

220 How To Take Back Your Attention

[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 Encouragement for Real Life today. I am thrilled that you are joining me. Last week we began our new series called Undistracted October, and we discussed the cost of a scattered life. We looked at how distraction steals our peace, our [00:01:00] presence, and our purpose. And today we're gonna get really practical. Are you ready to do that?

We're gonna talk about how to take back your attention, because attention is one of the most valuable things that we have, and where we give it determines the life that we live. If you've ever ended the day wondering, where did my time go? Well then this episode is for you.

Living undistracted isn't just for living it for a month, but for living it for a lifetime. And so we're gonna get into that today and find some hope and encouragement. So let's get into this episode.

Julie Lefebure: I began last Tuesday with great intentions to accomplish all that was on my to-do [00:02:00] list. And that to-do list was quite lengthy. And I started off really strong until I paused to make a reel to share on Instagram. That was a big mistake. It took me 25 minutes longer than I wanted it to or expected it to, and then I made the next mistake of taking my first scroll on my phone through Instagram. That turned into another 20 minutes, and before I realized it, I had been on my phone for an hour. An hour. I can laugh about it now, but I was really upset at myself at the time. Maybe you can relate, maybe you understand. I don't know, but it's, it's silly how much time that took me and how much time I allowed myself to be on my phone.

But it gets better. Then a little bit later, I was [00:03:00] editing my next book that I'm writing and my thoughts all of a sudden just were all over the place in all sorts of different directions. Like, what should I make for dinner? And did I switch the laundry? And so I ran up and switched the laundry 'cause I hadn't done that yet. And then I also, while I was up there, I thought, oh wait a minute, I need to pay this bill that is due today or the next day. Something like that. So I grabbed the bill and I came back downstairs to my office. And then I thought, oh gosh, I still need to exercise. Well, I exercised later in the day, but as you can see, my mind was all over. It was all over the place, and I was making little progress on my book until I realized what was happening. My attention was being stolen again and again and again. And I know better. I know better. I know what to do. And I didn't stop it until I [00:04:00] got to the point of frustration. And I was also exhausted. I was exhausted from being so distracted.

Keeping our attention on what matters can be such a battle some days. Can't it? I know I can't be the only one to struggle with this, right? Because if I struggle with distraction, the woman who wrote two books on the subject, then I assume you likely struggle with it too.

If we think about it though. Attention is really about stewardship. I mean, you know what stewardship is, right? It's kind of a big word. But basically if we look at it through a Biblical lens, which I do with a lot of things, stewardship is really just taking responsibility to care for and manage all that God has entrusted to us. And that may include our time, the talents that He's blessed us with, um, finances, [00:05:00] relationships, our environment around us, the work that we do. It can entail a lot of things. And when we steward things well, we do it for God's glory and for the good of others. And since we only receive, you know, so many minutes in a day, what we focus on matters. It, it's stewardship. And what we focus on shapes our emotions and how we live and how we connect with God and others. When we're scattered, we're going to live scattered. When we're feeling overwhelmed, we're gonna live overwhelmed. And when our attention is snatched to focus on lesser important things, sadly those lesser important things become what's important. And they were never meant to be important.

But the good news is we [00:06:00] have good news. Yes, we have good news. The good news is this, that we don't have to live this way. We don't. We can do something about these distractions, these things that pull our attention away from what's important. But it, it takes dedication and intention and effort. We can live this way to be able to live the abundant lives that Jesus came to give us, without distractions running and ruling our lives. With God's help. We can't do

it on our own. But with God's help, we can take back our attention every single moment of every single day, and we can put it on what matters most.

I was reminded of a verse recently that really speaks to just the truth of how we consider and how we use our time. And it's found in Psalm chapter 90, verse 12, and I really like the the New Living Bible translation. It says, [00:07:00] "Teach us to number our days and recognize how few they are. Help us to spend them as we should." Amen. Help us to spend them as we should. What a great prayer. What a great verse that we can just make into a prayer.

But Moses, um, is, is the attributed author of this psalm, and he asked God to teach his people, to teach God's people about the brevity of life and the shortness of it. And to live it with wisdom and meaning before life passes us by. And it's still a good word for us today. I, it's just a verse that I think we should always have in the forefront of our minds. We have a choice to quote, "number our days" every single day. To think about this. I mean, just to think about, just to recognize how short and [00:08:00] fleeting our lives are here on this earth. Because, sometimes I forget that. Not to think about it to make us feel sad or depressed or even anxious. But to cause us to live each moment on purpose. And then to respond by living with intention and focus and appreciation for every moment we're given. Not wasting time on fleeting pursuits and on frivolous ways of living. Because I think we all have a tendency to wanna do that.

