



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

Rest and Refresh with Ashley Hales

Season 2, Episode 2 Transcript

[00:00:00] Intro: Welcome to the Gospel for Life podcast, we help churches make disciples and now here's your host, Darryl Dash.

[00:00:15] Darryl Dash: Welcome back to the Gospel for Life podcast. Today I want to talk about the limits of building rest into our lives, of simplifying and prioritizing what matters most.

We are told that freedom and opportunity is our ticket to the good life. Get out there and follow your dreams, be the hero of your own story, find your happiness, live your best life. It seems that limitless possibilities await anyone with vision and willingness to hustle the way through life. But the thing is, instead of resulting in a sense of accomplishment, we get tired. This limitless way of living merely has us doing more and trying harder, leaving us feeling depleted and dissatisfied with life and faith.

Ashley Hales has written a book about a better way in her new book *A Spacious Life*. Contrary to what we've believed, the spacious life is not found in unfettered options or accomplished by our hustle and hurry. The life we crave is found within the confines of God's loving limits. Ashley helps us recognize that when we live within these boundaries, we discover a life filled with purpose, joy and rest. I'm so excited about her book, I've been reading it and have been really appreciating it. I need this book, it's an invitation to a different way of living.

So if you don't know Ashley Hales, she is a skilled writer, she's a speaker and host of the Finding Holy podcast and she's somebody I've grown to appreciate. She and her husband are doing a good work and I'm so glad she's on the podcast today, so Ashley welcome.

[00:01:55] Ashley Hales: Thank you, it's so fun to be with you Darryl.

[00:01:58] Darryl Dash: Ashley, why are we all so exhausted?

[00:02:00] Ashley Hales: Well, there are 101 reasons. You know I think a lot of our exhaustion isn't simply about how full our calendars are, but this sort of sense that what we do is who we are. We have to constantly keep recreating our lives and curating our lives and we have to keep hustling to show we're worthy of love and belonging, and that is not the gospel way. That is maybe the American way or definitely the Western way. And we really lose out on the gifts that God has for us and for our communities when we choose instead to try to earn for ourselves the things that we've already been given by God.

[00:02:47] Darryl Dash: It sounds really like all the Disney things, right? Like you can do anything and don't let anybody hold you back.

[00:02:55] Ashley Hales: Right, just look inside yourself and find out who you are and only you can tell yourself who you are, and then you can tell everyone who you are.

[00:03:05] Darryl Dash: It's not a biblical message, so why does that seem to be so enticing, and yet it doesn't deliver?

[00:03:14] Ashley Hales: Yeah, that's so true. I think for Christians who are listening, there's a sense that we know that's not the right way and we know that the gospel of Jesus is different. And yet we can't seem to kind of get out of this same story of "follow your dreams, follow your heart, work hard and all will be well." And I think what's fascinating to me is when we think about this idea of limits, limits are really good. They're actually God-given limits or good in creation before sin entered the world, but one word that we tend to use for sin is transgression. And if you look at the word etymologically, the word transgress means to go beyond, it means to literally like go past a limit. And so when Adam and Eve in the garden chose to go, they went past the good guard rails of God's limits. Like you are not to eat of this tree, and instead they wanted to kind of create for themselves this godlike power that they didn't have access to. So when sin entered the world, I think since then we have continued to try to transgress or go past our natural human creaturely limits because ultimately we want to create our own reality. We want to be responsible for our success, we want the glory for ourselves. We don't feel like we can rest because we feel like we have to keep providing for ourselves and as we know, that's totally exhausting.

[00:04:48] Darryl Dash: So you have a Ph.D., you've just written a book, there must be a certain amount of drivenness within you, and I'm reading this as I

speaking to you, man that's me, right? I'm believing everything you're saying and yet I hustle like it all depends on me, even though I know it doesn't. So what's with that, how come we're so disconnected from what we know is true?

[00:05:08] Ashley Hales: Yeah, it just must be like the human way after the Fall, it's got to be because it's so innate with and we're also fed the heavy diet not only Disney movies, but you know, this kind of in my American context, right? Like even all of our early American literary heroes are always the ones who are going to the edge of the frontier. So much of our stories or good movies right about the Lone Ranger and the hero are really promoting an anti-gospel that says you have to keep hustling and performing. And you can't stay in the community because your community probably wants to hold you down and hold you back and you have to go out and create your own identity. There's a sense I think in the drivenness, it's not bad to work hard or to be driven or have ambition but ultimately, if our drive or ambition is something that we find ourselves serving. Or if you're sick, if you have an autoimmune disease, if you feel the limits of your body or your time and you don't pay attention to those, we can begin to see oh, I think my ambition is misplaced or misdirected.

[00:06:23] Darryl Dash: Yeah, so it's not necessarily getting rid of ambition, but as the book title or the book talks about, it's really redeeming that. And what's underneath that and how to bring it under the Lordship of Christ and turn it into worship.

[00:06:39] Ashley Hales: And even though there may be seasons where you are working really hard or you have to hold down multiple jobs to help support your family. But it's not to say then that that might be our reality all of the time. And to respect that seasonality even of our lives, I think is an important thing too, instead of I have to be going at full force all the time.

[00:07:03] Darryl Dash: So where I am, if the traffic light turns green and you hesitate for even a half a second, you hear the car horns started to go. And I have a feeling if you talk to people and said, why are you in such a hurry, they really wouldn't know. And what I love about your book is you talk about hurry and hustle isn't just about our schedules, it's really about our souls, it's about the state of our soul. I wish it were just changing our calendar because then it would be those three acts. How can we actually deal with the soul of the issue? Which is maybe embracing our limits and the fact that we are created beings who have limits.

[00:07:46] Ashley Hales: I think our limits, if we let them, they can be like that dashboard warning light, right? That when we hit a limit and we find ourselves resenting, blaming, falling into shame or ignoring their limits, then falling apart.

There are so many different unhealthy ways that kind of come up against our normal human limits. And if we begin to see then, okay maybe my limit is like the light on my car that tells me that there's something going on underneath, and I need to actually begin to pay attention to it. Instead of seeing it immediately like something to fight, to move past or shut down. I think that might be one practical way that we can begin to lean into them and then secondarily to bring our limits to God. I think our limits ultimately are invitations to knowing God, and we see that in the life of Jesus, right?

He of course was God and flesh, but he was also human and you see him napping throughout the gospels, you see him going out in the quiet in the dark to pray to his father. You see him choosing to heal, but he's not healing every single person in Palestine. There are limits to his attention and to his work. He wasn't like taking off an airplane because they weren't those, all around the world to create this big platform for ministry. He was a local teacher and preacher and healer, and I think that's just a really great reminder too, is that our limit ultimately our invitations to be in embodied community to pay attention to what the spirit of God is doing. To practice the presence of God and then to just like follow what he is doing.

And so you see Christ for instance, in one of the wilderness temptations, instead of choosing to like turn the stone into bread, as Satan is tempting him to do, he chooses to wait. He's waiting on God the Father, instead of taking life into his own hands. And so you see him obviously the limit of his hunger, limit of his body, but instead of like I'm going to solve this and work past it. Instead, he submits himself to the will of the Father, choosing to wait instead on his leaning and direction. And I think that's just a beautiful reminder for those of us who want to hustle and hurry and make our plans happen to begin to say, okay here's my limit, can I bring it to God? Can I press in because he knows this limit right now? And is he good enough that I can wait for him to show me what's next?

[00:10:21] Darryl Dash: I think part of our limits is dealing with our smallness. I was listening to Karen's Swallow Prior on a podcast the other day and she was saying we have this real temptation to build our platform these days. Almost like we really don't matter unless we're getting noticed and retweeted and are getting our follower count up there. And she said it's really a betrayal of, if you think of a Russian peasant who lived centuries ago that was known to nobody but his or her family, and died and is completely forgotten. No historical record today. Their life really mattered, and yet today we measure everything by how big we are. So talk about smallness is that related to limits? How do we be okay with being small and not necessarily doing big things but ordinary things?

[00:11:08] Ashley Hales: You know I love so many things that Jesus uses in the gospels to talk about the Kingdom of God. They're really small things right like yeast and even a pearl and a net and in different ways that he's talking about was the kingdom of God like. And they're small things designed to do something, right? Yeast isn't like flashy or amazing, it doesn't really draw attention to itself, but it does help bread to rise, right, dough to rise. And so I think it's only right in the Kingdom of God that we know that our smallness is a gift, like we get to be creatures and get to be children. And the secondary that not only is it a gift us, but it's also a gift to other people. And so when we're not like having to rush around or try to like puff ourselves up and pretend that we're big, we can not only rest in who God say we are. We are children, we're loved or cared for, he knows the hairs on our heads. But also then invites us into a sense of purpose that isn't grandiose, that were actually able to pay attention to people and ask good questions and meet them where they're at. Instead of needing even our service to be kind of self-referential.

