

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR *Real Life*

170. When Discomfort Makes You Uncomfortable

What do you do when discomfort makes you uncomfortable? This can be any kind of discomfort like some sort of physical discomfort, or some kind of unpleasant situation you find yourself in, or receiving some sort of unhappy news? Do you typically ignore it, do you run from it, or do you try to avoid any kind of discomfort at all costs? Or do you embrace the feeling of discomfort, knowing it might bring about something good within you? Well, we're going there in this episode. I believe many of us try to do all we can to avoid discomfort, because well, it's uncomfortable. But is this always God's best for us? Maybe, or maybe not. We're spending these next few minutes exploring this and looking deeper into how being uncomfortable may not be such a terrible thing after all. If you're up for stretching your thoughts and perspective today, stick around and we'll find some help and hope as we open ourselves to growth. Let's get into this episode.

Discomfort. I'm venturing to say it's no one's favorite word. In fact, Dictionary.com defines the noun discomfort as, *an absence of comfort or ease; uneasiness, hardship, or mild pain or anything that is disturbing to or interferes with comfort*. Thesaurus.com adds synonyms of *trouble, unpleasantness, and annoyance*. Yeah, no one likes discomfort. At least no one I know, including me.

I, instead, like comfort--comfort food, my comfy blanket, my comfortable home, and my for-the-most-part comfy life. Oh, there's parts of it that aren't so comfortable, but I choose not to focus on those things. Yes, I like comfort. I would say I almost crave comfort.

But I've learned what I crave isn't always what's best for me.

I crave chocolate chip cookies but eating them for every meal won't benefit my health.

I also crave sunshiny and 75-degree days every day, but I'm guessing months and months of it would lead me to boredom and complacency.

Some days I crave lying in my bed longer than necessary. Too much of that isn't best for me either.

Just because I crave something doesn't mean it's what God desires for me. I fully realize comfort isn't always my friend. Even though I like to hang out with her for extended periods of time! But it never fails, when I get comfortable for too long, God seems to--subtly or not!--remind me that comfort isn't the goal in this life, but the courage of follow Him is. God cares more about my character than my comfort. Deep down, I care about that more, too.

It's no wonder that discomfort makes me uncomfortable.

As the definition I just shared states, discomfort can involve uneasiness, hardship, or pain. It can be disturbing, and it interferes with the comfort I crave. But I don't think I'm the only one who craves comfort. I don't believe I'm alone in my dislike for discomfort, because I think this is hard-wired in our humanity. After doing some research, I found out comfort is actually one of our survival mechanisms as

it helps us to feel safe and secure. When we experience comfort, our brains release dopamine, otherwise known as the 'feel-good' hormone. It positively reinforces the habit for us to seek and repeat comfort-providing situations in life. Reduced stress and improved mental health are by-products of hanging out in what some people call their comfort zones.

I'm pretty fond of my comfort zone, too.

It makes sense, doesn't it? I mean when we're comfortable, we feel good. Our stress lowers and our mental health improves. You can almost feel that happening in comfortable moments, can't you? So, of course we love what's comfortable! We thrive in our comfort zones!

But last year, God stretched me beyond my so-called comfort zone.

If you've been around here for a while, you might remember I choose a word for each year. I've done this for years, but actually, I really don't choose it. God tends to point me to a word. I know, that may sound strange, but it's true. Do you remember what my word was for 2023? It was--uncomfortable. Yes, the word uncomfortable.

I'll never forget when I shared it on Instagram, one acquaintance commented, "Why would you choose a word like that?" Yeah, well I didn't. I wanted to explain the long, drawn-out answer, but I avoided the lengthy exchange and responded, "God chose it, not me." Oh, I knew there was no way I would choose such a word. I wanted a comfy word like joy, blessed, or even grow would have been nice. But no. God wanted me to choose uncomfortable. In fact, I kinda got in a fight with God about it. All I could think of was for 365 days I would be uncomfortable, and I wanted to avoid that at all costs. But I knew if I didn't adopt it as my word, I would regret it every day of the twelve months of 2023--or maybe longer--and I couldn't bear the thought of that.

So, uncomfortable, it was.

As you can imagine, I hated it at first. I pouted about it until I realized twelve months of pouting wasn't going to make for a great year either. So one day in early January, during our Monday morning prayer group, I surrendered my will for God's. I gave up my disdain for uncomfortable, ready to learn and embrace whatever He had for me with it.

I then made it my mission to do something uncomfortable every day, and I wrote what I did daily in my planner. If God was going to use this word in my life, I might as well give Him lots of opportunities to do so. For example, some of the entries during the week of August 28 were,
"I feel uncomfortable because I'm not feeling 100% physically today."
"My car battery died today, and I was stranded for three hours."
"I did something really dumb today--I attempted to start our car without the key."

Some entries were little annoyances like this, and some were bigger life events.

But the biggest uncomfortable entries had to do with writing, editing, and publishing two books last year. If I was going to be uncomfortable, I might as well write the books that I had been saying I was going to write for years. The year of uncomfortable was the year to pursue my dreams of finally becoming a published author.

I'm not sure I would have pushed through if I hadn't embraced uncomfortable as my word and also as my way of life.

One life-changing truth I learned was this:

When discomfort makes you uncomfortable, you don't have to run from it.

As I faced discomfort every day of 2023, I came to the realization that being uncomfortable was a big fear of mine. It sounds kind of silly when I say it out loud, but it's true. That feeling of being uncomfortable was almost paralyzing, and God knew that. So it makes sense He wanted me to face that fear head on, not just hide away from it. This proves to me again how God does not leave us in places or spaces that aren't His best for us. He continues to mold us and shape us and transform us into the people He desires us to be.

This reminds me of the story of Jonah in the Bible. God asked Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh to prophecy against their wickedness, but Jonah disobeyed God and fled in the opposite direction of Nineveh toward Joppa. Why? Because Jonah hated the Ninevites. He despised them. It's no wonder going to their city would make him extremely uncomfortable. And preaching a message of repentance--in case they would repent--would be the last thing on Jonah's list to do. You may recall how Jonah ended up in a belly of a giant fish for three days and nights until Jonah prayed to God. God had mercy on Jonah and commanded the fish to spit him out.

Jonah gave in and went to Nineveh. The people repented and of their ways because of Jonah's message, and God spared the people in the city.

Let's read what happened next in Jonah 4:5-8, NIV, "Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

How many times have you and I felt the same when we're uncomfortable?

"It would be better for me to die than to live." Sure, Jonah is being a bit dramatic here, but that's what we can become when discomfort comes a knocking, and we complete focus on the discomfort and not on God's provision through it.

Continuing on through verse 11, "But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?' 'It is,' he said. 'And I'm so angry I wish I were dead.' But the Lord said, 'You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?'"

Jonah, too, craved comfort. And when it was absent he ran away, he ended up suffering more discomfort, he begrudgingly did what God asked him to do, and he became so angry, he wanted to die. Discomfort made Jonah uncomfortable. But what do you think would have happened if he faced his discomfort right away and did what God asked him to do from the beginning? We will never know, but

I'm guessing he wouldn't have ended up on top of a hill angry because the shade God provided withered.

And that's how the story of Jonah ends. He was angry.

May this be a lesson for us. Sure, comfort is good, until it's not. Until it holds us back from what God wants to do in and through us. Comfort is temporary, just like the plant God provided Jonah. Comfort isn't meant to last. It's good for a time, but a good thing to remember is this: when discomfort makes you uncomfortable, you know it's time to embrace it and see what God might be doing through it.

Remember, God is more concerned about our character than our comfort.

He won't let us stay in our comfort zones if that's not His best for us. What uncomfortable thing is God calling you to today? What discomfort are you experiencing in your current circumstances? May we remember, just because it's uncomfortable, it doesn't mean it's not from God. Friend, let's follow God into what's uncomfortable. Let's seek Him and not run from Him. Let's not be like Jonah. If God's calling us to Nineveh, let's trust He knows what He's doing, and He'll be with us as we follow His lead there.

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We are exploring this idea of embracing discomfort in the next few episodes, because I believe it's time to step out of our comfort zones to embrace the abundant life Jesus came to give us. We no longer have to be fearful of discomfort. I invite you back next week to dig a little deeper with me. As I say often, life is one big adventure with God. I can't wait to explore the next part of this adventure with you! I'm cheering you on as you embrace what's uncomfortable today. God bless you!

Links in this episode:

[Jonah 4 NIV](#)

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