what was happening around me became blurred, and I remember thinking as I stared at my phone in disbelief, "Is this really happening?" Because maybe I naively thought we'd be safe out here in little ol' Iowa. Maybe I believed we'd be okay as we heard rumors of the rest of the world shutting down. *But here in Iowa? Seriously?*

### **And suddenly the room felt as if it was closing in on me.**

I remember looking around. Thousands of people were surrounding me. Breathing on me, coughing on me, spewing their germs on me. *Do they have COVID? Will we get it while we're here? Am I going to die?* Because what we saw on t.v. was sickness and death and devastation from this virus. All we knew was what we witnessed in the headlines and the news stories. And I honestly a piece of me wanted to bolt out of the 1,700-seat theater and run for my life all the way back to my rural Iowa home.

Instead, I lifted my eyes back to the stage, turned to Bill, and showed him my phone. Our eyes locked. This *was* really happening. I texted our pastor back confirming I would make the announcement, but it would have to wait until the concert was over. (Since I am the communication person at church,

communicating this kind of thing is part of my responsibilities.) I can't say I remember much of the rest of the concert, but I can say I remember this evening as if it happened last weekend.

### **What about you?**

I invite you today to pause where you are, turn around, and take a look back. A long look back to 2020. Goodness we've gone through much in two years, haven't we? Because sometimes it's in the glancing back to where we've been to be able to see just how far we've traveled. To realize just how far we've come.

Where were you when things began shutting down in your corner of the world? What were you doing? I'm guessing you remember it well. Kind of like a mark in time. Kind of like with other monumental marks in time. Such as, I remember where I was when I was told of the Challenger space shuttle disaster in 1986, in Psychology class in high school. And I recall exactly where I was when the tragic events unfolded the morning of September 11, 2001, at our children's elementary school. You probably do, too, and with other moments like these.

What were you doing when life changed in 2020? Where were you?

But do you also remember when the word "pandemic" was an unfamiliar term in our vocabulary? I mean, who ever said that word before 2020? But we also became familiar with new words and statements in March of 2020 such as "flattening the curve," "no toilet paper," "social distancing," and "lockdown." Some of us learned new skills like wiping down our groceries, making face masks, and exploring the world of Zoom. And some of us had to adjust to a new way of life. Working from home became common, essential workers became recognized, and front-line workers became exhausted.

### **Two years ago, we had no idea what we were doing, but we learned along the way, didn't we?**

Two weeks of flattening the curve became a month, then six months, then a year, and then beyond that. Some of us feared to leave our homes. Some of us felt like we were shriveling up in our homes. And some of us just wanted to return home and never leave again.

My position at church tripled in hours as I transitioned to working from home with everything moving online. I turned to my writing during those early days, as writing became my way to cope and heal. But goodness, those days were long. I felt completely isolated and alone while Bill bravely faced the unknown in his essential-worker job.

I wrote a blog post on April 14, 2020, and in it I asked the question, "What are you learning about yourself through this pandemic?"

My answer to the question was lengthy. Quite honestly, I didn't like every part of my answer.

I am stronger than I thought; I'm also weaker than I thought.

I don't need all the things I've thought I needed.

Cooking can be something I enjoy.

I am not a pleasant person when I worry.

I've totally downplayed the importance of lounge wear.

Chocolate does not make me feel better. But, praying does.

I am way too hard on myself.

I don't have to get it all done today.  
Wearing makeup can be optional. Having a chai tea latte is not.  
I need social interaction more than I realized.  
I can bake sweets and eat them all.  
It's not wise for me to watch too much news on t.v.  
The more I write, the happier I am.  
I miss spending time with my children.  
I like being home.  
My focus might have been a little out of whack before all this happened.  
When someone I love is sick, I want to fix him/her.  
My relationship with Jesus is most important.

Interestingly enough, each one of these, except for the chai tea lattes and eating all the sweets, is still true today. I don't know what that means or what that says about me, but that's my reality.

### **The thing for me back then was I didn't want to waste that season.**

Because I knew that window wouldn't remain open forever. Someday those lockdown, shutdown, whatever-you-call-them days would end. And I'm thankful they did. But I wanted to learn all God had for me to learn. About me, about Him, about others, and about life. And I wanted to come out of that season saying I was a different person than when it started. A better person. A happier person. And maybe a more contented person.

