

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

136. That Time God Went with Us on Vacation

You are listening to episode 136 of the Encouragement for Real Life Podcast titled, That Time When God Went with Us on Vacation. Welcome to the podcast! I'm glad you're here, no matter where you are today or what you are doing. Thanks for joining me. My husband and I returned from a ten-day vacation on Saturday. We returned rested and rejuvenated, glad to be home, yet longing for a few more days together in the sun and on the sand. But truly, there's no place like home, am I right? But so much happened on our vacation. I share a couple stories in this episode, and I'll reserve a couple for next week's. I pray our experiences will encourage you and inspire you and give you hope, like they did me as we were living them out. Let's get right into this episode.

On February 28 at 4:30 a.m. we pulled out of our driveway in our packed rental, a white Chrysler Pacifica, with our sights set for Georgia later that evening. Our goal was to have dinner with our friends in their home, so we needed to be intentional regarding our time and our limited stops on the way. My husband and I had a good plan, and we felt our early start was essential and wise. We were excited for some time away, and were ready to relax, to enjoy warm weather and a change of scenery, and to return to a familiar place with our final destination of Florida's gulf.

For the last few years, we've fallen in love with Indian Rocks Beach, Florida. This would be our fourth trip there. We have a good relationship with the owner of a home in Indian Rocks Beach, also known as IRB. So when we can, we book our stay through her. It's perfect for us. Last year we traveled there with our kids and grandkids, and we made wonderful memories together.

But this year our vacation was just for us--Bill and I. Or so we thought. Stopping by our friends' home in Georgia on the way was a perfect way to break up the drive and have some fun with these friends we hadn't seen in a while. Sheila and I have been friends since fifth grade. That's a long time.

But just because we're on vacation doesn't mean we leave our real lives behind.

It doesn't mean we don't carry with us the things that are important to us, or the things that truly matter. I usually carry with me my Bible, any devotional books I'm reading, and I certainly bring my journal. Even on vacations of years past, we always invited God to join us. Because why would we ever want to leave home without Him? Or why would we not want to begin our vacation days with Him, just like we begin our days at home with Him?

So as we left our home in those early morning hours of February 28, Bill and I prayed together for our trip. We invited God to join us on our vacation.

Yes, God went with us on vacation.

And because He did, do I have some stories and experiences to share with you!

But we know God is always with us, right? We're never left to fend for ourselves. But something amazing happens when we intentionally invite God into our moments, into our days, and yes, even on our vacations. In fact, why don't we take a moment and silently or aloud invite Him into our moment right now?

A friend suggested we listen to an audio book on the 13-hour drive to Dahlonega. She suggested *Love and Respect* by Emerson Eggerichs. So we fired up Audible and listened to the entire book on our way southward. We finished it as we pulled into our friends' driveway for dinner that evening. Let me tell you, that book convicted me as a wife, and I think it impacted Bill, too. If you are married or are getting married, and if you haven't read it yet, I highly recommend! I wish I had read it as a young bride 30ish years ago. It would have helped our marriage in numerous ways, and I think we would have avoided some big potholes along the way in our marriage adventure.

But I believe God prompted us to listen to that book to set the tone of our vacation together.

He turned our hearts not only towards Him through the tools in that book, but also toward each other. There wasn't a more perfect way to begin our vacation. Thank You, God.

We spent the next day and night with our friends in Dahlonega. I had been there once before, and I love the area. But it was Bill's first time, and us two couples had so much fun together. We shared lots of laughs, tears, food, and fun. I can't wait to go back to Dahlonega, Georgia again.

Two days later after arriving there we departed for Indian Rocks Beach. Because God went with us on vacation, we completely trusted Him for everything, even down to what we would be doing each day. In the Chrysler Pacifica we also packed our tandem bicycle. It fit perfectly, and because it did, I asked Bill if we should purchase a van like this after arriving home! (We didn't, but it was sure tempting!) So we biked for three days in Florida. What a joy in 80-degree weather! It felt amazing to be back, on it again after a long, cold Iowa winter.

We started and ended our days on the beach, walking for miles and soaking up amazing sunsets. We also soaked up the sun there midday and enjoyed burying our feet into the fine grain, white sand. Our skin is a little more sun-kissed returning home than it was when we left home.

