

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

74. Happy 2023! How Are You Beginning This New Year?

You're listening to episode 74 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled *Happy 2023! How Are You Beginning This New Year?* Happy New Year and welcome to the podcast! Whether this is your first time here or you're returning back to listen, I am grateful we get to journey together in this way today! Yes, happy 2023! The new year is here! I hope you had wonderful holidays that brought you much joy and delight. Getting right to it today, how do you typically begin a new year? Do you set goals or resolutions? Do you choose a word for the year or maybe a Bible verse? Or is there something special you do as you turn the calendar from one year to the next? This is our subject of this episode, and in it I share what I typically do and my word for 2023. Hang with me here for the next short while and we'll find some encouragement together. Let's get to it!

One thing I've learned over the years when it comes to a new year is this: there's no right way or wrong way to begin one. We just begin. And it happens whether we're ready or not.

Because we're each different and unique, we each likely step into a new year in different ways.

We discussed in last week's episode 73, how to set ourselves up for the new year. Some of us may set goals, dream new dreams, believe in a fresh hope. Some of us may begin the new year with resolutions, with plans and progress charts. Yet some of us may not do anything at all. Some of us might breathe a sigh of relief knowing last year is behind us and we haven't thought too much about the new one as we turn the calendar page.

I was reminded of a powerful truth yesterday when a friend said, "God is not limited by time." She's right. God isn't confined to a year, a day, an hour. And I was reminded of 2 Peter 3:8 (NIV) when the apostle Peter said, "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day." God doesn't measure time like we do.

So, there's nothing magical or sacred about a new year. The new year and celebrating it on January 1 is a man-made idea. And actually, it began in ancient Rome, and the day was dedicated to a god of gateways and beginnings, named Janus. And interestingly, the month of January is named after this god.

Now please know, this is not the God of the Bible, with a big "G." This is a man-made god, with a little "g." And some believe we who believe in God with a big "G" shouldn't celebrate a holiday that was originally dedicated to a god with a little "g." I'm not here to debate that. We won't go there today. But where we are going is to use this man-made marking of time as a space to seek God, to reflect and recenter our focus. To use it as a starting point to begin again or to start fresh. To realign our priorities and purpose. And to not get so caught up in what we do or don't do in a single year, but to glorify God in following His lead.

Please remember this: this new year isn't dependent upon how you begin it or not begin it. Because God is bigger than all of it. He is bigger than the ending and beginning of a new year. And quite frankly, beginning this new year in the way God wants you to is the way to begin 2023.

So, friend, how do you typically begin a new year? What do you do, or not do?

How are you beginning this new year?

Typically, I take some time to pause and reflect on the past year before running head-long into the new one. I was able to do that last week. I celebrated some successes, I rejoiced in how I saw God show up in my life over the last twelve months, and I also took a hard look at what did not go well. Because frankly, I don't want to have to relearn any lessons I learned in these last 365 days.

I also took time to pray and ponder and seek God in my goals and plans. And I asked Him to help me choose a word and scripture for 2023. Do you typically choose a word for your new year? Some years I have chosen one and other years I believe God chose it for me. Kinda like He did for this year. Which I'll get to in a moment. But this word for the year is something that can help you focus, or be an encouragement, or be something you want more of in your life. Or maybe it's something God has for you.

Because a word isn't too small for God to care about, nor is it too big for Him to handle.

And maybe, just maybe, He'll use that word powerfully in your life in the new year. In ways you may never expect.

My past words have been:

2014 - JOURNEY

2015 - IMPACT

2016 - BELIEVE

2017 - LIVE

2018 - ADVENTURE

2019 - REVIVE

2020 - OPEN

2021 - CONNECT

2022 - DELIGHT

In choosing mine this year, after prayer and pondering, a few words came to mind, and I jotted them down. They were REST, INTENTIONAL, UNDISTRACTED, SLOW, PRESENT.

But on Wednesday last week a word crossed my path, and as soon as I saw it, I lump lodged in my throat. I knew this was the word. How? Because I didn't want it to be my word. It made me nervous. It made me want to run from it. And it made me uncomfortable. I knew God was getting my attention and I also knew this is the word He would use to grow me in 2023.

That word is:

UNCOMFORTABLE.

See what I mean?

It makes me uncomfortable just speaking it, and it probably makes you uncomfortable too, right?? I mean, who wants that word for the year? Doesn't REST or SLOW sound much better than UNCOMFORTABLE?

But I fleshed this out with a close friend last week, and she helped me see how all of those other words play into the word UNCOMFORTABLE. Because many times forcing myself to rest, and choosing to slow down, and staying present, and living intentionally and undistracted is very uncomfortable for me. Because my pace is normally faster. My mind tends to run to the next thing. I'm one who has lots to do and places to go and people to see. That's what's comfortable to me. Learning a new way to do anything is always uncomfortable!

Thinking about this word further, the goals I set for 2023 make me very uncomfortable. Because they are goals I don't know how to achieve yet. That's anything but comfortable! Yikes! I will have to do things I've never done before and will have to rely on God's leading and guiding to get me there. These are goals I cannot achieve on my own, and actually, that's precisely where God wants me.

God wants me uncomfortable.

I believe He wants us all uncomfortable.

Because He gets our attention when we are uncomfortable. We draw to Him more when we are uncomfortable. And when we are uncomfortable, that's when we grow. We don't grow when we're comfortable. We just don't.

But hear me in this when I say, I want to be comfortable. I like comfortable. In fact, I think I've even idolized comfort in my life. I'm okay remaining in my comfort zone, under my big blue fuzzy blanket, with my cozy slippers on my feet and a cup of hot tea in my hand. And I don't particularly like to be challenged or things to change drastically in my life. Comfort is my friend, and I hang out with her a lot.

So, it's no wonder this is my word for 2023!

In my time with God last Friday morning, I landed upon this scripture, and it's perfect for this word, uncomfortable.

I hear the Lord saying, "I will stay close to you, instructing and guiding you along the pathway for your life. I will advise you along the way and lead you forth with my eyes as your guide. So don't make it difficult; don't be stubborn when I take you where you've not been before. Don't make me tug you and pull you along. Just come with me!" Psalm 32:8-9 TPT

Yep, that one is my Bible verse for this year.

God may take me where I've not been before, but if He's by my side, I don't need to feel uncomfortable.

And another Bible verse encouraged me about being uncomfortable. It pointed me to the truth that God is our comfort.

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NLT

So, even if I feel uncomfortable, God is my comfort. Isn't that so encouraging?

I'm not dreading my word of the year anymore. I may learn to appreciate what comes with feeling uncomfortable. We'll walk this out and see.

Have you chosen a word as you are beginning this new year?

If you need some ideas, you'll find a Word of the Year list which contains 81 words to choose from in my Free Resources on my website. You may find the perfect word for you there. The link to my Resources is in the show notes.

Have you set any goals or resolutions for 2023? Are you doing anything special as you are beginning this new year? We're discussing this all week long in our private Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. I invite you over there to have some fun with us and join in the conversation. The link to this private group is in the show notes as well.

Again, I want to stress, how we begin 2023 does not determine how the rest of the year will play out. Only God can determine that. And the best thing we can do is to stay close to Jesus as we journey through 2023. Remember how we celebrated Him as Immanuel, God with us, just nine days ago? He was with us on December 25, He is with us today, and He will be with us every day of this year.

Proverbs 16:9 NLT says, "We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps." And I like how the CEV of that same verse reads, "We make our own plans, but the Lord decides where we will go."

Amen? Amen.

As we close out this episode, please know I am praying for you today. I pray God draws you close in this new year, no matter how you are beginning it. I pray He blesses you with His undeniable presence, His perfect provision, and His peace that surpasses all understanding throughout 2023. Thank you for joining me here today, friend. I am cheering you on! God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre