

Encouragement for Real Life

230 Celebrate with Purpose

[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 the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. I am so grateful that you are here with me today. Christmas is almost here. Oh my goodness. And as we enter this final week of our different kind of December series, I want to invite you to something simple, [00:01:00] something sacred, something steadying for your heart.

This week we are talking about how to celebrate with purpose. How to make room for the wonder of Jesus in the middle of real life, real emotions, real expectations, and real December moments. Because friend, Christmas doesn't have to be perfect to be meaningful. It doesn't have to look like the pictures, the commercials, or even the plans you made.

Christmas is meaningful because Jesus is here. Yeah. And when we slow down, we take a breath and pay attention, we begin to notice Him in the small, sometimes simple places, in the quiet moments, in the laughter, in the candlelight, in the imperfections, and in the people around our tables.[00:02:00]

Today we are talking about how to experience this Christmas with intention, peace, and with presence, and how to release the pressure so we can receive the joy. That's what we want, right? We wanna receive that joy. So whether your December has gone exactly like you hoped or nothing like you planned, you are welcome here and you're in good company. So let's lean in to the wonder of Jesus together and step into Christmas week with peace, purpose, and with Him.

Julie Lefebure: If we pause enough to think about it, Christmas is really quite amazing, isn't it? I mean, think about it for just a minute. You [00:03:00] know,

not all the activities that we do to celebrate it, and not even the holiday itself, but the story of Christmas is quite miraculous and breathtaking.

So often we are consumed with the hustle and bustle that the world has created around it, which we may be experiencing this very day. I get that. But when we are caught up in all that, we miss the heart of Christmas altogether.

But think about it just, just for a second. God put on flesh, God put on flesh and came down to us through Jesus. Just let that sink in for a moment. That's just something amazing, isn't it?

And He didn't make a search for Him. He came to us. He didn't come when our lives were perfect. He came at His perfect time. [00:04:00] And He didn't come as a mighty king in a palace as He could have and has as He deserved, but instead as a lowly baby in a manger, no crib for His bed.

And He didn't come just to give us what we want out of life. You know, sometimes we think we wish He would've. But no, He came to give us what we need - an eternal life with Him forever. I mean, it's quite amazing, isn't it? If we just pause and ponder it, we just can get filled with awe like I am right now.

But let's look at this a little deeper. Let's look into scripture for just a moment. Isaiah chapter 9, verse 6, in the New International Version. Actually approximately 700 years [00:05:00] prior, Isaiah foretold the birth of Jesus. And this is what he said in this verse. Actually, it's Isaiah chapter 9, verses 6 and 7. It says, "For unto us, a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness. From that time on and forever, the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this."

Wow. Yes, I love the names especially, that Isaiah gave to Jesus. The names of Wonderful Counselor, Mighty [00:06:00] God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. It's just such a, a blessed verse that we can just cling to and we can just claim and listen to. And, and just the fact that he foretold it approximately 700 years before Jesus was born is amazing.

And the next one I wanna look at, and you might know this one and you might, you know, you might hear it, this Christmas, but it's Luke chapter 2 verses 10 through 14, also in the New International Version. And this is about the birth of Jesus. Let's take a look. It says, "And there were shepherds living out in the

fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior [00:07:00] has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel praising God and saying, 'glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'"

It's just amazing to me about, I think I've said amazing, probably 12 times already in this episode, but I just was so overcome with the, the reality of Christmas, this Christmas story and what it really means. Because there's so many years that I missed it. Of course, I knew I knew the story, but I missed it because I was so focused on the other stuff, and the other stuff doesn't matter. Christmas is about God drawing near. Everything else is [00:08:00] secondary.

I was thinking about this the other morning when I was still lying in bed and uh, I don't remember what year it actually was, but it was before we had children, so I assume it must have been either the first or second year of our marriage. And, traditionally my parents and siblings , and us, we would all gather together at mom and dad's house on Christmas Day. So on Christmas Eve, Bill and I would typically go to church, to Christmas Eve church service. And oftentimes, um, mom and dad would join us. And so this particular year they did. And I don't know what happened, but I remember being so grumpy and so frustrated at our home with just Bill and I there, uh, before leaving for church. I mean, I was mad. I just remember that. [00:09:00] I don't remember what happened. I can't recall why I was grumpy, what happened, or, or who knows what happened. But something must have happened that upset me or that made the holiday feel imperfect before it even began. I don't know.

But once we got to church and sitting in the pew of this church that we were married in, my heart began to soften. I can still picture it all in my mind now. The beautiful nativity scene up front and the red poinsettias on the altar and the joy that filled the air. There's just something about Christmas Eve joy isn't there. And the reading of the Christmas story. All of that combined just humbled me and it caused me to actually repent of my former downcast attitude. Because immediately my attitude changed in that moment. [00:10:00] You know, I just remember I was still a new Christian at that time and I was learning how to navigate my faith, amid life circumstances. But I knew that Jesus was getting my attention.

And my thoughts shifted right then. And I remember looking at mom and dad and I became exceedingly grateful to have them with us because I knew someday they weren't gonna be there. And I looked at my husband and, oh, sorry, I don't mean to get emotional. And I, I remember thanking God for how we were, we were together still learning how to live with and to love each other well. And I remember also looking within, and I remember asking God to change my heart, to change me from the inside out. I felt like such a mess back then. And here we were celebrating the birth of our [00:11:00] Savior, the one who, yeah, saved a wretch like me. Singing, Oh Holy Night and Silent Night, two of my favorites. Just singing them just made my heart swell. And what began as a grumpy Christmas Eve turned into such a sacred moment of worship. Isn't it amazing how God can do that? He can just change our attitudes and change our hearts just like that.

And you know something else, something happened outside of the church while we were inside. Unbeknownst to us, it had started to snow. And when we walked out, you know, that was before we had cell phones, so we really didn't know, you know, the radar and the weather like we do today. Gosh, that's a long time ago. But when we walked outside, when we walked out, those big doors, huge fluffy [00:12:00] flakes were cascading down from the sky and they settled on our faces, on our cheeks and our eyes. And I remember having to, to blink, you know, to be able to see through the snow falling. And I remember us looking up towards the, the source of these snowflakes. And you know, this memory is so vivid. It's as if it would've happened just last year, but it was gosh, so long ago. And I remember just silently thanking God for this beautiful moment in this beautiful Christmas Eve that started out so imperfect.

And as I think about it now, I have not experienced a Christmas Eve like that ever since. There was just something so precious about walking outside and having the snow come down and, just, just remind me that Jesus was present.

Friend, Christmas is not about perfection. I mean, [00:13:00] look at the first Christmas. It was not perfect. I'm sure Mary would've, you know, rather have given birth to Jesus in, in a more, um, more appropriate place, instead of a, a stable or a barn. Or you know, where animals were. But no, it's not about, the, the perfection. It's about presence. It's about God's presence with us, God being with us. That's what it's about. You know that word, Emmanuel, is God with us.

Yet the culture that we live in tells us that Christmas should be perfect meals, right? Perfect memories. Picture, perfect moments. The right gift you give to someone. And the pressure to do it all. That's what our culture says.

But [00:14:00] God invites us to something better, to presence with Him, to worship. He invites us with gratitude and, and to wonder and joy. Those sound like a whole lot more exciting than the things that the world, the culture says Christmas is about. Christmas was never meant to be a performance like we make it today. It was meant to be a celebration of a person and that's Jesus.

I invite you right now no matter where you are, just to take a moment to pause and to breathe, and just a quick moment of reflection. Wherever you are. Imagine the manger just for a brief moment. Imagine the manger. The quiet, the simplicity, the God who came near. Can you even? I like to stop, and pause and think about it [00:15:00] because it brings it close.

And as we reflect, let's ask Him, Jesus, how do You want me to celebrate You this week? How do You want me to celebrate You today? And you know, this doesn't have to be reserved just for Christmas day or Christmas week. We can ask Him that every day. Jesus, how do You want me to celebrate You today? Listen for His answer.

And as you sit in this moment, just for a second, think back to the word that you chose at the beginning of the month. Do you remember it? How might that word shape your celebration this week? How might it guide your heart on Christmas Eve or Christmas morning, or in those in-between moments where things feel loud or just full or even tender? Your word wasn't just for the [00:16:00] first week of December. It's meant to carry you into the heart of Christmas too. So dig that word back out and how might it impact you this week?

My word was presence, and so that is impacting me this week, that I want to stay present. In everything, even in the imperfect and maybe not so fun moments. I wanna stay present because God is present with me.

Here are some, maybe just some simple practical ways to celebrate with purpose, 'cause that's our theme this week, right? We're gonna celebrate with purpose.

So the first way is just to slow the pace. Some ideas might be just a five minute Christmas morning scripture reading. Whether that's alone with yourself sitting in front of the Christmas tree or with your family. Just five minutes.

Another one, uh, could [00:17:00] be a quiet moment ritual where you just spend a quiet moment with Jesus. Play worship before opening gifts or before, you eat or just have it playing in the background. It's a perfect time just to have worship music going.

The second way is to simplify expectations. This may mean to let the meal be simple. We're having a very simple Christmas meal this year. To release the need to control every detail. We don't need to be in control of all of that stuff, do we? And to choose connection over cleanup. You know what? Let the dishes sit and go be connected with those who you're with.

