

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

55. How to Be More Like the Sunflower

You're listening to episode 55 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, "How to Be More Like the Sunflower." Thank you for joining me and welcome back to the podcast! Everywhere I go lately, I can't help but notice sunflowers. Maybe that's because it's that time of year, or maybe it's because I'm pretty fond of these amazing flowers. Either way, I don't mind. Sunflowers are beautiful creations of God, aren't they? As I gazed at one the other day and marveled at its beauty, I was reminded just how special and unique these plants are. Then I couldn't help but ponder a few spiritual applications based off of these beautiful flowers. We can learn a lot from God's creation, can't we? Even something like the sunflower?

Now please know, I fully realize we are to worship the Creator and not His creation, and in this episode, we will remember that. But hang with me here for this short while, and we'll ponder, together, what we can learn from the sunflower and how we can apply that to our lives today. Let's get to it.

'Tis the season for sunflowers. They are one of my favorite flowers. With their strong, tall stalks, their heads full of seeds, and their beautiful bright yellow, sunshiny crowns, they are glorious plants, aren't they? Sadly, time got away from me this spring, and I did not plant any sunflowers in our garden this year. Lesson learned, because I'm missing them in our backyard right now.

They are quite easy to grow, however, and I continue to be amazed how such a tall and strong plant comes from a strange shaped, brown seed. A seed many of us eat, by the way!

It's no wonder many of us like the sunflower!

As I typically do with much of God's creation, I found some spiritual applications from these beautiful flowers, perfect for a podcast episode! Because God didn't just create beautiful things for us to enjoy. He also created them to point to Him.

God's eternal power and character cannot be seen. But from the beginning of creation, God has shown what these are like by all he has made.

Romans 1:20 CEV

If you want to learn, then go and ask the wild animals and the birds, the flowers and the fish. Any of them can tell you what the Lord has done. Every living creature is in the hands of God.

Job 12:7-10 CEV

I can't help but see our Creator in His creation.

And I can't help but look at the sunflower and find its existence and its function to inspire me. But before we get too far, what is a sunflower anyway and where did it get its name?

As a native plant of North America, the common name, "sunflower," refers to the annual species *Helianthus annuus*, whose golden round flower heads resemble the sun. In the Greek language, *helios* means sun and *anthos* means flower. The resulting name: sunflower. Its existence dates back to 1000 B.C. where it was cultivated for food and for medicinal purposes.

Some interesting facts about the sunflower:

- it is the national flower of Russia and the state flower of Kansas.
- is known for turning its face to the sun, also known as heliotropism.
- its flower heads consist of 1,000 to 2,000 individual flowers (seeds).
- seeds contain calcium and 11 other minerals.
- the largest sunflower head on record measured 32 1/2 inches across its widest point and was grown in Canada.

We can learn a lot from sunflowers!

Ready to learn and be inspired with me? Here are a few spiritual applications regarding sunflowers.

How to be more like the sunflower (and why we would want to be).

1 - Follow the sun (Son).

"I don't think there's anything on this planet that more trumpets life than the sunflower. For me that's because of the reason behind its name. Not because it looks like the sun but because it follows the sun. During the course of the day, the head tracks the journey of the sun across the sky. A satellite dish for sunshine."

Helen Mirren

Yes, sunflowers follow the sun as it moves through the sky throughout the day. We would be wise to follow the SON, as well. As in the quote I just read, instead of being a satellite dish for sunshine, what if we were a satellite dish for Jesus? To follow Him and receive all He has to shine on us? Sunflowers are a beautiful example for us to emulate. Because when we follow the Son, we too will grow in ways we could not on our own or in following someone or something else.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12 NIV

May we be like the sunflower to continually receive the light of life!

2 - Take time to grow.

Sunflowers aren't in a rush to grow. A sunflower seed will sprout in 10 - 14 days, and if given proper water, sunlight, and fertilizer, they will grow to maturity (sometimes up to 12 feet tall!) in 70-100 days after planting. That's actually pretty quick, right? Growing that tall in a short amount of time. But they don't rush the growing. They just grow.

We don't need to be in a rush to grow, either. I don't know about you, but I've been known to try to rush through the experience to get to the lesson. Or to rush through the growing pains to get to the end result: growth. That doesn't work so well. God teaches us, molds us, transforms us, and grows us in His timing, and His timing is always perfect. And just like a matured sunflower, that stands in beautiful splendor, we will do the same as God matures us.

May we be like the sunflower and allow God to mature us in His timing.

3 - Stand tall.

Sunflowers are always the tallest flowers in my garden. Always. Nothing comes close to their stature. Sure, other varieties may be shorter, but the ones I plant can grow to a height taller than me. I just love that, by the way!

It can get quite windy out here in the country, and in all the years we've planted sunflowers, only one has succumbed to the wind and fallen over, flat on the ground. That's the year we experienced a derecho, with over 110 mph winds. But other than that, our sunflowers stand tall, no matter what comes their way.

What if we did that? What if we stood tall, in God's strength against whatever came our way? Not in our own strength, because I've proven that doesn't work. Maybe you have too. But in God's strength, asking Him for His strength each day.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13 ESV

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

Ephesians 6:10 NIRV

In His strength, and with His help, we can stand tall in all situations and circumstances, no matter what comes our way.

May we be like the sunflower and stand tall, no matter what, in God's strength.

4 - Be a seed bearer.

As the fact I shared a few minutes ago stated, a sunflower can contain 1,000 to 2,000 individual flowers. That means one can contain 1,000 to 2,000 individual seeds! That's a lot of seeds! And a healthy, thriving sunflower produces healthy, thriving seeds. Those seeds can be used for a variety of things (food, oil, medicine, dyes, more flowers). Good things come from the seeds. And I can't tell you how many years we've had sunflowers sprout up out of the ground that came from the flower from the year prior. (I wish that would have happened this year!)

What about us? What about our seeds? Are we healthy and thriving, producing healthy and thriving seeds? What about the seeds God has planted in us? Are we using them for good? Are we scattering good seeds that may bring forth good today and down the road? Do we share them so others can benefit from them, too? Who is in our lives today who could use a few of these good seeds planted in his or her life? What will we do about that?

May we be like the sunflower to continually bear seeds of hope to a needy and hurting world!

5 - Make others smile.

"Her smile put the sunflower to shame."

Jerry Spinelli

My sister-in-law gave me a plaque that hangs in our entryway that's a beautiful reminder as we leave our home. It says, "Be the reason someone smiles today." Somedays I don't carry that out so well. But what if we did that every day? What if our intention every day was to make someone smile?

Sunflowers just naturally do that. They don't intend to, but because of their beauty and innocence and uniqueness, they just naturally do. I mean, who can look at a sunflower and not smile? (If nothing else, internally?) Sunflowers bring out the happy in people. What if we did the same? Could we bring out the happy in people? Would we?

I say let's try. Let's be about making others lives better and more happy.

May we be like the sunflower to bring out the happy in others and make them smile!

Which one of these five ways speak to your heart the most?

Which one spurs you on and encourages you? How can you be more like the sunflower today?

Behind our home is a large field of corn. It's a beautiful sight, with the stalks lush, green, and taller than me. Today I imagined for a moment what it might look like if it was a field of sunflowers. *Can you imagine?* If you've ever visited a sunflower field, then you can imagine it. That sight in my backyard would be absolutely amazing. And if that was the case, I'd love to give as many sunflowers away as possible. To make others smile too.

But since that's not the case, and I'm assuming you don't have a sunflower field in your backyard either, we can do the next best thing. We can take this list and apply any or all of these to our lives. God can use anything to grow us and teach us, right. Even a sunflower.

I invite you over to our Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. There we are continuing our conversation regarding being more like a sunflower. Come on over and join in the conversation. The link to this most encouraging group is in the show notes.

Also, you'll find some fresh and new printables and images to share in my Free Resources on my site, all about, you guessed it, sunflowers! Come on over, grab a bookmark or a lock screen to stay encouraged. The link to the Resources is also in the show notes.

Don't forget to rate and review this episode if you found some timely encouragement. Subscribe to the podcast so you never miss an episode.

In closing, I pray you see lots of sunflowers in the days to come. And I pray God uses them to remind you to follow the Son, to take time to grow, to stand tall, to be a seed bearer, and to make others smile.

Thank you for joining me here today and for being a bright spot in my world... just like a sunflower. Have a great week ahead. God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre