

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

79. The Distraction of the Future Says, "Live There Now"

You are listening to episode 79 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, "The Distraction of the Future Says, "Live There Now." Welcome to the podcast! I'm thankful we get to spend a few moments together today. Because I help women live encouraged and less distracted, we continue to explore the many varied distractions that work their way into our lives on any given day. And so far in this podcast, we've covered many of them. But goodness, there's still many more to delve into. Today's episode focuses on a distraction that I believe is another one that many don't consider a typical distraction. But it has distracted me, more than I care to admit here. And maybe as we work our way through this episode you will see how it has distracted you, too. The distraction of the future has two different sides to it, and we are looking at both. Let's find some help and hope along the way today. Are you ready? Let's get to it.

I was reminded a few weeks ago of a story from my youth. And remembering it brought out an important truth.

How the distraction of the future impacts our lives.

Even at twelve years old.

The day in my youth when my mom told me her mother died when she was twelve years old, something in my brain marked time. I wasn't twelve quite yet. But my simple mind led me to the thoughts that if my mom's mom died when she was twelve, well then my mom would likely die when I was twelve. Likely on the anniversary of my grandmother's death.

It sounds all a bit silly, now that I'm an adult, but it wasn't so silly to me back then. I mean, what child thinks about such awful thoughts?? Well, this child did. All because of fear. You see my greatest fear back then was losing my mom, and that fear plagued me for many years in my young life.

Well, eventually that day in June arrived in my twelfth year of life, the anniversary of my grandmother's death, because remember, my young brain marked that day in my mind. The dreaded day had arrived. The day I would lose my mom (or thought so, anyway).

But I planned to spend that day with friends at an amusement park two hours away. However, the thought of not being home with Mom that day nearly tore me apart. I didn't want to go.

Of course I told Mom of this fear, because I told her everything. She assured me she'd be okay, and that I when I returned, she'd be waiting for me. After much coaxing and encouragement, I trusted her words and went with my friends. As I rode roller coasters and spinning rides, and dined on cotton candy and played arcade games that afternoon, I forgot all about my expectation of Mom's passing. But I remember I couldn't get home fast enough to see her after our day of fun was over. And sure enough, my heart was relieved to see Mom in the kitchen when I arrived home.

The future becomes a distraction when we allow fear and worry to fill it.

But that's not the only facet to the distraction of the future. The distraction of the future can also be a result of anticipating something good in our lives. Like the distraction of our hopes, our dreams, our future goals and realities.

Allow me to explain.

Have you ever daydreamed about something specific in your future? Something wonderful or something you've desired for a long time? And your daydreams were so vibrant and colorful, almost as if they were already a reality? I have. Back in 2001, I cut out of the local newspaper the plans for my dream home. Back then every Sunday they featured one each week. I put those plans on my goal posters and talked about it with the people I loved. I saw that home in full color, I smelled the new home smell, I dreamed of that home daily and all of the potential memories we would create in it. Yes, I did all the things I was taught to do to enable me to achieve this goal and dream.

Today, however, I don't have a clue where those plans are, and we don't live in that dream home. So, what happened?

Turns out, research suggests seeing that home so vibrantly in my mind and feeling that sense of accomplishment without it being a reality, likely demotivated me to work at achieving that goal. My mind experienced enough good endorphins just thinking about it that I lost all motivation to do the work to make it happen.

Too much dreaming and fanaticizing about our goals can backfire.

Because oftentimes our minds can't tell the difference from what's real or what's imagined.

But that's not all.

Have you ever set a goal and talked about that goal with everyone around you? You believed in that goal and knew someday you were going to achieve it. Interestingly, talking about our goals can do the same things in our minds.

Melissa Chu, a writer for Inc.com describes it this way:

'When you write down or think about your intentions, there's a gap between where you are and where you want to be. The compelling need to close this gap helps you to act on your intentions. But when you let others know about it, the gap closes because you (artificially) feel the same way you should after completing your intentions.'

Research shows publicly announcing your goals makes you less likely to achieve them.

Despite what you and I have been taught for years. Despite how we've been told to visualize ourselves achieving our dreams, to share our goals with others to remain accountable, to do all the things necessary to achieve success.

Hence, no dream home over here.

Don't get me wrong. I love our home, and I'm okay that we don't live in that dream home. But isn't all of this interesting? What we've always been taught might not have been the best to achieve what we desired.

And this is how the future can become a distraction in our lives today.

The distraction of the future is not God's best for us.

Because the distraction of the future says, "Live there now." But God says, "Stay present with me."

Why? Because God meets us in the present. Because we encounter God in the present.

Sure, God transcends time and is infinite, so He's the God of our pasts, our present, and our futures. He's the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. But He meets us in the right now. He gives us what we need in the present.