I'm not sure I accomplished that or not. But I do believe we're all different than the people we were before March 2020. Don't you agree? Because our circumstances and experiences affect us. They impact us and mold us, even change us. And as we each walked through those days differently, we each faced unique experiences.

Some of us lost loved ones. Some of us lost jobs. All of us faced loss of some kind.

Some of us became sick. Some of us became depressed. All of us became transformed in some way. Some of us turned to our faith. Some of us turned away from our faith. All of us turned to or from something.

Some of us lived in peace. Some of us lived in panic. All of us lived those days in the best way we knew how.

We are not the same people we were two years ago. And friend, I believe we are better. Some might disagree with me, and that's okay. But I believe we are a more grateful people, we are more compassionate, we are more aware, and we are stronger than we were two years ago. I believe we are more resilient, more kind, more open, and more appreciative. No, not everyone has, but in general we each have grown for the better these last two years.

So, think back with me. How are you better? What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about your fellow man? And what have you learned about God?

### **And what about God?**

Through these last two years, I'm guessing you, like me, have experienced God's faithfulness, love, and mercy. He has shown up in your life in ways you never expected. And sometimes He answered your prayers in ways you couldn't have imagined.

The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. Lamentations 3:22-23 NLT

He has been with us in the hard days, the confusing days, the scary days. God has guided us, equipped us, helped us, and grieved with us. He has encouraged us, given us His peace, and grown our faith in Him.

But one thing He never did was leave us. No, God never once left our side in these two years, let alone ever. Not once. He has always been with us and always will be.

It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. Deuteronomy 31:8 ESV

We saw how He brought good out of terrible situations, how He shined His light through dark days, and how He provided exactly what we needed, when we needed it. We saw Him in the warm sunny days, in the flower poking through the sidewalk, in the amber and tangerine sunset. He was in the glistening snow, in another person's smiling eyes, in your child's laughter. God showed up, sometimes when we least expected Him to. But He did. And we're glad He did, aren't we?

**God carried us through when we couldn't find our own way.**

And here we are today, standing on His solid foundation. Standing, believing, rejoicing, thanking, trusting, serving, loving, and blessing. All thanks to God.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Psalm 150:6 NIV

I invite you to praise Him for His goodness and faithfulness and love today. I invite you to see Him in everything around you. And I invite you to rest in His care. Because some of us are weary travelers from these last two years, aren't we? Some of us are worn out from what we've gone through. And some of us could use some rest. Some of God's rest. Am I right?

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." Matthew 11:28-30 MSG

Because in sometimes looking back we also realize it's a good time for a break. Sometimes we realize we can't keep going at the pace we've been keeping. And sometimes we find out it's okay to pause and celebrate just how far we've come and how far God has carried us.

**I say today is a good day to do that.**

Friend, I applaud you. You've made it this far, and you've done well. Give yourself much grace and much love today. Because you deserve both.

And God isn't done with you yet, friend. He has plans and purposes for your life that are good and pleasing and perfect. And He loves you immensely. As author and pastor Max Lucado says, "God is fond

of you. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. If He had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Face it, friend, He's crazy about you."

No matter what we've experienced these last two years, we've made it this far. With God's leading, you and I have made it through. We may not know what tomorrow will hold, but we know Who holds tomorrow. (Adapted from original quote from Richard Abernathy.) And that, my friend, is all we need to know.

I'll wind down this episode with one more Bible verse, and I've shared it before, but this time in The Passion Translation. It's Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the Lord completely, and do not rely on your own opinions. With all your heart rely on him to guide you, and he will lead you in every decision you make. Become intimate with him in whatever you do, and he will lead you wherever you go.

If you found encouragement here, I invite you to subscribe to this podcast so you never miss an episode. Please rate it and review it so others can find encouragement for their real lives, too.

And as always, we're over in the Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. We are sharing our stories and what we're learning over there this week. Come on over and join in the conversation. The link to this group is in the show notes.

No matter what we were doing two years ago, and no matter what's to come, we've learned it's in God we trust with the real lives He's given us. God bless you, my friend.

*Julie Lefebvre*