

179. A Helpful Way to Welcome a New Year

[00:00:00] Welcome to the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. I'm Julie Lefebure, your host. Life is remarkable, sometimes raw and always real. And some days we could use a little extra encouragement for our real lives. Here, you'll find that, along with personal life impacting stories, helpful life hacks, timely inspiration, biblical insight, and a fresh perspective.

The Encouragement for Real Life podcast equips you to be a light in this world and to shine bright wherever God has you. I'm glad you're here today.

Julie Lefebure: Well, happy 2025. I pray that you had wonderful Christmas and New Year's celebrations. And I trust that this finds you basking in the hope and promise of a new year. Isn't it an exciting time? Gosh, I just love a new year. But in this first [00:01:00] episode of 2025, we are pausing to reflect on the good of last year while peeking into maybe what might be coming for us in this new year.

And I'm glad that we get to do this together. And we're going to have some hope and encouragement sprinkled in along the way. So without further delay, let's get into this episode to find hope and encouragement right out of the gate in 2025.

Julie Lefebure: So yes, welcome to 2025. I can't even believe that. It just sounds like. That just sounds like a year that we have been waiting for for a long time, just because of the, the number, maybe 2025. I don't know. But I know we're already a week into this year, but it's still a new year in my book [00:02:00] and I'm still getting used to writing 2025. But I'll get there, right?

But how do you typically welcome a new year? Maybe you set goals based on your dreams and aspirations. Or maybe you start the year with resolutions complete with plans and progress charts. Or maybe you really don't do anything at all. Maybe you just begin it without much planning or thought. But no matter what you do, there's no perfect way to begin a new year.

Mm mm. There's no right or wrong way. And how you begin a year does not determine how the remainder of the year is going to play out. So, we can take

the pressure off of us today. Because you and I are unique, just because one of us may start a new year in a certain way doesn't mean that that works the best for both of us.

So, I think it's a good time right out of the [00:03:00] gate to just pause and remember the truth that's tucked in 2nd Peter chapter 3 verse 8. In the New International Version it reads, "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." That's such a good verse.

All the verses are good in the Bible, right? But, God doesn't measure time like we do. Celebrating a new year on January 1 is actually a man made idea. That's not in the Bible. But, in this man made marking of time, it's a wonderful opportunity to seek God and to reflect and refocus and just remember, maybe recenter ourselves on really what's most important. To use it as a starting point, to begin again or maybe to start fresh. To realign our priorities and our [00:04:00] purpose. And to not get so caught up in what we do or don't do in any single year. But to glorify God in following His lead all the way through it.

I know that it's possible that 2024 wasn't what you expected it to be. Or maybe it was quite the opposite. Maybe it was much more than you ever dreamed or imagined. Maybe it was full of disappointments or discouragement. Or maybe it was full of joy and celebration. Maybe the year was confusing, confounding, or really correcting. That's not fun. Or maybe it was full of peace and blessing. But I'm guessing your year was a little like my year. It was a mixture of both good and bad, joys and sorrows. And thankfully, God is with us in it all. Not only in this past year was He with us, but He is with us in this year. So yes, God [00:05:00] is with us. And we just celebrated Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us just two short weeks ago at Christmas time.

This truth is something that we can carry with us every day into this new year. No matter what we do or what we face or where we go, God is always with us. Doesn't that feel good to just claim that today? God is always with us. There's not one moment that we're left to fend for ourselves.

Even if we may feel like we are all alone, you and I can always be assured, no matter what we do, God will never leave us. And friends, let me tell you, over the years, I have given Him plenty of reasons to leave. But He's still here. Thanks be to God. May you and I remember that God is with us not just as we begin a new year, but every day in it. God is with us. I hope to be able to remind you of that all year [00:06:00] long. Because that is such a truth that we can never tire hearing or reading or learning.

So as we step into 2025, I personally think it's important to reflect on the past year, even if it wasn't the greatest of years. So have you done that?

