

# ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

## **37. What Is Your Faith Story?**

You are listening to episode 37 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, "What Is Your Faith Story?" Welcome back and thank you for being here. What is your faith story? You may not think you have one, but you do. Actually, we each have a faith story, and no matter how old or young we are, as long as we're breathing, we each are living out our faith stories. No two faith stories are the same, just as no two people are the same. But no matter if we're currently living out our faith or not, it's all a part of our story. This is the subject of this week's episode, and I share a little of my faith story throughout it. I pray it encourages you to share yours in your corner of the world. So, let's get into it and find some encouragement along the way.

Last week, thirty one years ago, I became a follower of Jesus Christ. So, naturally I thought it would be a good time to discuss faith stories on the podcast!

### **So, what is faith, anyway?**

Hebrews 11:1 says it this way in the Voice translation: Faith is the assurance of things you have hoped for, the absolute conviction that there are realities you've never seen.

2 Corinthians 5:7 CEV says this: But we live by faith, not by what we see.

Dictionary.com defines it a few different ways:

- belief in God or in the doctrines or teachings of religion
- confidence or trust in a person or thing
- the trust in God and in His promises as made through Christ and the Scriptures by which humans are justified or saved

The last definition is my favorite, because it reminds me faith's importance rests in the object of our faith. We all have faith in something, right? Faith in my fellow man is different than my faith in God. So, in what do we have our faith? What is the object of our faith? To clarify, in this episode I'm referring to our religious faith. For me, the object of my religious faith is Jesus. He's the center of my faith and what (or Who) I believe in.

But it wasn't always this way.

My faith story began when I was a small child. For as long as I can remember, faith in God has been a part of my life. I can recall in my early years how our family attended church every weekend and on special, what the church deemed special days. But back then, going to church wasn't my favorite thing to do as a child. Especially on Good Friday when the rest of the world had the day off from school and

was outside playing at 2 p.m. as we were off to church. Gosh, I wanted to join my friends and play outside instead.

**But, church back then was the beginning of my faith story.**

What's yours? What's the beginning of your faith story?

I can't say I got much out of those church services back then. I probably paid more attention to what people did and what they were wearing than what the minister shared from the pulpit. And I was likely counting down the minutes until it would be over and I could get on with the really important stuff in my life. Like hanging out with my friends, or spending time in my room, or eating some lunch. You know, all those important childhood things.

Even though I didn't know it then, attending church weekly laid a foundation for me and opened the door for understanding God, the One true God of the Bible, was real. And not only that, but He was active in my life. My mom was my first example of someone who believed in God. It was important to her for us to believe in God, too.

**So, I can't remember a time when I didn't believe in God.**

Who was your first example of someone who believed in God? I wish I couldn't thank Mom today once more for her example of faith she modeled to me and to our family. I'd love to remind her how her life and her faith made a difference in my faith story. If that person is still alive and in your life today, may I suggest letting him or her know the impact he or she made in your life and in your faith story?

Mom taught me and my three brothers how to pray, and I can vividly remember how she, my brothers, and I would kneel around one of our beds each night at bedtime to pray together. I don't know why Dad never joined us, but he didn't. The prayers we said were words I barely understood, but after saying them each night, I began to memorize them. And you know? I can still recite them today, decades later, even though I pray differently today. This was the beginning of my prayer life. Mom modeled to me the importance of prayer.

Today, my prayers are different. They aren't like they used to be, but are more of a conversation with God, as if He is sitting right next to me. Prayer is an important, vital part of my day, of my faith, and of my life. Prayer is one way I connect with God.

But it wasn't always this way.

Sadly, as I grew older, my faith grew less important. I shelved God and put Him on the back burner of my life when I left home as a young adult. Sure, I prayed, but only when I was in a jam or only when I needed something. I guess you could say I treated God as if He was a genie in a bottle, and He lived to grant my wishes. But even seasons like this are a part of our faith stories.

I didn't think I needed God in my life back then, but I soon found out how wrong I was.

**Because at 22 years old, I found my life full of confusion and uncertainty.**

I lived with stress and concern and the absence of any sort of peace. I didn't recognize it at the time, but I was living my life for me, in my own strength, and I was miserable.

Over the phone one evening in April of that year with my best friend, Tina, and her mom, Barb, I made the most important decision of my life. I let go of all my striving and so-called control, and gave my life to Jesus. I invited Him to reside in my heart, and to take control of my messy, chaotic life. Barb said that night, "You'll find you have a joy in your heart that will never leave."

You know? She was right. *That joy is still there.*

And I appreciate how the Message translation describes this gift of God in Ephesians 2:8-10: Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

### **What a gift, indeed!**

Within that very next week, I fell in love with a handsome farmer who would later become my husband. We were engaged three months later and married the following year. As we started our family, God grew our faith as we put Him in the center of our lives.

[Bible Study Fellowship](#) became a part of my life when I was expecting our now 25-year-old son. Through it I began reading the Bible, something I had never done before. Because the Bible scared me. It was a big book with big words, and it just didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. But slowly I began to learn and study the Bible, which is something I never thought I could do. The more I learned, the more I couldn't get enough of what I was reading. Sometimes it felt as if the words jumped off the page to me, and were written just for me and my circumstances.

Through reading God's Words, it was then I fell in love with Jesus, the one I had already given my heart to.

Both of our children grew up in BSF, they invited Jesus into their lives at young ages, and still have those deep roots of truth planted in their hearts today. I still study God's Word through BSF... 25 years later!

### **But just because I follow Jesus, doesn't mean life is perfect.**

It doesn't mean life is all sunshine and roses over here. Because it's not. We've struggled in our marriage, we've struggled in our family, I don't always trust God wholeheartedly, and sometimes I focus on my problems more than the hope I have. That's a part of our faith stories too, how God continues to grow our faith and trust in Who He is.

And we don't live on Easy Street either. We have trials and problems and experience circumstances we'd rather not walk through. As I've mentioned this scripture in prior episodes, it's worth sharing again. Jesus said to His disciples before He faced crucifixion the words in John 16:33. We can apply them to our lives today as well. In the AMPC it says:

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 yes, we who believe in Jesus still experience hard things in this life.

But I say it's a whole lot better than without Jesus in it.

**Jesus is the center of my faith story, my life, of our marriage, and of our family.**

I cannot imagine my life without Him in it. Life with Jesus is the greatest adventure I've ever experienced. Having Him in the center gives me assurance that everything is going to be okay, no matter what I'm going through or what is happening around me. When this life is over, I trust I'll see His face welcoming me into eternity. What a glorious day that will be!

Friend, our faith stories are powerful. They may not seem like a big deal, but they are. And they are unfolding day by day. They aren't perfect, but they are perfectly ours. Your story is different than mine. You may be farther along in your story than me. But no matter where you are in your story, it's important, and it's important to share with one another. I'd love to read about or hear yours!

So I invite you over to our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. We are sharing snippets of our faith stories all week long. Stop over to be encouraged and inspired, and why not share some of your own faith story? I can't wait to read it. You'll find the link to this community in the show notes.

And if you're listening to this episode near its published date, and if you live local to me, I invite you to our next BYOB and B (Bring Your Own Bible and Bestie) evening of encouragement for women. Yes, we are resuming our events and we are so excited! This event, our 14th one, is coming up on Monday, May 2, and its subject is all about our thoughts, what we're thinking, and how important our thoughts are. You'll come away encouraged and inspired for your real life right now. Details and tickets can be found at the link in the show notes.

In closing, may this final scripture passage encourage your heart to continue to shine your light in this world through your faith story. It's Matthew 5:16 VOICE: *You are like that illuminating light.* Let your light shine everywhere you go, *that you may illumine creation*, so men and women everywhere may see your good actions, *may see creation at its fullest, may see your devotion to Me*, and may turn and praise your Father in heaven *because of it*.

You are making a difference in this world, my friend. Thank you, and God bless you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie Lefebvre". The signature is written in black ink and has a horizontal line underneath it.