But this is one reason that, uh, we need God's wisdom to help us live these days out in His will and in His ways. Because we know, right, that His will and His ways are far better than ours. And when we're careless with our attention, we, we waste the time that God gives us. [00:09:00] But when we keep our attention focused, we live with God's wisdom. That is a part of the wisdom right there, is keeping it as our focus.

So what do we do to better steward these days that God has given us when we live in this consuming culture of distraction? I mean, what can we do? I would imagine, 'cause I feel this way, I imagine you might feel that it's too difficult to, to battle it all or to fight the distractions, and is it even worth the effort? And maybe you're thinking, how can I possibly keep my attention on what matters when so many things just snatch it away? And you may also believe that it's impossible to live an undistracted life. I get it. I have been there. That's why I wrote those two books, Right Now Matters and the Right Now Matters Bible study.

But I'm living proof that it can be done. [00:10:00] That we can live an undistracted life. But let me say, I don't live it out perfectly. And I don't think we'll ever live it out perfectly, this side of eternity. You know, hence my stories that I shared earlier in this episode. But by applying what I've learned, I do a much better job of staying present and living in the moment than I used to. I don't miss as many God moments, I call 'em God moments as I used to. And I live with much more peace than I used to. All because I've taught myself how to battle distractions and how to not let the distractions win in my life.

So how do you take back your attention? How do you do that? Well, in chapter 5 of my book Right Now Matters, I list in detail what I call the big five distractions. Now, these aren't just my distractions, even though [00:11:00] they are. But they are the five most common ones from the various women that I polled when I was writing the book. These distractions haven't changed, and I don't think they're going to. Except for maybe getting worse since I wrote the book. But it just seems like these five distractions seem to continue to rise to the top. So see if you struggle with any of these.

The first one that I talk about is the past. This is basically thinking back to the good old days and reminiscing about what was great in the past. Or it could be the opposite of carrying regrets from your past that you just can't shake. So it can be a good thing or a negative thing. But the cost of this, the cost of this distraction is that we miss the moment we're in if we're stuck on the past. And the past is over, there's nothing we can do about it. But still, we, our [00:12:00] brains are stuck there. But the practical reset is to surrender the past to God, no matter if it was good or not so good, and live in the moment that you're in.

The second of the big five is the future. And this is really having to do with anticipating the good that is coming. You're excited, maybe you're excited for a vacation, or you're excited about something fun that's coming your way. Or it could be the opposite that you're fearing and worrying about what lies ahead. Again, it could be a good thing or a negative thing.

The cost of this is that when we focus , on the future, we're missing the moment right now by fixating on what's to come. And that's not a good thing either. But a practical reset would be to trust God with the future, knowing that He's got it all under control and it's all in His hands. And no amount of worrying or [00:13:00] even anticipating the future is gonna help. But we can trust God with it. We can live in the now and that makes all the difference.

The third of the big five is technology. This is a big one for many of us. This is our devices. They snatch our attention and they immerse us in a world that's,

that's not what we're living in. It's, it's a digital world that it's, it's not fulfilling. The cost of it is that it's not fulfilling and it robs us of priceless moments happening right in front of us. And we, we might miss the sunset happening outside the window. I'm speaking from experience there. Um, we might miss a loving glance from your, your spouse. Um, you might miss a fun thing that your child did.

The practical reset is to turn notifications off. To maybe set your dinner [00:14:00] time as a phone free area, and put your devices down two hours before bed. Just some practical things we can do with our devices.

The fourth of the big five is our thoughts or ourselves. Our thoughts, or ourselves. Now that was my issue when I was, uh, in the, the story that I was, when I was working on my book, and I had all these thoughts, you know, pinballing all over the place. Our thoughts, they can keep us stuck and they can keep us stagnant. And sometimes we just have too much going on in our brains, right? That was my case, and I couldn't move ahead because I was constantly being bombarded by these distractions.

So the cost is with all that we have going on in our minds. We can't stay focused or intentional. We just go from one thing to another to another. We can't stay focused. The practical reset is to work from a list. I [00:15:00] firmly believe in working from a list. And when a distracting thought pops in, write it down. Write it down, and come back to your list, to that list later. Uh, and that always helps me. If a, a distraction pops in or a thought pops in my brain and it's distracting, I'll write it on a piece of paper and I'll come back to it later. And that's what I should have done that day, when it was first happening last Tuesday. Live and learn. Right?

And then the fifth of the big five is one that I always get someone to push back about this, to push back at me about it. But it's so, it's so alarming to me is multitasking. I know we were taught a long time ago that if we were gonna be effective and efficient, we needed to multitask. But our brains are not designed to do more than one thing at a time. They're not made that way. When we think we're multi [00:16:00] multitasking, what our brains are actually doing is switching back and forth very quickly from one task to the other. And what it's doing, the cost of it, it's exhausting us. Our brains are becoming taxed. And by the end of the day, if you've been multitasking all day, you feel exhausted and you feel worn out, and your brain is tired. I've looked at so many studies, read so many books on this, and multitasking is robbing us of our brain power.

So a practical reset is to intentionally do one task at a time. Now, I'm not saying you can't walk and chew gum at the same time. That's not what I'm talking about. But listening to a podcast while you're also scrolling on your phone. That's two. That's two, two activities at one time. Your brain is just going back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. It's not good for us.

How do I know? Because I've done it. So you're not alone if [00:17:00] right now you're listening or watching the podcast on YouTube. But if you're listening to it and looking at your phone, I understand. I'm not judging you because I've been there.

But which one of these five, the past, the future technology, your thoughts, yourself, or multitasking, which one affects you the most? Which one steals your attention on , any given day the most? You know, really pause and think about it for a moment. And if you're at a place that you can write, just write it down. Which one it is. You're acknowledging it and acknowledging it is the first step to overcoming the distraction. So, yay, you are already on your way to overcoming the distraction that plagues you.

I'm gonna encourage you to take one of the big five, whichever one is affecting you the most, just to take one this week just to look [00:18:00] at it and you've acknowledged it already. So that's a good step. And ask God to help you set one boundary or one practical reset regarding that distraction. Ask him to help you overcome it. Because, friend, we cannot do this on our own. We need God's help. He knows what we struggle with and He knows what's gonna be best for us. So He will help you.

I encourage you to take out your journal or write it down somewhere. Um, just your thoughts on this. Invite God in and, and, you know, just look at your thoughts, perceive your thoughts about this distraction, and, and write down what it's robbing you.

Then make a plan, make a plan with God, and then begin to walk it out. Then, the hard part can sometimes be continuing to enforce that boundary or that reset that you've set. And then continue involving God in it. Continue to take it day [00:19:00] by day. And when you feel like, Hmm, you're ready, you're, you're doing pretty good with that distraction, then I suggest to move on to the next one and do the same steps. You can do this friend. With God, you can do this.

I go into greater detail, uh, with these big five distractions in my book Right Now Matters. And I offer practical tools to overcome them. And these are the tools that I use every day in my life when I remember. But these are the tools

that I use and if they help me, I believe they're gonna help you too. If you apply what you learn in this book then I guarantee you that your life will change. You are gonna be a less distracted woman. You'll begin to live with, intention and purpose and, and you'll be walking out an undistracted life. So there's a link in the show notes if you want to go deeper or if you even wanna check out the Right Now [00:20:00] Matters Bible study. Both are there. There's a link in the show notes.

And if you want help applying this to your real life today, I have opened a few Abundant Life mentoring spots for this fall, and we'll take some simple steps that you can actually just apply to your real life and live out and you're gonna feel good about it. So that link for My Abundant Life Mentoring, where you can schedule your free 20 minute connection call, that's also in the show notes.

As I say, often, I, I say this probably almost every day, is life is too important to live it distracted. Friend God is with us in the present, in the present moment, in the right now, and if our attention is tied to, to any other thing, we're gonna miss Him and we're gonna miss the blessings that He's giving us and we're gonna miss what He's doing in our lives. We don't wanna do that. No, we wanna, we wanna see Him. We wanna [00:21:00] experience all we can with God. He's got good plans for us, friend.

Next week we continue our theme of this Undistracted October as we look at saying no to good and yes to God. So come back next Tuesday and uh, we'll take the next step together. And I can't wait to continue to journey with you this fall. So thank you for being here today. I am praying for you and I believe in you, and God loves you.

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.