We ate at our favorite restaurants, and at the French bakery just down the street, the same accordion playing man who was there last year serenaded the patrons on the patio once again this year. We stopped and visited with him before leaving, adding a tip to his red, white, and blue fabric lined basket. I even got my photo taken with him. He shared with us his wife of 50-plus years died three months ago. But he said had joy and hope. Because some day he would see her again because of Jesus.

One day I wore my "This is the day the Lord has made" light green graphic t-shirt, and on the beach that morning, so many fellow beach walkers commented on it. "Hey, I love your shirt!" or "Cool shirt!" One woman stopped and said, "Yes, this is the day. Hallelujah!" Friend, you can't make this stuff up! God blessed us beyond what we imagined or expected.

Yes, God went with us on vacation. But this vacation wasn't just about us. The very first morning we became acutely aware that God returned us to this familiar place for more than just time away. He had something for us to do and someone for us to be blessings to.

The woman in Unit B.

Bill and I were enjoying the warmth of the sun on the patio after venturing to our favorite French bakery that morning. A woman came strolling down the street and turned toward us. It didn't take long for us to realize she was the tenant next door. I wondered where her husband was, and I soon would find out. She came over and introduced herself to us. She was spunky, she had a sparkle in her eyes I don't typically see, and she was warm and friendly. Since I don't have permission to use her name, I'll call her Mary. Mary, a fellow Iowan!, mentioned her husband died eleven months ago, and she was on vacation by herself.

Over the course of our conversation, she also tenderly shared a year ago she and her husband stayed in this same property. After they left last year, they immediately booked their stay for this year. Yet he unexpectedly passed away a week or so later their way home from their vacation! What?? Yes, he died in their hotel room on their way home. Tears welled up in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks.

I knew then our time together was divinely appointed.

So many questions ran through my mind. Some I voiced and some I didn't. Like how does one handle that? How do you deal with the death of your spouse, let alone while on vacation? What did you do? How did you carry on? As she shared, we soon learned her faith in Jesus is what carried her through and what still does today. It was clear she didn't walk this path alone, but God led her every step of the way.

Even to coming back to Unit B by herself this year.

Bill and I both knew we'd be spending more time with Mary throughout our week. We went to dinner with her one evening, which was lovely, and we spent more time on the patio discussing nearly everything under the sun. We loved on Mary in the ways God prompted us to. Yet I also realized Mary was there to minister to us. I learned a great deal about life, love, and death through Mary and her words. God was using her to strengthen us as well. But isn't that what we do as believers in Jesus. We are called to edify and encourage one another, to build up and strengthen one another!

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV).

We each have stories to tell. Stories of what God is doing in and through our lives. They may not always be pleasant stories, like Mary's, yet here she was, still ministering to us. Encouraging us and prompting us to continue keeping our eyes lifted and our relationship with each other strong. Who can you and I encourage today? Even through the hard and difficult stories that God may use to help another?

We said tearful goodbyes early on Friday last week as we backed the Chrysler Pacifica out of the driveway. Mary was unsure of the week ahead, but she knew she wouldn't be alone. Jesus would be with

her, and that's really all that mattered. Because she lives just a few hours from us, we plan to stay in touch and visit one another when possible.

It's amazing what God will do when we invite Him in.

I'm so glad God went with us on vacation. I have more stories to tell, but I'll share more in next week's episode, number 137. But for now, I pray this prompts us all to invite God into our days, into our everyday moments. He may use us in ways we cannot expect and may bless us in ways we can't comprehend right now. But it will all be for our growth, for the good of others, and for His glory.

Who will you encourage today?

Join us as we take this conversation over to the Encouragement for Real Life Community on Facebook. We're discussing this over there this week. I invite you to come on over to join in the fun. The link to this private group is in the show notes.

And if you love close to me, our next evening of encouragement for women is scheduled for Thursday, March 28 in Cedar Rapids. We call these events Real Encouragement LIVE! Reflect, Realign, and Refocus is the title of this event, as we pause to look at where we are, where we've been, and where we are headed. It's not easy to know where we're going if we don't know where we are now. Come join us for this fun girls' night out with a purpose! The details and \$25 tickets are in the link in the show notes.

To close out this episode, I pray God has encouraged you and strengthened you today. Invite Him into your days, into your moments, and watch what He will do in and through you. You may be the blessing someone else needs today. Thanks for being here. God bless you!

Links in this episode:

[1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV](#)

[Encouragement for Real Life Community](#)

[Real Encouragement LIVE! event for women: Reflect, Realign, and Refocus](#)

[Access my Free Resource Library](#) filled with tools to encourage your heart!