

176 No Crib For a Bed - Carols of Encouragement

Julie Lefebure: [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.

The third episode in our series, Carols of Encouragement, prompts us to look at what some of us may have a difficult time embracing in this season, simplicity and surrender. But inside this episode, we will look at how God can use them for our good in any season [00:01:00] of life, including this holiday season.

This series is inspired by timeless lyrics of biblically based Christmas carols. And together we're reflecting on the profound truths hidden in these songs, discovering how they speak to our everyday struggles, and we're embracing the hope, peace, and joy that Christ brings. Whether you're feeling weary, you're searching for stillness or simply longing to connect with God in this holiday season, these episodes will encourage your heart and point you back to Him. So let's dive into this week's carol to find help and hope for our real lives today.

What would it look like to let go of expectations and embrace God's plans, even when it feels too simple and uncomfortable? [00:02:00] Well, today's Christmas carol reminds us how God's plans are perfect and often times unexpected. This carol for today has quite the history. And its lyrics take us to the heart of the Christmas story of the birth of Jesus. It's Away In a Manger.

It was first published in the late 19th century and was a popular song throughout the English speaking world. But early hymnals cite Martin Luther, a German Protestant reformer, as its author. But today that claim is considered false for various reasons, and it's now thought to be of an American origin.

So there we go. Some say it has two musical settings with many variants. But I'm sticking with the version that I've known and loved since I was a little girl old enough to sing this carol about baby Jesus who had no crib for a bed. It goes

like [00:03:00] this, "Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head."

It may sound familiar to you, right? But right out of the gate, the words in the first verse cause me to reevaluate everything I know and expect. Because how can the Savior of the world be born in a stable, a manger or a barn, whatever you want to call it, with no crib for a bed? How can that even be? The Savior of the world is the greatest of royalty. And typically when I think of royal babies, they usually have elaborate cribs with servants with wonderful surroundings, tucked inside breathtaking castles or wonderful large homes. But not Jesus. God had different plans for His birth. In Luke 2, verses 6 and 7, in the New International Version, it states this, [00:04:00] "While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available to them." Yes, Jesus is royalty. The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. But His birth was the most humble of births. It was without fanfare and festivals. It was peaceful and simple. And we've talked a little bit about that last week.

His birth points us to the truth that Emmanuel, God with us, came to earth for us. Not as an extravagant or elaborate ruler, but as one of us. Humble, meek, approachable, relatable. And this goes with Philippians chapter two, verses six and seven. And it's interesting that those are almost the same exact chapters and verses, just different books of the Bible. But [00:05:00] this helps us connect this. It says in the New International Reader's Version, "In his very nature, he was God. Jesus was equal with God, but Jesus didn't take advantage of that fact. Instead, he made himself nothing. He did this by taking on the nature of a servant. He was made just like human beings."

I don't know about you, but I can't relate to a king living in a palace. And I doubt I'll ever be able to approach one. But Jesus, the King, who was born in a feeding trough? Well, I can relate more to Him. More of my life seems as if it has taken place in or near a feeding trough than a palace. This humble birth shows me how God will often work through the simple, unassuming circumstances to accomplish His plans. He even works through a simple manger. He works even through no [00:06:00] crib for a bed.

But why a feeding trough? I can't help but think that there's a symbolic picture here somewhere. And so I got to really thinking about this and I thought that, you know, to be nourished, animals eat from a feeding trough, right? That's where they find their food. And here we peer into the manger and see Jesus with no crib for a bed, symbolizing for us as He lay in the trough, that He's the

source of our spiritual food. He's the bread of life. We read in John chapter six, verse 35 in the New International Version, which says, "Then Jesus declared, I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Jesus is our source for spiritual nourishment and strength, right? Without Him, we become spiritually hungry and thirsty. We get [00:07:00] weak and weary without Him. In Him, however, we find life. Not only for the right here and now, but for all of eternity.

He invites us through His humble birth to let go of all that the world offers and all the things that we think we need. To instead rest in Him and His purpose for each one of us. There's nothing better, my friend. Surrendering all we have and all we are and all we expect leads us to discovering God's greater plan.

But we've complicated things, haven't we? I mean, look at Jesus humble birth. And nothing could be simpler. Sure, their circumstances were less than ideal. But Mary and Joseph didn't focus on any of the external things that really didn't matter. They focused on what was most important, Jesus. Is that what we do? [00:08:00] Not only in our everyday lives, but during the holiday season? Do we focus on , what's most important?

As I was thinking about this, one Christmas came to mind when money was extremely tight for our family. We've had a few of those, but this one year stood out to me. There were a few less presents under the tree that year, and we didn't participate in many of the typical holiday things that we normally did because of financial strain. It was difficult for me to surrender myself to the fact that it would be a leaner holiday season for us. Because I wanted it to be so much more. Many days during December, I felt discouraged and disheartened. I guess you could say that I felt that I had, quote, "no crib for a bed" back in that day. It didn't feel like Christmas at all. Until my Advent devotional reminded me that I was focused on the wrong things.[00:09:00]

Yeah, Christmas was going to be wonderful no matter how many presents were or weren't under the tree. Christmas was going to be special because of Who we were celebrating and not how we celebrated. Something happened that year to change my heart. Christmas became less about the stuff and more about what's really important. And that year we celebrated a very simple Christmas. And it, interestingly, might have been one of the most meaningful and memorable ones to date. But surrendering to simplicity isn't the way of the world. But it is the way of Jesus.

It might be a good day to surrender what's simple again today. What areas in your life do you feel you lack "a crib"? The comforts or expectations that you

think you need? Could God be using these areas to surrender to a more simple and impactful way of living? Could [00:10:00] He? Sometimes God meets us in the most vulnerable and simple moments for our good and growth and for His glory. And surrendering to God and His ways isn't giving up or giving in. But instead it's opening ourselves to something greater and something more God ordained.

I invite you to take some time to reflect on this today, because I am doing the very same thing. I invite you to read Luke chapter 2, and those two verses, 6 and 7 especially, and ponder the simplicity of Jesus's birth. Journal your thoughts and whatever God speaks to you. Listen to that Christmas carol Away in a Manger and find encouragement in the truth of "no crib for a bed". Then ask yourself a couple of questions. What areas in your life is God prompting you to surrender to His care and to trust Him to provide? How is He calling you to keep this [00:11:00] season simple?

Speaking of keeping this season simple? I want to share this. If you live close to me I invite you to our next women's event of encouragement and it's starting the new year off on the right foot. Start the new year with purpose and a heart ready to follow God's calling. Join us for Coffee and Calling, a special gathering where women come together over a warm cup of coffee to reflect, connect, and prayerfully choose a guiding word for 2025. And if you don't know anything about choosing a word, well, we're going to walk through that and we're going to encourage each other in it.

It's held on Saturday morning, January 4th from 830 to 10 and it's in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Details and tickets can be found in the link in the show notes. There's only 30 tickets available and I would love to have you join me.

And have you checked out the Encouragement for Real Life podcast on YouTube yet? Yep, we are now [00:12:00] streaming in video on YouTube, and it is so fun over there too. So find us over there at the link in the show notes. And be sure to check out my free resource library for tips and ideas to simplify your holiday season.

But before we close, will you pray with me?

Oh, God, thank You for the gift of Your son, Jesus. Thank You, Lord, that You brought Him to earth in such a simple way that we can relate, that we can maybe understand a little more of Your goodness and graciousness toward us. Father, You didn't bring Him in a fantastic and wonderful and flamboyant kind of way to the earth. You brought Him as a baby in a manger. And Father, that

gives us such hope that You are in the details of our lives. Father, we ask that You would help us to be content this season, to live with simplicity, to live under the surrender [00:13:00] of You and Your good plans and purposes for our lives, because we know Father God, that is the best place to be.

So Father, help us in this season to turn our hearts towards You and the birth of Your Son. May He be the most important for us in this season. It's in Your name we pray these things. Amen.

So let's close out this episode in reading the fifth and sixth verses of Away in a Manger which read like a beautiful prayer, have you noticed that? They go like this... "Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay close by me forever and love me I pray. Bless all the dear children in your tender care and fit us for heaven to live with you there." That's beautiful, isn't it? I pray when you hear that song this season that now it'll mean just a little bit more to you. Amen. And amen. Merry Christmas, my friend. I'm grateful for you. [00:14:00] 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.