This distraction of the future entices us in this moment to dwell on what's to come. It snatches us away from what's happening right here and now and places our attention on the future. The future we have not control over. The future that only God sees, and knows, and controls. Whether it's a negative perspective of the future (meaning with fear or worry) or a positive one (anticipating good things), we aren't designed to live in any space of time than the one we're currently in.

Do you suppose that's why God talks about this in His Word?

Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. Matthew 6:34 MSG

After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! God deals out joy in the present, the *now*. It's useless to brood over how long we might live. Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 MSG

And one more verse. I've shared it here on the podcast before. In 1 Corinthians 7, apostle Paul instructs the Corinthians in singleness and marriage, and in the middle of that verse are two sentences that encourage my heart. So much so, I have it hanging on my office wall. Yes, it's regarding singleness and marriage, but it speaks to the essence of God's will for our lives. The middle of verse 17 reads from the Message translation, "Where you are right now is God's place for you. Live and obey and love and believe right there."

Three sentences stand out to me in these verses.

In the first one:

"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now."

If we're focused on the future, giving our entire attention right now is impossible to do. If our thoughts are on tomorrow, we can't appreciate today. We miss what's happening right now if tomorrow consumes our mind. If we're living in tomorrow, we can't fully live in today.

So, how do we give our entire attention to what God is doing right now? How do we do that? Well, the first idea that comes to my mind is to ask Him for help. Sounds simple, right? Just ask for God's help. But if you're anything like me, I can easily forget to ask God to help me stay in the moment. To keep my thoughts on right now. But if we don't ask, how can He answer?

But I believe the more we ask Him to keep our minds on right now, and to give our attention to what He is doing right now, the more we will remember to do it. We can begin with asking each morning, each mid-day, each evening. And then staying in the present when we ask, and also returning our attention to what's happening in those moments. It's quite okay to put reminders in strategic places. Even a simple sticky note can be helpful.

Another idea is to jot down in your calendar (either digitally or in a paper one) or in a small notebook the ways you see God throughout the day. That certainly helps in keeping our attention to what God is doing right now and it makes us aware of His presence.

This helps us remove the distraction of the future.

The second sentence that stands out to me is found in the Ecclesiastes passage I read:

"God deals out joy in the present, the *now*."

The word 'now' is italicized in the text. I looked up why, and I learned that an italicized word expresses a deeper explanation of the text from the author. So simply, 'now' helps define 'the present.' God doesn't deal out joy in the future, no. He gives His joy in the present, the now. Not tomorrow, but right now. Not even in the next minute, but right now. He gives us joy in this very moment.

How can we embrace the joy He's giving us in this moment? What can we do to fully live in it?

We can thank Him for it. We can share that joy with others around us. And when we're tempted to turn our thoughts to the future, we can reel them back to the joy He gives us right now. Even when the circumstances we're facing aren't so joyful. His joy isn't dependent on our circumstances. But, friend, this isn't always easy, and reeling our thoughts back in takes practice. But the more we do it, the better we will get at it, and the easier it will be to embrace His joy in the moment we're in.

His joy is present right now.

The third sentence that stands out to me is in the 1 Corinthians passage.

"Where you are right now is God's place for you."

Where we are in this very moment is God's place for us. Right now, right here, right where you and I are. We don't know God's place for us tomorrow, but His place for us today, right now is here. Right where we are. God's best for us is to live in this moment, and not to be concerned about the future. If His place for us changes, He'll let us know in that moment. But for right now, we live and stay in the present.

And the sentence that follows it tells us "to live and obey and love and believe right there." We are to fully live and operate and function in the place God has us. And that's right here, right now, in this moment. We aren't to live in the future, we are to live right now.

How? We stay present. And we follow the suggestions I've already shared. We ask God to help us, we pay attention to what God is doing in our lives, we live in God's joy in each moment and reel our thoughts back in when necessary, and we function in the here and now.

This isn't to say we aren't to be prepared for tomorrow, but we aren't there yet. Right now is all we have, and right now is where God desires us to be.

How does this encourage your heart? What's one thing you can do today to live in the present and forego focusing on the future?

We're moving this conversation over to our private Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook this week. I invite you over there to join in the conversation about how to forego living in the future and staying in the present. You'll find this space encouraging and full of hope. The link to this group is in the show notes.

Also, if you found encouragement in this episode, would you please rate it and/or review it from where you're listening today? This will help others find this encouragement too. And so you never miss a new episode, be sure to subscribe to the podcast.

To close out this episode, I encourage you to cling to the three verses I shared earlier in this podcast. They are listed in the show notes as well. But allow them to spur you on to stay present with God. Because God wants to commune with us now. He wants us to be present with Him. Tomorrow will be there when we get there. And God will meet us there. But for now, may we stop this distraction of the future to pull us away from the present. Thank you for listening and being there today. I appreciate you. God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre