

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

54. 5 Valuable Life Lessons from RAGBRAI 2022

You are listening to episode 54 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, 5 Valuable Life Lessons from RAGBRAI 2022. Welcome back to the podcast, friend. Thank you for joining me today. My husband and I are back and recovered (well, mostly recovered) from our RAGBRAI biking trip that took place the last full week of July. I shared more about this in episode 51. In case you missed it, RAGBRAI is the annual bicycle ride across Iowa, and this was our 7th trip across our state on our tandem. And just like past years, God taught me much on this year's ride. I'm sharing these life lessons from RAGBRAI 2022 today in this episode. Not only for me, however, because I believe you'll benefit from these as well. So, let's get into this episode and find some hope and encouragement along the way.

Seven days, with over 11,000 feet of climb, and 470+ miles on two wheels.

This year's RAGBRAI route took us through some new and some familiar towns as we peddled from near the Missouri River, the western border of Iowa, to the Mississippi River on the east, enjoying small town Iowa at its finest along the way. My husband and I, on our bicycle built for two, experienced Iowa once again the way co-founder, John Karras, once described it.

"You drive around Iowa, and it's not very impressive in a car... When you bicycle through Iowa, it was stunning. Incredible. You approach a river valley — there a lot of river valleys in Iowa — and it's full of mist, and it's morning, and just glorious, beautiful."

John Karras, Co-founder of RAGBRAI

Mr. Karras was right. There's nothing like experiencing Iowa on a bicycle. Nothing. And experiencing seven of those misty-filled mornings on RAGBRAI was an unexpected joy I had forgotten about.

Each RAGBRAI is special, and on each one God teaches me lessons I don't want to forget.

This trip across the state was no exception. God again showed up, meeting me on the back of our tandem, teaching me, transforming me, and wowing me in ways only He could.

But the thing is, if I don't write these lessons down, or better yet if I don't share them, I will forget them. And I fully believe these lessons aren't just for me. There for any of us who care to apply them.

So, here goes.

5 Valuable Life Lessons from RAGBRAI 2022

1. Starting the day with the sunrise makes the day go better.

We like to get an early start on RAGBRAI, so on most days we're up at 5, and on the road by 6. Since we were moving across the state from west to east, we peddled each morning toward the sunrise. And those mornings we caught the sun rising up over the horizon, as the songbirds serenaded us with their

morning hellos, we concluded there's no better way to start the day. And starting a full day of bicycling, welcoming in a brand-new day, made our day go better. Our attitudes were brighter. Our bodies were more alert. And our hearts were more thankful. **Starting the day with the sunrise is a great way to begin every day.** But don't just take my word for it. Researchers say rising with the sun creates optimal energy and productivity levels!

2. Eat when you're hungry. Sleep when you're tired.

We don't wear watches on RAGBRAI. We don't pay much attention to the time at all (except for setting our morning alarm). Because on RAGBRAI there's really no need to. We eat when we're hungry, not when the clock tells us to. We sleep when we're tired, not when the clock says it's bedtime. And we don't let time rule us like we do in our everyday lives back home. Because quite honestly, I let time control much of my normal day and how I feel about what I accomplish.

But living a week without the concern of time was generously freeing. It reminded me to pay less attention to the clock and more attention to God's timing for me. Who says we need to eat at noon and 6 p.m. anyway? How much is time controlling what we do and when we do it? **What if we ate when we're hungry and slept when we're tired on a regular basis?**

3. Your pace is your pace.

I'm a person who likes to win. I'm also a person who likes to finish first. I'd rather lead than follow. Just like RAGBRAI is not a race, neither is life. My husband has to reel me in often on RAGBRAI, because I want to get to the finish line quickly. But life is a journey, right? So is RAGBRAI. This is something I have to consistently tell myself. My pace is my pace. I don't have to finish first and I don't have to race anyone else.

And on a tandem, my pace has to match my husband's. Otherwise, there's trouble. So, we, together, find a pace that works for both of us. In life, if my pace doesn't match God's pace, there will also be friction and disharmony. Matching the pace God has for me is much more enjoyable. Romans 3:28 MSG says, "We've finally figured it out. Our lives get in step with God and all others by letting him set the pace, not by proudly or anxiously trying to run the parade."

Yeah. This is a lesson I continue to learn. The same goes for you, friend. **You are not behind. You are not in a race. Your pace is your pace.** Embrace it. Learn to thrive in it. And allow God to take you to the finish line in victory--in His timing.

4. We can do hard things.

Day 4, Wednesday's route of RAGBRAI was a 100-mile day. I had not biked 100 miles in one day ever, and I was nervous about it. I was feeling all the feels! *Could I do it? Would my body hold out biking for 6+ hours in a single day? Would we be able to do this together? If I finish this day, will I be able to finish the week?* Yet, I wanted to give it my best shot. So, we started early, we stopped and refueled often, and we hydrated a lot. Plus, I prayed a lot too. (I'll talk about that in number 5.) God showed me when He equips us, we can do hard things. Things we may not be able to do in our own strength, but in His strength we can.

Finally, let the Lord make you strong. Depend on his mighty power.

Ephesians 6:10 NIRV

We finished that 100-mile day, and wouldn't you know? I had strength to spare when we rolled into our campsite later that afternoon. I felt great! That's not how I expected to finish that day. I couldn't believe it! **Indeed, God enables us to do hard things!**

5. Prayer matters.

Each morning as we set out on the route, my husband and I prayed together on the bike. We prayed for our family back home, for us and for our safety, and for His peace, presence, and provision. We knew we didn't want to attempt the day ahead without inviting God in.

On the final day, the hilliest day with the most feet of climb, we had just peddled up a doozy of a hill and the second to last town's water tower was in sight as we crested the hill. Yes! It wouldn't be long, and we would finish our week-long ride! But as we peddled along on the flattened-out stretch of road, our front tire began to wobble. Bill immediately took us to the shoulder and BOOM! A sound like a gun shot came from our tire. The force of the blow sent gravel pieces from the road's shoulder pelting our legs. We had blown our front tire, and a 4-inch hole appeared to prove it.

Oh no. At first tears began forming because of the welts on my legs from the gravel shrapnel. I fought the tears back. But then the reality of how on earth were we going to get into town to get our tire fixed set in. Bigger tears formed. I couldn't fight them back.

But then I remembered our prayer that morning. I remembered we gave this day to God. So, I trusted He would show up, somehow, some way as we walked our bike towards town, with likely three miles to go. Cyclists passed us. Vehicles passed us. The sun beat down on our backs. And let me tell you, cycling shoes are not designed for long-distance walking, just saying.

I said to Bill, "It would be great if a nice farmer guy would pick us up in this truck and take us to town." I silently prayed for that to happen.

And wouldn't you know, within a matter of minutes, a white farm truck with a big truck bed pulled up beside us, and the man driving offered to give us a ride to town. Hallelujah! I might have heard an angelic chorus in that moment. Here this man was working at a car dealership and saw us walking by. He hopped in his truck to give us a ride to wherever we needed to go! Thank you, Lord! We loaded our bike and ourselves and within minutes we were in town at a bike repair stand. Thank you, Brady.

As Bill took care of the bike at the bike repair stand, I walked away and went live on Facebook to share an update. And in that very moment, it hit me. Tears flowed that I could not stop. Recalling our prayer that morning and realizing what just happened when our front tire blew, my emotions got the best of me. Because I fully understood how God protected us on that road. Our tire could have blown going down one of the steep hills we flew down earlier that day. Or it could have blown as we were giving all we had in climbing one of those same hills. Either scenario wouldn't have been good, and it's likely we would have ended up in the hospital--or worse--as a result.

But God allowed the tire to blow while we were nearly coasting on a flat stretch of road. And where Bill had enough time to get off the road to protect us and the other cyclists. God heard our prayer for protection that morning and answered generously! It still chokes me up when I think about it. God is so faithful, friend. And our prayers matter. May you and I not begin a single day without inviting God into

it. Without asking Him for His peace, protection, and provision through it. **Prayer matters more than we may realize.**

We got the tire replaced, I wiped my tears, and down the road we went to finish our week-long ride across Iowa. God blessed us in so many ways, especially that day as we finished. I'll never stop praising God and thanking Him for the lessons He taught me on RAGBRAI this year and for His amazing faithfulness. I'm so completely grateful. I'm so completely in awe.

All day long I'll praise and honor you, O God, for all that you have done for me.

Psalm 71:8 TLB

I pray these 5 valuable life lessons from RAGBRAI 2022 encourage your heart as well.

Which one encourages you the most? To start your day with the sunrise? To eat when you're hungry? Your pace is your pace? We can do hard things? Or how prayer matters?

What lessons is God teaching you today or has taught you recently? I'd love to learn from you!

We're continuing this conversation over in our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook, and I invite you over there to join in. You'll find this space encouraging and uplifting, and you may just meet a new friend or two over there. The link to this amazing group is in the show notes.

And please rate or review this episode if you found some encouragement today. This will help others find this podcast as well. Subscribe so you never miss an episode.

In closing, I'm thankful for these lessons from RAGBRAI 2022. Lord willing, we'll have more on next year's ride! And if you'd like to join us next July, it's the 50th anniversary of RAGBRAI. It would be fun to share the experience with you!

Thank you for allowing me to share these lessons with you today. God is faithful, isn't He, friend? To Him be the glory! Amen!

Until next time, God bless you.

Julie Lefebvre