

Encouragement for Real Life

227 A Different Kind of December

[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 a brand new month and a brand new series here on the podcast called A Different Kind of December. If you're anything at all like me, you have survived and not necessarily thrived in Decembers that felt rushed, or [00:01:00] pressured or packed too full and gone before you could even take a breath, right?

I don't know if you've experienced any of those, but I certainly have. But this year we are choosing something different. We are choosing purpose and presence and a whole lot of God's peace. We're deciding today, today that this season will be different than previous ones with less stress and a whole lot more joy. Sound good?

December can be beautiful, and it's actually one of my favorite months of the year. It can be beautiful not because everything is perfect, but because God is present with us. And that goes for any single moment of any single day, but December especially. And so today we're beginning it with intention.

Of course, you know, we can use what we're learning this month [00:02:00] through these episodes in every season of life, and I pray that we will do that. But today we are definitely focused on right here and right now, living in the moment because right now does matter.

So if you're ready to experience a different kind of December with me and with the other women that listen in and find encouragement here, well, let's get into this episode.

Julie Lefebure: Isn't it so true that December often tries to set the pace for us? We sometimes feel like we don't get a say in the matter. That December is so full and so packed that sometimes our schedules just get set. Well, our culture tells us to hurry faster, hurry faster than we're designed to, to buy, to purchase beyond our [00:03:00] means and to do more than we did last year. It also invites us to impress others with our stuff and to fill our calendars to overflowing. But scripture calls us to something different.

Taking a look at Romans chapter 12, verse 12, in The Voice translation, it reminds us of this, "Do not allow this world to mold you into its own image. Instead be transformed from the inside out by renewing your mind. As a result, you will be able to discern what God wills, and whatever God finds good, pleasing and complete." Oh, amen to that. Friend, this month, instead of letting December happen to us, we are inviting God to shape it with us.

You know, I remember one December, there's probably more than one [00:04:00] that I've done this, but one December in particular, when I got swept up in all the things. Let me tell you right now. You probably know this about me already, excuse me, but I absolutely love Christmas. Love it. Love everything about it. I, uh, I love the festivities. I love the lights. I love the, the, the excitement in the air. I love watching my grandsons, enjoy the season. I watch through their eyes. It's just, , it's my favorite time of year. It's not my favorite month of year, but it's my favorite time of year.

Now I know not everyone is like me. Some people dread it. Some people despise Christmas for various reasons. And, after this specific year that I'm gonna be talking about here, I understand why. I understand how people can come with varying, emotions about the holiday because of past experiences or just because what the [00:05:00] world has made Christmas into.

But beyond that, um regarding this, this particular year, I don't remember what exactly what year it was, but my heart's intention was to create the most magical, most meaningful, most memory filled Christmas for my family, especially our kids. And the demands that I put on myself that year and the pressure to create the perfect holiday, it just loomed large. You know, kind of like the, the cloud that follows Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh. That was the pressure and that was the stress that I, uh, really brought upon myself that year. It felt like that.

You know, and, and it was a beautiful Christmas. We had a beautiful holiday, and it, it was, it was fantastic. It really was. With the, the plentiful presents underneath the tree and the delicious dinners that we had, and the many

twinkling light and starry sky moments that we had. It was, [00:06:00] it was beautiful. But after it was all over, I felt as if I missed it all. I felt that I missed it all together. That I missed Christmas. And I just wanted to hit rewind. I just wanted to hit rewind, back up and have a do over. I was there for it. Yes, I was there for it physically. But I was so caught up in preparing for it and making it perfect that I missed the entire heart of the holiday. And then immediately a deep regret filled my heart.

Again, I wanted to rewind and have a do-over, but I couldn't. It was just a couple days after Christmas. Maybe it was Christmas night even. I don't even remember exactly, but it was, it was a terrible feeling. And I vowed right then that I never wanted to experience that again. I never wanted to allow myself to do a Christmas [00:07:00] like that ever again.

And that's what we think. We think sometimes that we do Christmas. But we don't do Christmas. We're able to embrace Christmas. We're able to appreciate Christmas.

And let me tell you though, each year, since that one year, I have had to fight that pull, the pull to make everything perfect and magical and meaningful and beautiful. I truly do. Even this year I'm fighting. I'm fighting that, that pull to do all those things. But Christmas is already meaningful and magical and perfect on its own, not because of anything that I do or anything that you do, or anything that the world does. But because of what and who we celebrate on this holiday, the coming of our Savior, [00:08:00] Jesus Christ. Yeah, He came for us to this earth and we get to celebrate that. But there's nothing that I can do to make Christmas better. It's special all on its own because of Jesus, because of a little baby born in a stable for you and for me. Pretty special.

Then came the year, of 2006. And you might remember from previous episodes that my mom, um, who was my best friend, passed away that year, just nine days before Christmas. You know, Christmas in my mind was supposed to be joyful, right? But that year it was heart wrenching. It was, it was really hard. It was difficult. How could I celebrate Christmas without mom? How could I be happy after just losing mom nine days ago? Is what I remember thinking.

[00:09:00] But I also remember sitting on our living room floor on Christmas morning as the the kids opened their presents. Oh, it was such a blur. But I do remember wiping away my tears and wondering if Christmas would ever be the same without mom. If I would ever be able to be happy again on Christmas. And I remember, don't remember exactly the words, but I remember my husband and children coming around me and they gently reminded me why we celebrate Christmas. And because Jesus came as a baby, born in a manger and

because of his sacrifice, 33 years later, I would one day get to see Mom again in heaven. And this changed everything for me. You know, I knew that. I've read the Bible for years before that. But I needed someone to just help me to see that this is why Christmas is so important. [00:10:00] This is why Christmas is special. And this truth that, that changed everything for me. This truth of Jesus coming for me, and dying for me made Christmas even more meaningful for me. Yes, I got it. I loved Christmas even more in that moment, and I think that's why I still love it so much today.

You know, beforehand, those nine days before Christmas after mom died, life came to a screeching halt. And so did all of my typical Christmas activities. I mean, I don't even think we got together as an extended family that year 'cause we were all just so, so heartbroken and, and so worn out from the, the events of her death and all of those things. But that year I learned how peaceful the holiday could be. [00:11:00] I didn't do all the running. I didn't do all the striving. I didn't do all of this stuff, and this changed everything. You know, even through my heartbreak and grief, I was able to see a little more clear of how a simple holiday could be so meaningful.

Something amazing happens, I believe, when we pause to just ask God, how do you want this season to look? Instead of us picturing it in our own minds, what if we just surrendered ourselves and asked God, yeah, Lord, how do You want this, this holiday to look? How do You want this season to look? Because of course we know that His ways are much better than ours, right?

I pray that you never have to experience a loss like I did at Christmas time. But if you do, I want you to know that God can still use it for good like He did for me. Uh, of course my [00:12:00] heart is still tender each time, you know, this season rolls around. But I know that God is with me and He's carrying me in those really sad moments, and He's still using it all for good. And I cannot wait to the day till I get to see mom and my dad again someday face to face in heaven.

That whole experience that year softened something in me. It slowed me. It reminded me that Christmas isn't something to perform. It's someone to receive. And friend, whatever this December holds for you, whether it's joy or grief, pressure, anticipation, or maybe a mix of it all. I want you to know, I want you to remember that you are not alone in it. You're not.

Friend, we don't drift into an intentional December, we [00:13:00] decide into it, and today is our day of decision. Let's set the tone now for the rest of the month.

For the rest of the days ahead in December. Not out of pressure, but out of possibility.

So before we step into this different kind of December, we're gonna do it together, but I want to invite you into a moment of honesty with your own heart. Because when we get honest with our own selves, then we can truly step into the season that we want, the season that we want Jesus to, to lead us in.

And so let's begin by asking us ourselves some questions. After I ask these, you may want to pause the episode and just really ponder these questions. You can pause them whenever you want to, but it may be just really a good thing just to pause, not just to, you know, fly through it, but just to set some time and pause and think about your answers to the questions.

[00:14:00] First one is, what parts of December tend to steal your peace? What parts of December tend to steal your peace?

The second one is, where do you feel pressure to perform this season? Where do you feel pressure to perform this season?

The third, who or what usually sets your pace this season during Christmas? Who or what usually sets your pace? Is it culture? Is it family expectations? Comparison? Your own internal critic?

And then the last one, where do you sense God inviting you to rest with Him instead of rush? Where do you sense God inviting you to rest with Him instead of rush.

After you answer these [00:15:00] honestly I think you're gonna now be able to see, to have a clearer picture of what adjustments you might make this season and in the days ahead. Sometimes we just need to pause and ask and then honestly answer.

So right now, let's take a breath right where we are. Take a big deep breath, ah, and ask Jesus Lord, what do you want December to look like in my heart? What do you want December to look like in my heart? And then listen. Notice what arises. Maybe peace, a picture, a phrase, a memory, maybe even a longing.

And now ask what needs to shift for that to happen. Maybe it's setting boundaries around your time or your schedule and your calendar. Maybe it's saying no [00:16:00] to extra things that really don't bring you joy. Or maybe

it's choosing a slower pace, slower mornings, or, five quiet minutes with God before opening your phone for the day.

You know, I don't know. It might be something different for you. But let's name that. Let's, let's figure out what we can do right now to be able to change something this season. Because if we don't change something, nothing's gonna to change, right? And God will lead us to that. Let's name the pull that tries to shape our December. This is important.

Let's look at a cultural December versus a different kind of December. A cultural December is all about hurry and hustle. You know, the hustle and the bustle of the season. Yeah, that's a cultural December. A different kind of December is resting. Resting in [00:17:00] Him. Now, when I say resting, I don't mean you take a nap. I just mean you stop all the striving and you just rest in His provision. You rest in what He has for you.

Um, a cultural December is consumption and a different kind of December is contentment and gratitude. Another cultural part of December is a perfect holiday where a different kind of December is a humble, holy Savior.

The cultural December involves lots of noise and a different kind of December involves stillness. And a cultural December is about looking good and a different kind of December is loving well. Cultural December is to do it all, and a different kind of December is to do what matters. And then the last one, a cultural December is a busy, I [00:18:00] don't like that word. You know, it. Is a packed calendar. We'll say that. Where a different kind of December is a spacious space and spirit. Yeah.

But each year with God's guidance, you know, I, I, we've, I've talked about this, oh gosh, for years here, um, that I choose a word for the year. And , we'll talk about choosing a word for the year come January. But, um, I thought it could be a really helpful tool if you and I would choose a word for this December, just for this month.

I've never done that where I've just chosen a word for the month. But I thought, you know , choosing a word for the year really helps me all year long. So maybe a word for the month of December would be a helpful tool. It would be a word that will help you focus, will help remind you of truth when stress starts to rise. And it could even be the word that that will help you, just rest in Jesus this month.

So I'm choosing the word presence. [00:19:00] Not presence as in P-R-E-S-E-N-T-S, the gifts under the tree. No, not that. That's what a cultural December would be like. But a different kind of December. I'm choosing the word presence. P-R-E-S-E-N-C-E. Presence, like being present.

What would your word be? Now, you don't need to just decide right this very moment. Take some time and if you think this is something that will help, help you choose a word for this month. And then just think about what is the word that you want to remember when life feels too full and heavy with all the pressure of the season. Or you know, what's the word that just gives you so much hope? I invite you to write that word somewhere, somewhere where it's visible. Maybe your planner or, uh, your mirror or the lock screen on your phone. And then speak it out. Speak it out loud. Remind yourself of it often, and begin to live it out [00:20:00] every single day

Now that's one thing we can do is to choose a word. And there's some other options that we can do. I believe that, that will help us make, um, this a different kind of December. And so I just listed a few of these on a piece of paper, and maybe these will help you and maybe you'll find something else that will help you live a different kind of December out.

One is to begin each day with God. That to me, that even when I'm laying in bed, I just, I just thank God and praise Him. Even before I get outta bed in the morning. Even just two minutes matters. So, so begin your day with God.

The second, protect your peace. You know, say yes to things slowly and say no kindly. We talked about, you know, people pleasing last month. And um, yeah, sometimes the most holy thing we can do is say no.

[00:21:00] The next one is to savor small moments like lighting a candle, pausing to breathe, taking a few moments to pray throughout the day.

Uh, another way is to celebrate just being present and to stop the perfection. Just to forget the perfection and just focus on being present.

And another one is to notice God in the ordinary, the ordinary moments, because He's here, right here with us now. This is an ordinary moment and we know that God's with us. So we can notice Him, we can appreciate Him and praise Him in these ordinary moments.

So which one of these speaks to your heart the most right now? Which one do you think you're gonna give a try either today or tomorrow, and that you could

incorporate all the rest of the month? Now again, you can use these any time of year, but now since we're in December and it's one of those times of year that we just really get bombarded with [00:22:00] all sorts of things, I pray that these will help you. And you can always come up with some on your own, and I would love to know them if you, uh, if you do choose some that are on your own, I would love to know 'em.

You know but just this week, I, I sat with my, my tea in my hands in the morning and the tree lights were on. It was an early quiet morning, um, in the darkness. It was just, it was a beautiful moment. And I thought, right then, this is what I missed for years. This quiet, this presence. And this year I am here for it all.

Friend, you do not have to sprint through this season. In fact, I'm really gonna encourage you not to. You can walk with Jesus slowly. You can walk through it with Jesus slowly. You can just imagine taking His hand and Him leading you through this season [00:23:00] at His pace slowly, intentionally, and joyfully. Can you even imagine that? Let's make room for His peace. Let's welcome the wonder of the season. Let's live a different kind of December together. Because after all, Jesus didn't come to earth for us to stress over celebrating His birth, right? He didn't. He came to give us life and life to the full, the abundant life that we are designed to live. So let's live it out this December.

I love this verse. "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." And that is Proverbs chapter 16 verse 3. Let's give all of this to the Lord. Commit all of this to Him and He will establish our plans.

Lord, we [00:24:00] just, we just give You this month. Shape it Lord, shape us. Draw us close to You. We wanna be near You. Yeah, we do. Amen to that.

If you chose a word for this month, I would love to hear it. And I would invite you to send me a message, maybe either on Instagram or Facebook, um, through Messenger, however you want to. You can also message me through my website at the, link down in the show notes. You can do that as well. But I would love to see and know of your word for this month.

And if this episode encouraged you, please consider sharing it with a friend who could also use a different kind of December. Or share it on social media, so another one can find hope as well.

And something exciting. If you'd like to bless those in your life with unique gifts, and you would also maybe like to [00:25:00] support this podcast, you can

visit my brand new store on my website. There you will find all sorts of things like scripture cards and t-shirts. You'll find my books and more. So these are all designed just for you to encourage your heart and inspire your soul. And so the link for that is in the show notes.

Friend, I am grateful that we're walking through this month together. I am cheering you on praying for your different kind of December. I am praying for you today. Thanks for being here. 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.