

Encouragement for Real Life Podcast

255 When I Struggled to Forgive Myself

[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. Have you ever replayed a mistake you made in your mind over and over again, so many times that each time you did replay it, you felt that weight of that mistake all over again? Maybe it was something you said in a conversation, or a [00:01:00] decision you made, or a moment that you wish you could just go back and change or even erase.

Well, I know what that feels like, because I walked through a season where I carried shame much longer than I needed to. I knew that God had already forgiven me, but I really struggled to forgive myself.

And maybe you're in this place today. So if you could use some encouragement in forgiving yourself right now, well, this episode is for you. Let's get into this episode.

Well, welcome back to the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. I'm Julie Lefebure, and I am grateful that we get to spend some time together today. We are [00:02:00] continuing our series, The Stories I Don't Always Tell. And today's episode is probably, I would say, one of the more personal conversations that I've ever shared here, maybe in a long time or ever. And, uh, these stories I'm telling are ones that I don't always talk about in my talks when I speak at events or, uh, just in everyday life. But I'm sharing them here because I believe they are valuable and need to be shared.

So today I'm not gonna actually share every single detail of this story that, that I'm talking about today. But it was a season where it was if God was excavating

past mistakes and sins and personal failures out of my soul. You know what an excavator does, right? It has that hook and it, it, it goes in the ground and digs out and, [00:03:00] and that's what it felt like God was doing. He was just like excavating all of this stuff out of my soul.

And I wanna be sure to share that that season felt like just, it, it was really a difficult season. And I wanna share what that season felt like emotionally and spiritually, and how deeply, deeply I struggled, um- for a while to truly receive God's grace for myself.

I think a lot of us understand grace in, in theory. Like, we believe that God forgives people, right? We believe that He restores people. We believe that He redeems broken things, and we see examples of this in scripture over and over again. And we believe that He can bring good from what looks bad, even through our mistakes and failures. [00:04:00] We, we believe that, right?

But sometimes it becomes a whole lot harder when the person needing that grace is us. And in this specific season, I replayed numerous things over and over in my mind. I revisited conversations, replayed moments, and I thought about what I should have said differently, I should have done differently, I should have handled things differently.

And I kept mentally trying to rewrite, rewrite the story. I wanted to rewrite the story so much that, um ... But I, I ... It had already taken place, and I had no power in changing it. You know, the past is the past, and we, we can't do anything about it except learn from it and try to not do it again if we made a mistake in [00:05:00] the past.

But honestly, all of that was exhausting, where I was trying to rewrite the story and I couldn't. It was exhausting. Because the thing about shame is that it has a way of convincing us that if we replay it enough, if we punish ourselves enough, or we hold onto it long enough, somehow we can make up for it. Somehow that's going to make it all disappear or be okay. Somehow that- that's the answer. But all it did for me was keep me stuck, as if I was in shackles and in torturous pain.

And honestly, I think forgiving ourselves is something that we, we don't talk about enough. I believe that we just ... we don't talk about it in Christian circles. We don't talk about forgiving ourselves. [00:06:00] We, we talk about forgiving others a lot and accepting God's forgiveness. But we don't ... Or, you know, extending, I should say, extending God's forgiveness to others. But we don't talk so much about forgiving ourselves.

You know, we may naturally struggle with forgiving others who have wronged us. I, I do that sometimes. I can struggle forgiving people. And when it comes to us being the ones who have wronged us, it can be even more difficult to forgive and to extend that forgiveness. I mean, after all, we knew better. We are Christians, right?

We can't believe that we made such a mistake or did such a thing, the thing that we shouldn't have done, whatever it might be. And then shame, it slowly and slyly just crawls up and settles in. We don't even realize it. We don't even realize that shame is there. And maybe you know what it feels like. Maybe [00:07:00] you know exactly what this feels like. Maybe there's something in your own life that you still revisit sometimes. A mistake, a regret, a season you wished looked different.

And today, I just want to have an honest conversation about what it looks like to struggle to forgive yourself and myself, and how God slowly met me in my own unforgiveness for myself. And I think the difficult thing about shame is that it doesn't just stay attached to the situation itself. But over time, it starts attaching itself to our identities.

You and I may stop thinking, "I made a mistake," and we start to slowly believe, "I am the mistake." That's a [00:08:00] difference. That's a big difference from when we, we think, "I made a mistake," to becoming, "I am the mistake." And that's what shame does.