The third way is to create meaningful connection. How about go around the table and share one thing that you're grateful for. You might have done this at Thanksgiving, but it's , a great activity to do Christmas Day or Christmas Eve. [00:18:00] How about asking each person a simple favorite moment question. Maybe a favorite moment throughout the year, or favorite moment this month, however God leads you. Or maybe just send a prayer or a text message to someone who needs some hope today.

The fourth is center on Jesus. To read Luke 2 as a family. I mean even briefly just read it. I would like to do that with our grandsons in the next few days, and I hope I can make that happen. Another one is to light a candle for Christ's presence being with you, just light a candle. Or whisper, a simple prayer. Thank you for coming near Jesus. Any of these ways would be just some really simple and just tangible ways that we all can celebrate, with purpose.

I'm also going to suggest this is, [00:19:00] this is something that I've just really kind of just taken for myself. I even do this sometimes daily when I need it. Um, a purpose statement for Christmas. Come up with a purpose statement. Choose a simple phrase for Christmas day or for Christmas Eve like be present or worship first or less pressure, more peace, or Jesus at the center, or hold space for joy. Just a real small statement that you can just say to yourself in the midst of whatever kind of situation you're in. And it'll just shift your mind and it'll bring you back to the center and it'll bring your focus back to where it needs to be. And of course, I love the one of be present. That's the one that I'm going to be whispering to myself on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

You know, not everyone's Christmas [00:20:00] looks picture perfect. It doesn't. Grief and joy coexist and yet Jesus is present in both. And the year that, you know, my mom died nine days before Christmas, it was, it was 2006, and I've shared about this already, but that year it was so imperfect. It was, it was, it was awful. But it was still beautiful at the same time.

So, yeah, grief and joy can coexist. And I understand if you're walking through a season of loss, a season of hopelessness, a season of grief. I may not know your exact situation, but I do understand. And that year when I lost mom, Jesus became so very real to me. It was like He was with me walking with me. Like I

could feel His presence, because I was so torn up. I was just so tender and I [00:21:00] was, I was so broken. But Jesus, He was with me. Yeah. And I'm gonna be praying for you in the days to come that you feel His presence as tangibly as I did back in 2006. Whether your Christmas is beautifully calm, joyfully loud, or somewhere in between, Jesus is with you in all of it.

Would you just pause with me here for a moment? I would just love to pray. Let's pray right now. I would love to do that.

Heavenly Father, I just thank You. Thank You, Lord, that You came down to Earth, You came to us. You didn't make us search You out. You came as a lowly baby in a manger, for us. To redeem us, to rescue us, to take us home with You someday. You conquered sin and death so, Father, we can conquer sin and death [00:22:00] too. And we, we know that someday we are going to be with You forever in our eternal home. And we look forward to that day. And so, Lord, we have a lot to celebrate this week. We celebrate Your birth, we celebrate the blessings, we celebrate Your peace and Your provision and Your protection and Your presence with us. We just, we wanna celebrate You the way You want us to celebrate You. And so Father, we surrender what we think we need to do to Your will. We want what You want this Christmas. Lord, center our hearts on what's most important, and help us not to get hung up on all the other little things. You are worthy of celebration. Help us to celebrate You with purpose and on purpose this week. We love You, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Oh, friend, as you step [00:23:00] into this Christmas week, I pray that you feel the nearness of Jesus in every moment - in the quiet, in the laughter, in the imperfect and in the beautiful. Christmas isn't about getting everything right. It's about God who came close, Emmanuel, God with us. So as you gather, as you prepare, as you celebrate, may your heart rest in the truth that you are deeply loved by the one that we honor this season.

And I hope that you'll join me next week for a very special guest episode as we close out the year together. It's warm and meaningful and the perfect way to wrap up 2025 with encouragement and hope.

Also if you are still looking for a thoughtful, meaningful, and last minute holiday gift, Christmas gift, a new year gift, a [00:24:00] birthday gift, maybe for a friend or a sister, or a coworker, or even yourself, I would love to invite you to my online event on, uh, January 3rd. I was gonna say July 3rd. Not July 3rd. January 3rd at 9:00 AM Central Time. And it's online and on Zoom and, it's called Coffee and Calling, Choosing Your Word for 2026. And I'm gonna lead

you through how to do that. And we're gonna have a beautiful time together. It's a lovely way to begin the new year with purpose, clarity, and a whole lot of joy. And a ticket makes a wonderful gift of encouragement , to someone who might need a fresh start or a little hope right now. So you can find all the details for that in the show notes.

Thank you. Thank you for spending part of your December with me. I'm grateful, so grateful for you. I'm cheering for you. I am praying for you. [00:25:00] And I pray that your Christmas is filled with peace, presence and the wonder of Jesus. Until next time, merry Christmas and keep living your one beautiful life with Him. God bless you.

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