

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

80. The Distraction of the Past Says, "Stay Stuck Here"

You are listening to episode 80 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast, titled, "The Distraction of the Past Says, "Stay Stuck Here." Welcome to the podcast! No matter if you're brand new or if you've been listening from the beginning or somewhere in between, I'm thankful you are tuning in today. For some time now we've been exploring the many different distractions that can plague us on any given day. Since I'm called to help women live encouraged and less distracted, we've covered many of these, but the list of distractions seems to be endless! How is it possible to live less distracted? Well, we do all we can to live in the moment. In last week's episode we discussed the distraction of the future, and today we're heading in the opposite direction. We're discussing the distraction of the past. Hang with me here for the next short while and we'll find some help and hope and we dig into this common distraction. Let's get to it.

I have a love-hate relationship with my past.

Maybe you do, too.

Think back to your past. You may not have to go back too far, because the past can be as short as a zeptosecond ago. (Which is a trillionth of a billionth of a second. It's a decimal point followed by 20 zeroes and a 1.) But when you think back, what in your past comes up first? For me today it's my childhood. And all the wonderful moments growing up in my parents' home with them and my brothers. But tomorrow I may recall something entirely different. Something that might not so positive.

Because we each have both--good instances and not so good instances--in our pasts.

I also recall my fun teenage years and the success I had in the many sports I played. (Have I told you I used to be quite the athlete? Why wouldn't I be, growing up with three brothers?) And I recall some of the good things I've done and the things I achieved in my past. Even just dating back to last week. It's all in my past.

But also in my past are the things I'd rather forget. The unpleasant experiences and circumstances I've walked through. The mistakes I've made and the sins I've committed. And the hurts, heartaches, headaches, and hard moments.

I don't need to assume your past is mixed as well. Because I know it is, even if I don't know you. No one has a past that's all roses and sprinkles. No one has a past that's full of rainbows and sunshine. We each have good and bad in our pasts.

And this is where the distraction of the past enters the scene.

Just like last week's subject, the distraction of the future, this week's subject, the distraction of the past, has different facets to it. And similar to last week's, one is negative and, one is positive. But both aren't God's best for us, and in a few minutes we'll realize why.

Because when the distraction of the past entices us from the present, we miss what's happening right here.

And that enticement away from the present may contain something positive in our pasts or something negative. Just like the examples I shared a minute ago. And unfortunately, I've struggled with both as distractions.

Not long ago I found myself reminiscing about my past successes in business, and how I led our group to sell \$300,000, \$350,000, and \$400,000 in retail cosmetics in three consecutive years. I think I might have daydreamed about those years for at least twenty minutes one afternoon. Not even realizing I was doing so.

But when I returned to my reality, I realized I had wasted twenty minutes I will never be able to get back. Twenty minutes of the present I missed. All because the distraction of the past snatched my thoughts to the "good ol' days."

We may think the good ol' days are what we remember in the past. But that's not true.

The good ol' days aren't in the past. They are right here, now.

Even if the past brings up fond memories and we carry the past with us like a warm hug. The good ol' days are the ones we're in right now. Why? Because God is with us today, That's why. We'll talk about that more in a minute, but today is a good ol' day. Despite our circumstances, and the price of eggs, and the changing world, and the alarming headlines. All thanks to God.

But the distraction of the past also likes to draw us away with remembering the negative experiences of our pasts, as well.

And I've dealt with that more than I care to disclose here.

Maybe you have, too, and maybe you're stuck there today.

I was stuck in my past for far too long, so I get it. It's not a pleasant place to be stuck when the past isn't your friend. For far too long I let my past sins, my past mistakes, my past failures consume me. There was a season I couldn't break free from it. It consumed my every waking moment, and almost every thought I had was degrading or depleting about my past. The how-could-you thoughts and the you-will-never-rise-above-this thoughts. The mistake-you-made-will-always-define-you thoughts and the you-are-worthless-and-unworthy thoughts.

Yeah, you'd never guess it, would you?

Me, who speaks and writes on encouragement, who hosts a podcast on encouragement, who finds her hope in Jesus, and who always tries to see the glass half-full. This distraction (like any distraction) can affect any of us, and that's one reason I'm so passionate about helping women rise above these distractions. No one is immune to them, but we can learn to overcome them.

And when I couldn't break free from my past with what I knew to do, I sought out professional help after much prayer and pondering. And God crossed my path with a wonderful Christian therapist. That was four years ago last month. Through much hard work and consistent selfcare and guidance from God, my past no longer consumes my present.

Oh, but it still tries to. But I now have the tools to "take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). And I can now embrace the present to receive what God has for me in the here and now.

I am no longer stuck in my past. And I don't want you to be stuck there either.

The past doesn't have to stop us from living in the present.

Because that's not God's best for us.

The distraction of the past says, "Stay stuck here." But God says, "Stay present with me."

Because no matter if what we're thinking about in the past is positive or negative, it keeps us stuck back there. It keeps us rewinding and reliving what's already been and prevents us from living in the abundance of God today.

Like I mentioned in last week's episode, God meets us in the present. Because we encounter God in the present. Yes, God transcends time and is infinite, and 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.

But don't take my word for it. Let's look further into what God has to say in His Word.

Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new. It's bursting out! Don't you see it? There it is! I'm making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands. Isaiah 43:18-19 MSG

Don't long for "the good old days." This is not wise. Ecclesiastes 7:10 NLT

Yes, it actually says this! It's so clear to me we aren't to live in the past.

And one more passage.

So be careful how you live; *be mindful of your steps*. Don't run around like idiots *as the rest of the world does*. Instead, walk as the wise! Make the most of every *living and breathing* moment because these are evil times. Ephesians 5:15-16 VOICE

This translation always makes me chuckle when I get to the 'idiots' part. I've been known to be one of those 'idiots'!

But on a more serious note, it's impossible to make the most of every living and breathing moment when we're stuck in the past.

So, what do we do?

How do we get unstuck? How do we overcome this distraction of the past?

Well, we can start with a prayer. Maybe we can pray similar to this:

Father God, I praise You for You are the God of my past, my present, and my future. You know all, You see all, and You are in control of all. Thank You that I can come to You with everything on my heart. Lord, my thoughts continue to take me backward to my past. I know the past is behind me, but it

continues to try to keep me there. For both the good memories and the not-so-good ones. When I get stuck back there, I cannot function well in the present time. Please help me with this. Please help me keep my thoughts fixed on You and what You have for me in this moment. Show me what needs to be healed from my past and help me heal from so I can better live with You right now. I give my thoughts to You, God. Equip me to take them captive to make them obedient to Christ. I need You, God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

God will guide you and direct you when it comes to your past.

He doesn't want you to miss what He's doing in your life right now. Maybe He'll direct you to a professional who can assist you like He did me. Or maybe He will help you in another way which will move you out of your past. But one thing is for sure. When we ask Him to, He will certainly help us to break free from the distraction of the past.

Then let's pay attention to what God is doing in our lives in the moment, and when our thoughts want to wander, let's bring them back in and take them captive. When I do this, I imagine handing every single thought regarding the past over to Jesus so He can handle them. Then we make the most of every moment, living alert and present right now.

It's wise to remember this: the past is in the past. No matter what you've done or haven't done. No matter what you've achieved or haven't achieved. God is using all of your past for your good and His glory today. He has used your past to grow you into the person you are today, but God's plans are for you not to stay back there. He has good plans for you for today.

We are continuing this conversation over in our private Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook this week. Come on over to join in the conversation as we discuss more about living in the present and getting ourselves unstuck from our pasts. You'll find this space encouraging and full of hope. I hope to see you over there. 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.

“The real enemies of our life are the ‘oughts’ and the ‘ifs.’ They pull us backward into the unalterable past and forward into the unpredictable future. But real life takes place in the here and the now. God is a God of the present. God is always in the moment, be that moment hard or easy, joyful or painful. God is not someone who was or will be, but the One who is, and who is for me in the present moment. That’s why Jesus came to wipe away the burden of the past and the worries of the future. He wants us to discover God right where we are, here and now.”—Henri Nouwen in *You are the Beloved* (Convergent 2017).

Friend, I pray we discover God right where we are today. In our everyday, normal lives. Because these lives are important to God and He wants to meet with us in this very moment. Living in the past is not His best for us, and I pray we can get unstuck to better live in the present today. Thank you for tuning in today. Stay present, friend. God bless you!

Julie Lefebvre