

Encouragement for Real Life Podcast

204: Summer of Abundance Week 3: Stay Close to Your Source

[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: Welcome to week 3 of the Summer of Abundance Series. You know, this summer, if you've listened at all. We are on this adventure to learning how to live the full and joy filled life that God has for us. And so far, uh, in the last few weeks, we've explored two of the [00:01:00] 12 key elements of living an Abundant Life, rooted in God's Word and relevant to our real lives today. And so those two so far are our identity in Christ and a renewed mindset. So important.

Last week we enjoyed our monthly guest episode with Reverend Barbara Furman who inspired us and offered us hope in our current circumstances. And I pray that that encouraged you as well.

And so here we are today in week three of our series. And now that we know who we are in Christ and how vital renewing our mindset truly is regarding our faith, let's talk today about our Source, our source in this life, and how we go about staying close to Him. Because you know this matters more than we think it does.

If you haven't already, I invite you to grab the Summer of [00:02:00] Abundance Companion pages. They're on my website, and the link is in the show notes, so you can go ahead and pause right now. Grab those. You can either fill them out online or you can print them off. But these pages can help you journal your reflections, your prayers, your action steps. They're for you. So you can find those there. So if you're ready to get in this episode like I am, well, let's get to it. I'm so glad you're here today.

Julie Lefebure: Not long ago, we experienced some strong wind swept days here in Iowa with wind gusts reaching over 40 miles an hour. We had just

transferred our starter plants from our home to our garden to the dirt there, um, just days prior. And my husband knew that [00:03:00] the wind was coming and so he, bless his heart, he attempted to put barriers of protection around them, to protect them from this wind that was coming. But, they were no match for the wind's force. Most of the pepper plants caught the brunt of this wind, and they snapped halfway up the stem because of it. And they weren't strong enough to hold themselves up with that strong wind. So hanging on just by a thread of the stem, the plants quickly withered within a day without the connection to their source. Rest in peace my beloved banana pepper plants. Uh, I was so looking forward to them. And maybe they'll come back, but they haven't yet.

But I couldn't help but compare those withered pepper plants to, to me. And that's how I feel and how I must look [00:04:00] when I lose my connection with my Source too. When I, for whatever reason, don't stay close to my Source, God, it doesn't take me long to begin shriveling up on the inside. My soul becomes parched, and my heart becomes weary, and my spirit gets faintly weak. Staying close to our Source is a matter of life or death, my friend. Literally. It will determine just how abundant our lives are.

So this element of intimacy with God is foundational for living an abundant life. And that is the element that we are looking at today, intimacy with God. Because a full life doesn't come from doing more. Mm-hmm. But from staying close to the One who gives us this life in the first place.

This takes us to our key scriptures for today. [00:05:00] And the first one, Jesus says, He says it plainly in John chapter 15, verse 5, and in the New International Version, but I'm gonna begin it in verse 4. So here's 4 and 5 in His words. "Remain in me as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing."

Yep. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. At least nothing that has lasting impact or nothing that affects eternity or has eternal value. If we continue though reading in verse 6, Jesus said that if we don't [00:06:00] remain in Him, we are "like branches that are thrown away and that wither and eventually thrown into the fire and burned."

Now, I know that we do not wanna be branches that end up with that kind of outcome. Absolutely not. And that's certainly not abundant life. Yeah, but don't we feel withered and, and dry and just all shriveled up when we don't stay close to our Source too? Don't we feel dry and weary and worn out and empty?

I mean, think of how you felt the last time that you were far from God. And quite possibly maybe you are there now. There's no judgment here. Absolutely no judgment on my part. I get it. I completely understand how easily we can wander away from our source or get enticed away from our Source. And it's not usually intentional. But more of a gradual movement [00:07:00] or maybe a gradual decline or a gradual drifting. And before we realize we've drifted far from Him, and we wonder how in the world did that happen? How do I know? Well, because I've been there and not so long ago.

Fruitfulness though flows from connection, not effort. And interestingly, the, the Greek word for remain in the verses that we just read in John chapter 15, verse 5, it means to dwell, to stay, to continue. It's about relationship, not performance. This isn't about striving or or seeking. It's simply just staying close to our source.

Now the second key verse for today is Psalm chapter 16, verse 11. And you know, I invite you sometime just to take some time and read all of [00:08:00] Psalm 16. There's only 11 verses, and this Psalm is a beautiful picture of an abundant life. And it just encourages me so when I read it. And so I extend that encouragement to you to take some time to read it. But in verse 11, in The Voice Translation, David wrote this, "Indeed, you direct me on the path that leads to a beautiful life. As I walk with you, the pleasures are never ending, and I know true joy and contentment."

