Encouragement for Real Life Podcast

277 Wait, We Get to Partner With God?

[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 stopped long enough to marvel at the fact that God invites us to be a part of what He's doing? Think about it for a minute. The God who created the heavens and the Earth, the entire universe. The God who can do anything and everything. He invites [00:01:00] you and me to participate in His work. Wait, what? We get to partner with God? Yes, we do. And it is amazing, isn't it?

And today, we are gonna be talking about this, and actually what it all means and why I think it's something worth getting excited about. So if you're ready, let's get into this episode.

Welcome back to the Encouragement for Real Life podcast. I'm Julie Lefebure, and I'm so glad you're here.

We are continuing in our series, Living With Expectation, this month. And I hope that you have already enjoyed the first two episodes of this series. We've already discussed anticipating what God might do in our ordinary lives, uh, recognizing that God may already be [00:02:00] at work in our current circumstances. And this week, we are looking at the gift of participating in what God is doing in the world. And I'm really excited about it.

The thing is, I keep thinking about this, that God doesn't need our help, right? He does not need our help. But He invites us to participate in what He's doing. And if we think about it, yes, God created the heavens and the Earth. He spoke,

and creation came into existence. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, all completely capable of accomplishing everything He wants to do, everything in His purposes and His plans. He doesn't need me to ma- to make His plans work, and He doesn't need you either.

But here's what continues to amaze me. He chooses [00:03:00] to involve you and me in what He's doing. He involves us. He invites ordinary people just like you, just like me, to participate in His work, in what He's doing in this world. And isn't this incredible? I mean, yeah, isn't it incredible? He doesn't need us, but yet He chooses to involve us It's incredible. Yeah.

So what does partnering with God actually mean? What am I meaning by this? And I had a pastor once who would, who would often close his sermon saying that, you know, that, that God shows, sometimes shows us what He, what He's doing and that we just get to be a part of it. And, and that was-- that's touched me for years. And it's, it still reminds me when I think of partnering with God, I think of that because yeah, He re- He reveals to us sometimes what He's doing, and He allows us to be a part of it.

But when I say, [00:04:00] excuse me, we get to partner with God, I'm certainly, oh goodness no, not suggesting that we're equal partners with God, because that's not true. He's God, and we are not. Yes, He's God. We are not. But He invites us to follow His leading, to use what, the tools, the gifts, and the talents He's given us, and to participate in His purposes. He's the one doing the work. We just get the privilege of being involved.

And I came across this, this verse. It's in, um, 1 Corinthians 3:9. And it just kind of shows this beautifully. In the New International Version, um, Paul refers to believers as coworkers in God's service. He said that, that, you know, Paul was the one that planted the [00:05:00] seed, Apollos watered the seed, and God made it grow. God made it grow. So yes, we are coworkers, coworkers with God.

And we may think sometimes that this invitation, it's only reserved for, for certain people. And maybe you're thinking of that today. Maybe you're listening or watching and you're thinking, "Well, that's, that's great. That's for w- that's wonderful for people like Paul and Apollos." Pastors, missionaries, or those who have some special calling in life, right? We can think that.

But friend, I want to stress to you that God's invitation to participate in His work is no way limited to people with a particular title or status or just anything that would set them to be up higher than someone [00:06:00] else. No. Uh, we don't

need a platform. We don't need to be living a big, bold life. Goodness, you know, we don't even need to have everything figured out in our lives for God to use us.

You could be a woman living her everyday life, loving her family, working at her job, caring for others, navigating a season that you never expected, and God can work through you right where you are. Maybe that's changing diapers. Maybe that's making dinner. Maybe that's conducting a sales meeting. Maybe that's even just speaking to someone in the grocery line, grocery store line. God can use anything, anyone that He wants to.

And there's a man in scripture that I just ... I like this story. I really love the stories of scripture. And I, you know, [00:07:00] stories, I'm not saying stories because they're fables. That's not it. Stories in the Bible are, are true, and I love ... They just, they just touch my heart because I can relate to many of them.