You know, I believe God meets us when we take time to look back and to recall and remember. So, I invite you to do just that, just to look back over 2024. Now, I realize that you may not be able to do this right at this moment, but I encourage you to set some time aside to do so, maybe when you have a few extra moments later.

But wait a minute, as I say that, if you're anything like me, you probably don't just have a few minutes later, right? You might need, like me, to set an appointment with yourself and with God in your calendar to do this. Because who has [00:07:00] just a few free moments? We don't, right? So to me, it's that important to do. Treat it like an appointment. And set some time aside to be just with yourself and God and maybe a piece of paper. And then ask yourself some questions like, what lessons did God teach me this year? What blessings did He provide in 2024? And what joys did I experience throughout the year? What do I want to carry with me in this new year? And what do I want to leave behind? That's important, too.

When you and I take some time to reflect and ponder, we allow space for God to speak into our lives and to grow us through our experiences. Because if we don't do this, we may miss the unexpected gifts that God desires to bless us with.

This is also a good time to spend some dedicated time with God and [00:08:00] ask Him some questions like, what is it, Lord, that You want for me this year? Or how can I grow closer to You in 2025? And how can I glorify You this year? What do You want me to focus on this year? Those are some really good questions just to sit and just to ponder with God.

And I ask you, What's your word for this year? That might be another question to ask God. What's my word for this year? If you do this. Some people choose a word for the year and some people don't. And I have, and I'll, I'll share mine in a minute. But did you set a word for last year? And if so, how did it impact you? How did God use it in your life in 2024?

It's so good to take some time to just reflect and remember. And I took some time to do this last week. I celebrated some successes. I rejoiced in how God showed up in my life over the last 12 [00:09:00] months. And it was fun to look back and just reflect on those times. And I also took a hard look at what did not

go well. Because I had some of that too. Because frankly, I don't want to have to relearn the hard, tough lessons that I learned in these last 365 days.

But I also took , some time to pray and to ponder and seek God for His goals and plans for my life. Because I used to be the person that set goals and plans and ask God to bless them. But I asked Him to choose His goals and His plans for my life instead of me doing that. And then I just want to follow Him wholeheartedly in carrying them out and praying that they come to fruition. But I also asked Him to help me choose a word and a scripture for 2025. And if you've done this before, maybe you have your own way of choosing a word.

But some [00:10:00] years I've chosen one just because it sounded good. And other years, I know without a doubt that God chose it for me. Kind of like He did for me this year, which of course I'll get to in a minute. But this word for the year is something that maybe can help you focus or to be an encouragement to your heart. Or maybe it would be something that you want more of in your life. Or quite possibly, maybe it's something that God has specifically just for you. Because a word isn't too small for God to use or to care about, nor is it too big for Him to handle. And maybe, just maybe, He will use that word powerfully in your life in the new year, in ways that you may never expect.

I started this in 2014, when I began choosing a word each year. So my past words have been, in 2014 it was journey. In [00:11:00] 2015 it was impact. In 2016 believe. 2017 was live. I really like that word. 2018 was adventure. 2019 was revive. 2020 was open. 2021 was connect. 2022 was delight. 2023 was uncomfortable. Yep. 2024 was walk.

So, during my time with my Monday morning prayer group on December 2nd, which interestingly was my dad's birthday, one word kept jumping out at me. And I think each friend in our group that morning said it numerous times. It just kept, like it was coming through the screen at me. And so I prayed about it after we were done, and I prayed about it [00:12:00] the rest of the week, and this is my word for 2025. Yeah. And it reminds me a little bit of 2023's word, uncomfortable. My word for 2025 is stretch. Yeah.