Yeah. True joy and contentment. God directs us to this beautiful life as we walk with Him. We experience never-ending pleasures, and we do know true joy and contentment when we do. But if we don't walk with Him, if we don't spend time with Him, friend, we will miss it all. The beautiful life that He has for us and His [00:09:00] joy and commitment. Not to mention everything else in this life that we will miss when we don't spend time with Him.

We often seek joy in other places like maybe our achievements or our relationships, or goodness, even comfort. But only God gives us true joy. Even faithful believers in Jesus can become spiritually dehydrated. Especially when we get caught up in performance or overloaded schedules, and then we lose touch with our source.

I get it. I understand. Yeah. But it's a good time today to pause and to ask Him, maybe to ask ourselves, am I bearing fruit or just filled with activity? Am I connected or am I coasting? Do you, and do I have an intimate [00:10:00] relationship with God?

You might say that it's strange or think it's strange that I'm using the word intimacy to describe a relationship with God. But this word isn't just a word that we use for something between a romantic couple when we think of intimacy. But God desires to have an intimate relationship with each one of us, with each one of His children. Yet would we describe our relationship with Him with that word?

Intimacy is not just a feeling, it's a rhythm of life lived with God. There's nothing like intimacy with our creator. But how do we get that kind of intimacy with Him? If you've had it or you have it now, you know that it's the best thing. And if you've never had it, then you really don't know what you're missing out on.

So maybe [00:11:00] you could use some ideas on how to grow your intimacy with God and to stay close to your source. I think we can all use some ideas and maybe a refresher of how we can continue to stay with Him, close to Him. Or if you're not there, of how you can get there.

So, I came up with three rhythms of intimacy. Now, when I think of rhythm, I think of just the day in and the day out, and just the, the rhythm of our day. And so it's not a one and done thing. And, and we'll get into this here.

But, but let's look at the first one. It's daily presence. Um, it, it's kind of the, if you think about creating space with God, like in prayer or listen to worship music or scripture, or even just silence. I think of it as showing up before you speak up. We show up with God. We spend time with God before we even [00:12:00] speak to anyone in the morning or even start our day. So maybe while you're getting ready for your day. I do that often. Or maybe put some worship music on. And I've been doing this a lot lately and it immediately impacts how my day begins. But this makes such a big difference just to start with Him right away first in the morning.

The second is ongoing conversation. Just talking to God throughout the day. Like invite Him into the small stuff, not just the crises of life. Um, maybe. I think about this. You should hear some of the conversations I have with God. Everything from, wow, God, thank you for that sunrise. Or, help me not to mess this up, Lord. Or what would be a better thought to think than the one I'm thinking right now. I just talk to Him throughout the day. [00:13:00] So conversing with God throughout your whole entire day will completely enlighten your day and it'll completely make a difference. Give it a try if you're not used to doing that.

And the third, uh, is intentional stillness. Now, this might be hard for some of us, and I'll get into to why in a minute, why it's hard for me. But practice just being with God, not always doing.

Abundance comes when we stop striving and we start abiding. And abiding is just like that rest with Him. You know, like I said, this, this, I've said this before, that resting and abiding is probably one of the most difficult things for me. I always wanna keep doing, I, I just wanna do and, and not just be. So, I truly have to force myself to do this. And like I said, I'm gonna share about that in a minute.

But intimacy, it's, it's all built over time. It's not in a [00:14:00] rush. And it's not from just spending one day with God or even one hour a day with God, but with God. Just being with Him all the time. Because He's with us always. Right? So what if we changed our thinking just to invite God into our everyday moments? Again, it's a rhythm of life lived with Him, day in and day out, moment in and moment out.

And here's an example of what I was saying just a minute ago. At the last local women's event that I hosted, we spent time reflecting on four questions to help us recognize how well we were living the abundant life that Jesus came to give us in that very moment. We were, we were looking at that, just in that current time. Now, keep in mind I wrote these questions. [00:15:00] So, I knew them. But when I personally answered one of them in our, our little private reflection time, that evening, God abruptly got my attention. The question was, where am I stuck? And when I answered, there was an empty space, where am I stuck? , But God showed me when I started writing, He showed me that even though I was and am a committed follower of Jesus, and I talked to Him throughout my day. I was stuck in a rut, so to speak.

Even though my relationship with Jesus was and is wonderful, at that moment in time, it wasn't so vibrant. It was a bit stagnant. And I was kind of surprised at that. But in looking at it and thinking about it, He was absolutely right. So no wonder I [00:16:00] felt some distance between He and I at that time. And it was clear right then to me that I was missing the intentional stillness piece of the three rhythms of intimacy that we just discussed. The intentional stillness. I needed to switch my focus from doing for God to abiding with Him.

It nearly just knocked me off. I don't wanna say, knocked me off my chair. It didn't literally knock me off my chair. But it kind of just, it knocked me sideways as I sat there. I just, I couldn't believe it 'cause I didn't realize that. As I sat there with the other women at our table and I shared what God was

showing me. But there was my answer. I immediately switched my focus. And the very next day I battled my natural tendencies of doing and just chose to stop my striving and prioritize resting in Him.

Now, resting in Him does not [00:17:00] mean that I was being lazy. But resting in Him as I carried out my, my responsibilities. Resting isn't always mean just doing nothing. It's resting in His strength and in His presence. Where we can continue on in our day but it's with a different mindset and a different practice, if that makes sense. So yeah, good news. My relationship with Jesus became full of life and vibrant again. And you know, I wanna keep it that way.

So this is the kind of relationship that Jesus wants with you too. Friend, God isn't asking us to do more. He's inviting us to stay close. How simple can it be? Right. But yet we complicate it. Abundant life doesn't grow in pressure, but in presence. And if you are just beginning this, this, this kind of whole, um, mindset or this [00:18:00] kind of walk, start small and just look at one of the three. Which of these three rhythms is God asking you to apply to your life right now? The daily presence, the ongoing conversation, or intentional stillness. What will you do about that today?

I love to give like a biblical declaration. So an optional biblical declaration for this could be something like, I am not alone. I stay connected to Jesus, and in His presence I find joy and strength. Something as simple as that based on scripture. If you say that throughout the day what a difference that will make. I'll say that again. I am not alone. I stay connected to Jesus. In His presence, I find joy and strength. Yes, and amen.

And some reflection questions for us [00:19:00] today could be, how does my connection with God affect my ability to live abundantly? Or am I staying close to my source or am I just running on empty? Another one might be what distractions are keeping me from that deeper intimacy with God. There's probably something, something distracting us. 'cause there always is. And last one, what does remaining in Jesus practically look like in my current season?

Some practical action steps could be set aside just 10 minutes today to be still with God. No agenda, just presence. Or choose a time this week to intentionally open your Bible, not just for study, but for connection. And that is one for me.

Start your day with this short prayer. Jesus, I wanna stay close to you [00:20:00] today. Be my source. A simple prayer like that can make all the difference.

So let's pause right here before we go any further and let's pray. Will you pray with me?

Oh Heavenly Father, I just thank You for this opportunity that You are just reminding us that, that You want us to be with You. That our, our striving and our seeking isn't what You want. You just want our presence. You just want us to be with You. You just want that intimacy with us. And Lord, the only way we can receive that, the only way that that this is mutually beneficial for us is if we just stop what we're doing and we just spend time with You. That we talk with You throughout our day. That we start our day with You. That we end our day with You. That's all You want, is just us. And so Father, would You prompt us today? For whatever that is. Maybe just whatever's stopping us from having that intimate relationship [00:21:00] with You, would You just make it real to us and make it known to us. And that You will help us to do the one thing, to change it, to make a difference. And then if there's more added on, I know that You'll just take us step by step by step, Lord. That a vibrant, intimate relationship with You is possible. It won't happen overnight. We know. But Lord, we just ask that You give us the desire for that and that we would take any step that You want us to, to make that a possibility in our lives, on our end. Because we know that You're willing and waiting for us right where we are.

So thank You for this time. Thank You for this opportunity. We love You so much and in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

As we start to wrap up today, I, I invite you back next week as we dive into week 4 in our series, the Summer of Abundance Series, and discuss the one thing that initiates freedom in living an abundant life. You might be surprised what that is. [00:22:00] So come back next week and we'll learn more together.

And before we wrap up completely, I'm just reminding you of the Summer of Abundance playlist on Spotify. I created it and I'm adding more songs when I find different worship songs or different songs that inspire me. The, the playlist is simply titled Abundant Life, and it's just for you. I created it for you. It's filled with uplifting worshipful songs, and just, just to help you stay rooted in truth and close to your source all summer long. You'll find the link in the show notes to access that and so allow these songs to minister to your heart and maybe even sing along while you're driving or walking or doing the dishes. But as I listen to 'em, I'm finding my favorites and I'm starting to memorize them and that's been a lot of fun.

And hey, if this episode encouraged your heart today, would you consider sharing it [00:23:00] with a friend? Just text it to someone who might need the

reminder that staying close to Jesus is where true abundance is found. And maybe invite her to walk this abundant life journey with you. Wouldn't that be fun?

So as we close today, thank you for being here. Remember to stay connected to God and to refuse to coast. I'm cheering you on today. 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.