And when we, um, when we look at that mistake, when we, we, we say that we are the mistake, we lose our identity. We are no longer God's beloved daughter. But instead, we see ourselves as the one that God is now disappointed in.

And then the spiritual spiral begins. That shame then affects our relationship with God. After we say we are the mistake, we see ourselves, - as a mistake, then it naturally affects our relationship with God. And we are tempted instead of, um, running to God in our mistakes and in our, in our sins, uh, [00:09:00] the shame causes us to desire, uh, causes us to desire to run away from Him.

And this is what many do. We just can't face God with the mistake. He would be so disappointed in us. He would be, He would disqualify us. He would, He-- Whatever the situation might be. But the thing is He already knows what we've done. He already knows it. So why would we wanna run from Him? But that's what we do. Many people run from God. Adam and Eve did it in the garden. They hid themselves after they sinned.

Then this affects our confidence. You know, when we run from God and we've lost our identity, we, we lose confidence in ourselves, in our maturity, in our capabilities. My goodness, we, like I said, we should have known better. Why did we do such a thing? We lose our confidence in, in God. We lose our confidence in what we believe in. And are we [00:10:00] really Christians if we've made such a mistake? And what would others say if they knew of our mistakes?

Then shame goes to the next level, and it keeps us stuck mentally. And I don't mean to laugh, but it's just ridiculous what shame does to us, and we don't even realize it's happening. But it keeps us stuck mentally. Again, the spiral continues. The replaying of the scenarios and the thoughts and the words and the actions. That all wears us down, and that can be so paralyzing.

I don't know if you've ever felt paralyzing before, if you ever felt paralyzed before. But when that happens, it makes us hesitant to move forward. We can't move forward when we're paralyzed. It's nearly impossible. We're just stuck, like stuck in cement, and we can't move anywhere. We're just stuck.

And this is why many, many of us [00:11:00] get stuck in regret, and we can't move out of it. We want to forgive ourselves, and maybe we've even said that we've forgiven ourselves, but we just can't seem to really do it. We keep beating ourselves up. We keep blaming ourselves. We keep punishing ourselves over and over and over.

And this is exactly where the enemy of our souls wants us. And so many stay stuck here. He wants us paralyzed. He wants us stuck. He wants us unable to serve God and others. He wants us to be so fixated on the mistakes that we've made that he wants us to think that God possibly can't use us now. There's no way. We messed it up, and it, we're too far gone to be used by God.

For me, I went through all of this. Shame was loud. It was constantly replaying things in my head. [00:12:00] It sounded like questioning myself and my worth. And it sounded like feeling disqualified. And it sounded like wondering if I had ruined something permanently. Was I truly disqualified from being used by God? Had I truly messed everything up?

Shame can start to twist stories in your mind. Shame can just make you feel so depleted. Oh my goodness. And shame affected my health. Shame is a, a tool that the enemy uses to destroy us. And as it affected my health, namely my heart. I mean, one day I ended up in the hospital, in the emergency room with a racing heart that had to be shocked back into rhythm, not once, but twice.

Shame was wreaking havoc in my life. And it also [00:13:00] led me to the depths of depression that I had never knew existed. I, I don't struggle with depression. I never have. I shouldn't say never have, because I did during that season. But I never had before that, and I've never had struggled with it after. But in that season, I had no idea the depths of depression that were present. And I, I couldn't climb out of that darkness on my own.

And thankfully, I just remember the day I called, um, a Christian therapy center, and I was shaking. But God led me to a wonderful Christian counselor who I still see today, after all these years. Who, she was almost like a life preserver for me. You know what a life preserver is? Someone's drowning, you throw out the, the life preserver to rescue them. God used this, this, this [00:14:00] counselor, this therapist, in that way in my life. He used her to pull me out of the depths of shame by offering me just some simple tools and strategies and ways that I could welcome healing to begin in my life. She helped me see that replaying the mistakes only, they, they made me relive them over and over, and that wasn't helping me get to a better place. And it certainly wasn't what God wanted me to do. I knew that. But I couldn't see it at the time.

And punishing myself wasn't bringing about healing. It was only making me feel worse. Only making me feel more buried under shame. And she reminded me of the truth that, that once we confess our sins and mistakes to God, He removes them. I had forgot that. Or I, I [00:15:00] couldn't grasp it at the time.

You know, God doesn't punish us over and over for our sins and the mistakes that we make. And Psalm 103:12 in The Voice translation says this very clearly. It declares, "You see, God takes all our crimes, our seemingly exhaustible sins, and removes them. As far as the east is from the west, He removes them from us." As far as the east is from the west, He removes them from us. Thankfully, He does.

I need to pause here now though and make a correction. In the next section of this episode, I mention my book Right Now Matters, day 19 of Right Now Matters, when it actually should be day 19 of my new book, Made for More.

And I wanna read an excerpt out of, um, [00:16:00] my Right Now Matters book. This day, it's day 19, and, uh, it is ... when I wrote this, I knew this was a reliving of some of my story of this part of not being able to forgive myself. It's called Stop Carrying What God's Released. All right, I'm gonna read it.

"Do you ever hold on to what God has already let go? We know God forgives us, but sometimes we continue to replay the past, to carry shame and regret, or

silently believe our sins still define us. Yet Scripture says God removes our sins infinitely far from us. Not just out of sight, but also out of reach. They are no longer ours to hold on to or to carry. Think of it this way. East and west never meet. Through Jesus, your past and your present never collide either. [00:17:00] Your already forgiven sins are not following behind you, waiting to resurface. They are gone and forever removed. Forever. When God forgives you, He releases you. He restores you. He rewrites your story with His amazing grace, never guilt, all out of His love for you. Today, stop carrying what He has already released from you. Walk free, forgiven, and clean because this is who you are, all thanks to Him."

That was day 19 of Made for More. And, uh, I'm just so grateful that, um, He continues to remind me that He has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west.

And as I processed in that season [00:18:00] and began to heal, it became crystal clear to me that the enemy of my soul wanted me defeated, but Jesus wanted me to live victoriously. It felt like as if a battle was kind of raging inside of me and who was I going to let win? Was I going to let the enemy of my soul win or was I going to let Jesus win?

And instead of running from God, I began to just trust Him to heal my heart, to clean up my soul. Most, most of those days, gosh, they were tiring and extremely difficult. But I did some things that helped me. I, I filled my mind with, with the truth of God's Word. I kept reading God's Word. And I started to find scriptures on forgiveness and hope and healing. I filled my home and my car with songs of worship. And [00:19:00] I found special meaning. I found this one song back then and it was, it was a, a song from Matthew West called Brand New. And that song was on repeat for months. I can sing it out loud. I can sing it. I have it all memorized because I listened to it so much.

The reminder of how He was making me new, lifting my shame and changing my name. God was making me new, brand new. I wasn't the person I was. I wasn't the person that I used to be. He was healing me. And I, I could see it and feel it happening, but it was oh so slow. It was oh so slow.

Because healing didn't happen overnight. Nor did it happen as fast as I wanted it to. But, but God was faithful. He continued to [00:20:00] shower His grace on me. And I, goodness, I, I learned how to accept it. I learned how to accept it. I learned how to walk in the freedom of Jesus' resurrection. And I, I was able to remember that He died for people like me who mess up, who confess, who struggle to receive His amazing grace, who cling to Him in times of darkness,

who keep clinging to Him until the light of freedom breaks through. And still we cling because we know that we can't do this life, not even a moment of this life without Him and His grace. And He helped me to learn to not define myself by one moment.

And I, I read a quote recently and I just thought, I have to put this in here. The quote, and I, it was, it said anonymous. So I don't know who wrote this, but maybe if you know it, you [00:21:00] can share it with me. But it, it says, "if we measured our lives by our worst moments, none of us would survive the judgment. People are more than their mistakes." Amen to that. You are more than your mistakes. I am more than my mistakes.

And if you've ever struggled to forgive yourself, I hope you know that you're not alone in that. So many of us struggle to forgive ourselves. One painful moment, one regret, one failure, one season does not get to become your entire identity. It does not. If you've confessed that mistake to God, He's already forgiven you.

And I appreciate the reminder in 1 John 1:9 which says, in The Voice translation, "But if we own up to our sins, God shows us that He is faithful [00:22:00] and just by forgiving us of our sins and purifying us from the pollution of all the bad things we have done." Amen.

Friend, you no longer need to keep hiding. You no longer need to keep reliving what He's already covered and removed with His grace. Grace says even though this happened, your story doesn't end there. I'm gonna say that again. Grace says that even though this happened, your story doesn't end there.

You do not have to spend the rest of your life punishing yourself for something that God has already forgiven. You don't. God has extended His grace to you today. He's extending it to you right now. Let me tell you, He's not disappointed in you. You did not fail Him. You, you aren't [00:23:00] disqualified to be used by Him.

But instead, He's ready, ready and waiting with open arms to receive you back, to say, "Daughter, I have forgiven you. Now it's time to forgive yourself." And let me tell you, His arms are the safest, most wonderful place to be. You can let go of all that you've been holding onto, friend. Let it all go.

And now, you know, as I look back, ... Well, first of all, before I look back, I, I, I still struggle sometimes in thinking, "I wish that season would've been different. I wish that season, I wish I would've made..." Well, in all those

seasons, all the, the stuff, that God was, excavating out of my soul and out of my heart, there were so many things I wish I could've done differently. So many regrets. So many, um, s- so much sadness over the, the mistakes I had made. And I still [00:24:00] sometimes struggle with the weight of that. But there's hope in that also. And I want to share that even though, you know, after that season and I look back through that challenging excavating season, it was, it was painful and it was hard and it was, it was a struggle.

But that season changed me. It changed me for good. And I can see how God used that season of excavation is what I call it in facing my sins and mistakes to not only purify me, but to heal me through the brokenness of my sins. And, uh, that sounds kind of weird, but that's how it felt. That I was a cracked vessel and God was healing me through all of the cracks.

And I was reminded, uh, when I was preparing this [00:25:00] episode of Psalm chapter 51 verse 17 in the New International Reader's Version. It says, "The greatest sacrifice you want is a broken spirit. God, you will gladly accept a heart that is broken because of sadness over sin."

That brokenness was actually a gift for me. I didn't like the feeling of being broken, but it was at the place there where I finally felt free. I was, uh, yeah, that was, that was a really, um, significant season in my life. And it was after walking through all of that, that I can look back now and see that God began to use me in ways that He had never before. He had opened doors that were once closed. He had given me opportunities that I had never received before. He had [00:26:00] really just kind of flourished lots of areas of my life after that season. And I, I see the fruit of that season today.

And I pray that my story encourages you right now as you face your own past mistakes or your, your own seasons where you wish were different. Because I don't think I'm alone here. I think we all have seasons like that, or we've, we all have, um, situations and circumstances we wish we would have done something different. Or something that we can't believe we did out of, you know, whatever, whatever, uh, situation or circumstance we were in to act in a way that we, we're ashamed of now.

But we don't have to be ashamed of that anymore when we hand that over to Jesus. We can walk in His freedom and in His forgiveness, and that makes [00:27:00] the cross and His resurrection even more meaningful. And that's why when Easter rolls around every year, I just am even more grateful for His sacrifice. Because of His sacrifice, we can be forgiven and walk in His grace. I'm so grateful for that.

And sometimes we need some support, like I did, while learning to walk through these seasons of life. I was grateful for the support that I received from my therapist. And honestly, I think that's one of the, the reasons that I care so deeply about mentoring women. It's because I know what it feels like to hold onto things internally for a very long time. The pressure, the, the shame, the spiraling thoughts, the, the feelings of being just stuck emotionally and spiritually and not even [00:28:00] fully knowing how to move forward. I get that.

And sometimes what we need most, is just to simply have a safe place to process honestly and be encouraged and be reminded of truth again. 'Cause sometimes shame causes us to forget truth.

And really, that's the heart behind my Abundant Life Mentoring. It's not about having everything figured out. It's also not about having a, a perfect facade where we think that we just have to come across being perfect. We get to open ourselves up and just ... It's a process of, of helping women slow down. To really embrace where they are, process it honestly, and to begin moving forward with God's peace and His freedom and intentionality.

So if this episode resonated with you in a deeper way and, and you've been craving that kind of support or [00:29:00] encouragement in your own life and in your faith journey, then I would love to connect with you. I'll leave the mentoring information in the show notes below.

And friend, if this episode helped or encouraged you in, in some way, would you be willing to share this with a friend or on social media? Or leave a rating or review? This really does help other women find this encouragement as well.

And maybe you know someone who's really struggling to forgive herself. Send this her way. And be sure to subscribe so you never miss an episode.

And next week, goodness, I am sharing something, another personal story. And this one is one that, that most people don't know about me. And I'm excited to share it. Um, it's something that I lived with silently for a long time, and how, uh, this affected my life more than I ever realized.[00:30:00]

So come back next Tuesday. I can't wait to see you then. And until then, stay encouraged and stay uplifted, and keep living out the life that you were designed to live, that abundant life in Jesus. God bless you.

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