Now I can't begin to imagine how God will use this word in my life this year. Does it mean to stretch my body more and my muscles more? Maybe. Or will God stretch me and what I perceive as my limits beyond what's comfortable? Maybe. Will I need to stretch my time or, or better yet, trust God to stretch my time and my resources? I don't know. I mean, I really can't begin to guess. But if this word is anything like my 2023 word, uncomfortable, I know I am in for quite the adventure with God. [00:13:00] I'm including a link in the show notes,

uh, so you can understand how God prompted me to choose that word in 2023 and how it came to be. So there'll be two links for two episodes, the beginning of 2023 and the end of 2023, which goodness was just a year ago. That's crazy, right? Wow.

And actually that word uncomfortable is the subject of my next book. So, who would have guessed? You just never know how God will use a word in our lives for our growth, for the good of others, and for His glory. He's so amazing, isn't He? Oh my goodness. But my verse for this year, it gives me hope in this word stretch. And I found it in Psalm chapter 143 verse 5, and it's in the English Standard Version. And it says this, "I stretch out my hands to you, [00:14:00] my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah." Hm. In my time with God last week, I became acutely aware that my soul desires more time with God. My soul desires more of Him. So it wasn't a surprise that God directed me to this verse. And when I read that verse in its full context the entirety of Psalm 143, it's full of pleas for justice and for God's help and for pleas based on God's promises. And it's also full of confession and humility. I guess it's what I need, right?

So a couple verses further though captured my attention when I read it in the message translation. Do you ever do this? Do you ever look at the different translations of a certain Bible passage and, and God sometimes just speaks to me so clearly [00:15:00] in different passages? I don't know if He does that for you, but He certainly does that for me. So in the Message translation, a few verses down in verse eight, it reads, "if you wake me each morning with the sound of your loving voice, I'll go to sleep each night, trusting in you.

Point out the road I must travel. I'm all ears, all eyes before you." That just speaks to my heart and encourages me so much. So I know without a shadow of a doubt, this is my word and this is my scripture for the year. And if you've read my book, Right Now Matters, you know how God has pressed upon my heart to begin my day with him and to end my day with him.

And this verse speaks to this. I love how God uses His Word to confirm to us what He continues to teach us and how He continues to grow us through His [00:16:00] Word. I absolutely love how He does that. Plus, did you notice the word Selah at the end of that verse, Psalm 143. 5? Selah means pause. And I also talk about that in my book, Right Now Matters. But this Selah, this pause, causes me to literally pause at the end of this verse and to soak it in and to reflect truly on what this verse is saying to me. Not to just move on to the next thing, which is typically what I do. So this Selah, this pause is just the reminder I need. Thank you, God. He's so good. He's so good.

So if you've chosen a word for 2025, I would love to know it. For years, all year long, I have prayed for the women who have shared their words with me for the year. So if you would like me to pray for you [00:17:00] throughout 2025, find my post. I did one on Facebook and one on Instagram, where I ask what your word is for 2025 and comment your word. And I will be honored to pray for you all year long. I love doing that.

You know, no matter how you welcome in the new year, the most important truth to remember is what we just talked about a few minutes ago. That God is with you every moment of the 365 days of 2025. He is with you. He's never going to leave you, no matter what you do, no matter what you don't do, no matter your circumstances. He's never going to leave you. Isn't that the best news today and every day?

So to encourage you before we close out this episode, friend, I, I just want to remind you that the [00:18:00] Lord has good things in store for you. He does. He desires His best for you and He's not gonna settle for anything than His best for you because that's just who He is. Draw near to Him this year. Spend some time every day reading His Word and talking with Him. Seek His face and follow His leading. It may be uncomfortable. But He will lead you to His best.

He loves you more than you can fathom. And He cares for you and about every detail of your life. God is for you, friend. Amen and Amen.

Thanks for being here today, friend. I am cheering you on today and in this new year. May you stay encouraged and hopeful remembering that God is with you, no matter how you [00:19:00] welcome in the new year.

God bless you.

Thank you so much for joining me here today. You can find more at JulieLefebure.com and until next time, stay encouraged.