But this one story illustrates this whole thing so beautifully. Um, this man, um, he was- wasn't one of Jesus's 12 disciples. But he was one of His ... Uh, the, the Bible describes him as a disciple. But we don't know a great deal about him. But God invited him to participate in something remarkable. His name was Ananias. And his story is found in Acts chapter 9. So you can always pull that out. And I, I will link the, the story in the show notes.

But we hear a lot about Saul, who later became Paul. And we hear a lot about his dramatic encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. [00:08:00] But we sometimes skip over that there's another person in this account who doesn't always get as much attention. And this person is Ananias. And I think that there's something, there's some lessons we can learn from his part of the story.

So looking at Acts 9:10-12. And this is in the NIV, which is the New International Version. This is what it says. "In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, 'Ananias!' 'Yes, Lord,' he answered. The Lord told him, 'Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named - Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.'"[00:09:00]

So here we are. God called Ananias by name, and He gave him specific directions to find Saul. And you know what Ananias did? He responded. So remember here, Saul is blind. Saul was blinded, uh, on that, that road to Damascus when he met Jesus. And so, uh, here is, um, Saul. He's, he's in a room praying on Straight Street.

But not only did Ananias respond, he also had some concerns. Let's read on. In Acts chapter 9, verses 13 through 14, he says, "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief [00:10:00] priests to arrest all who call on your name."

Well, clearly Ananias had heard about Saul and what he had done to the believers there. He knew that Saul had authority to arrest Christians. I mean, can you even imagine being Ananias? That God is asking him to go to someone who has been actively persecuting people just like him? I, I think I would have some concerns too.

But here's what I find so very interesting. God didn't need Ananias to come up with a plan. Mm-mm. God already knew what He was doing. He simply invited Ananias to just be a part of it. God doesn't necessarily wait until [00:11:00] we feel completely confident before inviting us to be a part of His work. I mean, usually that's not the case. Usually, we feel very uncomfortable when God invites us to be a part of His work. It's usually something that makes us face our comfort zone and, and have to step out of it.

But reading on in, in verses 15 and 16, "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go. This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings, and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'"

So here, God explained that Saul was His chosen instrument to carry His name to the Gentiles, their kings, and to the people of Israel. Ananias could not have known what Saul's future ministry would look like, [00:12:00] but God certainly did.

Reading on in verses 17 and 18, "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here, has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized."

So Ananias went to Saul, placed his hands on him, and addressed him, which is what I think is amazing, as Brother Saul. Those two words, those are worth noticing. Brother Saul. Think about it. Ananias had been afraid of this man, and rightly so. He [00:13:00] has, he ha- had all authority to kill Christians just like Ananias. He knew what Saul had done to other believers, and maybe he even

knew some of these people. We don't know. Yet when he approached him, he called him brother. When Ananias approached Saul, he called him brother. And God used Ananias as part of Saul's remarkable story, which was recorded in scripture for all of us to see.

Ananias didn't change Saul's heart. Jesus had already met Saul on the road to Damascus. But God invited Ananias to participate in what He was doing.

And we may think, "Well, that's just-- that just doesn't make sense. Why would he involve Ananias?" I don't know. There must have [00:14:00] been a reason. We don't get all those details. Why did he choose Ananias and not someone else? We don't know. But God has His reasons. He has perfect plans for you and for me and for Ananias.

Now, I don't know about you, but I find this story - just so encouraging, that God was already working in Saul's life before Ananias even entered the picture, even came on the scene. He was already working in Saul's life, and then He invited Ananias to be a part of that work.

Ananias didn't know everything that would happen afterward. He had no map, no instructions of what was gonna happen afterward. He didn't know the full impact of his obedience and what that would look like, and even the future ramifications of that. But, but the thing is, he responded to God's direction. He [00:15:00] responded. He was obedient. He did what God asked him to do.

And I can't help but wonder how often God gives us opportunities to participate in what He's doing, and we don't even realize the the, the significance of these opportunities. You know, maybe it's a simple conversation or it seems like a simple conversation that really makes an impact. Or maybe it's an opportunity to encourage someone. Or maybe it's something that really stretches us beyond what's comfortable. Yeah.

We may never know the impact of our obedience. We may never know how God uses these moments that sometimes look so simple, or maybe that these moments that feel so uncomfortable that we, we wanna shy away from doing it because it's so uncomfortable.

And isn't it amazing that He invites us to participate in what He's doing? I [00:16:00] mean, that should real-- that should really just blow us away. Really, if we stop to think about it, that should just make us fall on our knees in humbleness and gratefulness that, wow, God, you, you would use someone like me?

And as I'm thinking about this in my own life i, I can't help but think about the Abundant Life mentoring conversations that I have with women. These conversations come to mind often. Women come to me in all kinds of seasons. Some are trying to figure out what's next in their life. Some are feeling overwhelmed by everything that's, that's happening in their circumstances. Others are just looking for clarity or [00:17:00] encouragement or just someone to talk to as they navigate something different or difficult or just discouraging in their lives.

And something that I have come to appreciate is that God is already at work in their lives before we ever sit down for a conversation. And to me, I already see it happening. Every single time, I already see God at work. I don't have to have all the answers. I don't have to figure everything out for, for each one. I get the opportunity and the privilege to listen. I get to ask questions. I get to encourage each one and help each one consider what her next step might look like or what, what, what might God be doing in her circumstance. And I get to trust God with the rest [00:18:00] because He's doing the work.

And sometimes I walk away from those conversations just amazed that God allows me to be a part of what He's doing in another woman's life. It just humbles me to my core. Every single time. It just humbles me.

And it reminds me that partnering with God doesn't always look like something big or something extraordinary or something from a stage or something grandiose. Sometimes it looks like showing up, being present, and being willing to let God work through us right where He has us.

And, you know, you, you may not mentor women, but I imagine there are people God has placed in your life too. People who you have been given an opportunity to [00:19:00] encourage, support, pray for, or just simply listen to. And we may never know the full impact of these kinds of moments. We may never know. But isn't it incredible that God invites us to be a part of them? Absolutely.

You know, it might even be a conversation at the copier in the office. It might be an encouraging text you send to a friend. It might be the way you listen to your grandchild when he talks to you. Or maybe it's how you care for someone who's ill.

I don't know how God's inviting you, but it's sometimes in these insignificant, almost seemingly insignificant moments that God is using. We just, we just never know the impact of those moments. And this is why I don't wanna miss, I

don't wanna miss any of them. I don't wanna miss one [00:20:00] moment that God has for me to use me in a way that, that He's choosing to use me. I don't wanna miss one, even if it's uncomfortable. Even if it's not feeling easy. Even if it's a hard moment.

And I hope that all of this today is reminding you of something pretty amazing too. The God who created this world, who knows you better than you know yourself, who loves you more than anyone else, invites you to participate in what He's doing. No, He doesn't need you. He doesn't need you to make His plans work, but because He graciously chooses to involve you. That's amazing.

And you don't have to. You don't have to have all the answers. You don't have to know how things are gonna [00:21:00] turn out. You don't even need to be someone you're not. He wants you to be who you are. That's why He's using you. Because you have gifts and talents that no one else has. He knows that He can use you in a way that He can't use anyone else. 'Cause you are special. You are extraordinary in His eyes, and He can't wait to involve you in His work. You can just simply be willing to follow His lead right where you are in your everyday life. And that's a message for me, too. Am I always just simply willing to follow His lead?

So here's some encouragement for you this week and for me. As you go about your everyday life, ask God to help you recognize the opportunities that He's given you to participate in what He's doing. Ask Him to help you recognize them. [00:22:00] Yeah, maybe that is encouraging someone through a text or offering to pray, and then you pray, maybe even with that person right there. Or sharing a word of hope. Or responding to someone in need right in front of you.

And remember, the outcome isn't yours or mine to control. We can trust God with that. That's His job. The outcome is His.

Friend, if today's episode encouraged you, would you just share this with another woman who comes to mind? Maybe she needs this reminder that God can work through her too.

And next week, I can't believe we're already at the end of the month, but we are wrapping up our Living with Expectation series with a special guest conversation with my friend Natalie. And I can't wait for you to hear it because I think it is just so appropriate for living with [00:23:00] expectation.

So thank you for being here. And until next time, keep looking to the Lord. Keep trusting Him. Keep living the abundant life that Jesus came to give you. 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.