



8: Curiosity

Hi, I'm Elisa Preston. Welcome to episode 8 of Praise Through It.



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This podcast is based on Philippians 4:8 - Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent and praiseworthy -- think about these things. My goal will always be to help you see an old burden in a new way, to see the praiseworthy side of your daily struggles. To see life in a way that brings hope, and in a way that shows the glimmer of light that inevitably shines, even in the daily grind. If that's something you're working on or you'd like to be a part of, listen in.



You know what's a great idea as a person who values routine, quiet, sunshine, and space?

In the span of five days at the beginning of winter, go from a house of three to a house of five when you move from sunny North Carolina to snowy New York after you leave your warmly-lit office job (which you loved) where you could basically control the noise level for forty hours a week. At the exact same time, start homeschooling your Kindergarten daughter and launch a podcast to go full-fledge into a new, creative career. And make sure you say hi to those contractors who begin at 7 a.m. every morning for your first ten weeks in your new home to finish the basement under your new bedroom.

Does't that just scream "good idea" to you?

Well, to skip far ahead in that story, it was a great idea. That's my family's story from November 2020. It didn't always feel like it in the thick of the transition, but feelings aren't reliable so feeling unstable didn't mean we were unstable. Our life in North Carolina had become unsustainable for a few reasons, the least of which included a lack of solid employment due to the pandemic. We're finally thawing out now that we're four months into the new year, we've seen our families more in the last 6 months than we probably did in the 6 previous years combined, and I don't have the threat of cockroaches weaseling into my house during the sweltering humid months of

May, June, July, August, September and sometimes October. These are all good things, all good things.

Transition can make you and your brain and your body feel kind of wonky. Our brains and our bodies are actually build for learning and adapting, but in this 2021 world of pressure to know everything and be good at something right away and always have something inspirational to say, we've basically trained our bodies and our brains to instinctively resist change. Even when it's a great change and we're really ready for it, our brains and bodies still get confused and act a little defiant. We're literally building new roads--called neural pathways--in our brains for this new condition we find ourselves in, and each of our bodies respond differently. You might feel extra tired even if you're getting decent sleep; you might feel extra jittery even if you don't consume caffeine; maybe you kept your eating habits the same through the transition but something just isn't sitting right--your belly feels muddled every day. You might feel sluggish or the opposite, you might just go right into overdrive and feel the need to produce, produce, produce and complete, complete, complete more than usual. All of that is part of the brain's response to surviving in a new condition.

The human experience is full of transition, all the time. New jobs, new houses, new additions to the family. New phases of marriage, new phases of parenting that we move in and out of. Phases of relationships and friendships that we move in and out of. The four weather seasons if you live somewhere where those change like I do, moving in and out of the holiday seasons. It's rare for life to stay as it is for very long.

Ad for me as I reflect on the best way to get through any life transition, and as I think about my family's story and how we've moved through our transition well, I submit to you this idea: remain curious. Find the thing behind the thing. Remain curious.

In his book called Brain Rules, author and developmental molecular biologist--I had to practice that one--John Medina talks about curiosity being the number one rule for keeping your brain healthy and growing. Now, this book is one of our favorites, mine and my husband's, and it takes these twelve brain rules, these complicated neuroscientific ideas, and boils them down so that we can understand them.

Medina talks about this curiosity and how important it is to keeping our brain healthy. The human brain grows and refines in really big ways through our 20s. It does small fine-tuning through our 40s. From then on it's a continual maintenance and renewal process. Neurons continue to be produced past the big refining, and those neurons have been shown to be just as pliable as the neurons of a newborn. So no matter what age you are when you listen to this podcast, please know: curiosity will always keep your brain healthy. We continue to learn and grow and change. So as we move through any kind of transition, I believe: if we can remain curious, maybe we can stave off the gray hairs a little bit that tend to come with age? I don't know. It's worth a shot.

Once we know the transition is happening and it gets hard, we consider remaining curious. We ask ourselves: what's the thing behind the thing? I know that what I see is bothering me, but what is really bothering me? What don't I know here? What am I not seeing that I need to start

seeing? Where can my curiosity be of use here? We can get specific to the situation, but those general questions are a good start.

When we remain curious and we ask these questions, and then we put generous people around us like my family had when we transitioned in 2020, we can answer those questions with honesty and with compassion for ourselves and for those around us.

Because what curiosity does is take away the sweeping dismissal that tends to come with assuming that everything we understand and everything we see in front of us is all there is to know. Curiosity keeps us on our toes. It can even help us dig our heels in on our convictions, but with more depth and meaning behind them. Or the convictions it changes, our hearts are expanded--Grinch-like expansion--in a way that can only come from being openly curious about the things we don't know and letting our discernment lead the way in the learning.

When I think of transitions, I mainly think of military families because that's been my biggest transitional experience. Our service member going away and coming home and going away and coming home. Brings a host of transitions. Relationally, parenting, everything. Scheduling. Everything. (giggle). I also think of general relationships, marriage, parenting, and work.

I thought of a couple questions under a couple categories that might be questions you consider asking yourself.

Some questions for a parenting transition might include:

What has worked in the past that isn't working now?

What has not worked in the past that might work now?

What is my kid communicating through his words? Through her actions?

Who is my kid showing me he or she wants to be?

I know when I finally catch up to a parenting transition, I ask myself those questions and others that might be specific to our situation. I remain confident as her mom but curious about what she needs. I don't presume to know just because I'm her mom, but I trust myself to learn and to lead because I am her mom.

For a marriage transition, you might see extra bickering or withdrawal, depending on the personalities or relationship dynamics. Some of the parenting questions might apply. Also, maybe we add some specifics:

Do we need something new in our schedule?

Do our roles need to shift a little?

Is my attitude helping or hurting?

Being curious about our own contribution to any life transition and how well or not well it's going is clutch. It keeps us humble and it keeps us honest.

If we're transitioning at work, some questions might be:

Where is the transition happening, in my role or in my environment?
If the transition is in my role, what old can I put away so the new can come forward?
What old should I bring along with me?
If the transition is in my environment, what is the change? Where will I be most helpful? Most unhelpful?

So many of these questions are topics we tend to take for granted when we're going about our daily business. But when we can slow down and become curious about them, we can really reflect and see if anything needs to change or if things have already and we just haven't changed with them. And then there is our opportunity. (giggle)

Now, April is the month of the military child and May is the month of the military family. So I'm going to speak to my military families for a second. Transition is the name of our game, and I have observed and experienced that we tend to skip this curiosity step in favor of either giving up active engagement all together--which is totally understandable because #militarylife. Or we might skip the curiosity and go right for the jump-ahead because we think we know what to expect and we're going to lean on that prior knowledge while we work on our seventh PCS or our spouse's next commander assignment or spouse's Tuesday morning at the unit.

But I would challenge you, military families, to remain curious as you live in your military life. Ask yourself and ask your family questions that might encourage active engagement in the event.

Questions like:

Am I happy or bummed about this change? Am I feeling both?

What do I want and need right now?

Where are the pockets of good here?

Where are the pain points here?

That kind of active engagement mingled with reflection and presence can really turn a discombobulated military transition--whether that's a spouse coming home from a school, a spouse coming home from deployment, entering military life, exiting active military life--into one with fewer tears, more laughs, and less headaches. And maybe fewer gray hairs. Maybe. I can't promise that because, again, #militarylife, but I can tell you that it's worth a try. From one Army wife to another, it is worth a try. From one military wife to another, it is worth a try. Transition is kind of the name of our game. Sometimes we're really good at it, sometimes we're horrible at it. Sometimes both our stuff and our hearts get broken during a PCS. Sometimes it seems like people expect us to be good at change because we've done it so much. But the truth is, it's just not always that way. We have to remind ourselves and be kind to ourselves when we remember that open curiosity is good, that it's healthy, and that it's helpful.

So far I've used the example of transition to speak about curiosity, but honestly, the power of curiosity shows up everywhere, all the time.

If we remain curious, even with ourselves, we skip the jump-ahead of *just knowing*, or arrogantly assuming, and we learn first. In our faith, in our relationship with ourself, our spouses, our friends, our co-workers. We remain students first, hot-take sharers second. And that can do nothing but help our faith, our relationships, and ourselves.

Medina gives the example of humans surviving the Serengeti in Africa. This is what he says: “When we came down from the trees to the savannah, we did not say to ourselves, ‘Good Lord, please give me a book and a lecture and a board of directors so that I can spend 10 years learning how to survive in this place.’” That’s not what happened. He goes on to say that “our survival did not depend upon exposure to organized, preplanned packets of information.” Are you picturing your own notebook right now? Because I know I did when I read that sentence. “Our survival depended upon chaotic, reactive information-gathering experiences.”

Or, learning. Being openly curious. We don’t have to change our convictions, but it changes our hearts. We put in more compassion. We express more compassion when we are curious, curious, curious. We walk through the doors of *I Wonder* instead of staying in the mire of what we already quote-unquote “know”.

There’s an organization called Pocket Fuel. It’s a husband and wife team that I recently discovered. They write cliché-free daily devotions. I will make sure to link them in the show notes because they have some really neat stuff. Their take on curiosity really stuck with me and it really struck me when I read it: faith is not opposed to questions, but it is opposed to the shallow certainty that what we understand is all there is.

In this space, we consider what is true, right, noble, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy about our daily grind. As we consider how much there is to learn on a daily basis, we consider keeping our minds on this scripture as it relates to curiosity.

What’s true about curiosity is that at the very least we learn something new and at the very most we let it change us for the better.

What’s right and noble about curiosity is that as we remain curious about ourselves, our neighbors, and the world around us, we have ample opportunity to show one another and ourselves kindness, grace, mercy, gentleness, and compassion.

What’s pure about curiosity is that it is the way we are wired. God wired us to learn and to adapt, and to do both one must remain fiercely loyal to curiosity.

What’s lovely about curiosity? Ask a child about the beauty she finds when she explores.

What’s admirable about curiosity? The stance of having a humble, teachable heart.

What’s excellent and praiseworthy about curiosity? Not only is it a beautiful example of God’s craftsmanship, but the more we learn about God’s beautiful, masterful, colorful creation, the more we find praise and gratitude on our lips and in our hearts.



Thank you so much for listening to episode 8 of Praise Through It. I truly value that you choose to spend some of your time with me. Life can be messy and hard, and we can see that side with no shame. And we can work to see the glimmers of light that shine through our everyday.

If you’re looking for a way to connect beyond your earbuds, you can find me on Instagram as [elisapreston](#); that’s usually where I’m hanging out in the socials world. Every Monday I offer a blessing to my readers; you can sign up for that at elisapreston.com/sign-up. I love connecting in one-to-one chats, too, so if you’re ever up for that or you want to share something that

impacted you, feel free to send a DM on Instagram or send a message to hello@elisapreston.com.



So, maybe curiosity killed a cat at some point in time. But it doesn't always have to. Today, I leave you with a prayer and a blessing for your curiosity.

May we let God take care of the unknown while we remain curious about what he's doing, what he's teaching us, and what he's teaching our neighbors.

May we let curiosity and wonder lead our faith in a sovereign God who cares for the concerns we cannot carry all the way to the littlest details of our existence.

And may we be believers who know that what we see and understand is not all there is, and may we let a never-ending curiosity lead us forward in faith.