But yeah, everything as you're saying, asks us you only matter if you're big, if you're important. And what's so great about the gospel is this ragtag group of 12 uneducated, mostly fishermen become the first witnesses to something that has spanned millennia now. Because ultimately, when we are weak and it's through our weakness that God will show himself strong. But it only happens if we have a sense of being cared for and seen by God, where we experience that sense of spaciousness in our relationship with him and in community. Because I think otherwise we can even use the idea of smallness as a way to flatten people or ourselves to kind of act like the doormat. But there is an appropriate smallness and creatureliness that we definitely need to recover.

[00:13:25] Darryl Dash: I have a feeling one day when... I forget who said it, the question where is the greatest preacher in the world? And the answer was, well, nobody knows who this person is. They're probably preaching to 40 people in some church that nobody's heard of and yet God knows them. We somehow think it's the people who have the platform and are celebrities that are significant. But yeah, I mean, I'm so thankful for the so-called small people. I mean nobody big has really influenced my life. The people who influenced my life in the deepest, most significant ways are all people who are not well known, and I'm so thankful for that. Ashley, what's the impact of the technological world on our limits and living a spacious life? How do we do that in a world of 24/7 nonstop endless scrolling? How do we deal with technology and how does that seem to fight against us living a spacious life?

[00:14:24] Ashley Hales: Yeah. You know, I think the lie of technology is that we can always be on and it also just gives us a sense of like we can be everywhere at once, right? Like you can be in and out of conversations with all these

important people, on Twitter, it can be posting pictures on Instagram and interacting with people. Social media particularly can give us this false sense that we are not limited in our time or our bodies or our places and so we can be having conversations with people all around the world. Which part of that is amazing, to be able to interact with a famous pastor or read an article and then you get to actually interact with their ideas with that person. I mean none of that was really possible all that long ago and yet when we are kind of formed by that especially as that maybe takes up perhaps too much of our time, we begin to also flatten people out. You know, you think of everybody shouting on Facebook about all of the various ways in which we have become extremely polarized in the last year and a half. And that's not creating real community, it's not probably giving Christians a good name. And there's so much I think is out there that when we engage in social media, particularly in technology more generally, we can tend to kind of elevate ourselves to this godlike position. I know all the answers and here I'm going to perform all the answers for you and I don't actually feel the constraints of my body in my place.

For instance, maybe there's some political issue you're disagreeing with, like with people in your neighborhood or your local church. If you're sitting around the table, you're not going to just stand up and shout at them and lambaste them. You're going to actually have a conversation, you're sharing a meal together, you're going to ask questions. And social media, kind of just takes it to flatten pictures where we're screaming at one another. So I would encourage us as we think about how we are present online, to try to remember on the other end of the screen, those are people with families, jobs and bodies and communities with real limits on their time. And so to begin even to say, might I ask questions of people instead of just. You know someone told me the other day online that because of a decision I had made that I was therefore scared and didn't trust Jesus. And I was like, actually please don't ascribe to me motives that I haven't actually said, I would like to have a conversation though. So that's just one maybe practical way that we can think through our interactions online. But even just to realize when you open up your phone, what kind of limit you might be pushing off, right? You don't want to wait in the grocery store line or you're feeling angry or anxious, and so you turn to social media. Remember that these limits that are informing even our presence online should first be taken to God and he can sit with us. And then we don't always have to show up online asking the technological aspects to actually shape us or soothe us or make us feel okay.

[00:17:43] Darryl Dash: I remember leaving my phone home one day and I couldn't believe how many times I reached in my pocket. It was kind of scary. So yeah, almost like soothing is a good term for it, it just feels unsettling to not

have that technology with us. And that's a kind of a weird thing when you think about

[00:18:00] Ashley Hales: It is.

[00:18:02] Darryl Dash: I want to switch and ask, that's a very modern question. I want to go back to a very ancient practice and ask you how does rest and Sabbath in particular help us to live a spacious life.

[00:18:14] Ashley Hales: You know to kind of tie this into the technology question. I love how Andy Crouch in his book, *Tech-Wise Family*, he has kind of a mantra to leave your phone off and out of sight for an hour a day, a day a week, and a week a year. And you know, part of that is really kind of instituting rest and sabbath into our use of technology as well. And I think what's so beautiful about the story of the Bible is that rest is actually what orients our work. And so you know the Jewish Sabbath particularly in the day, starts in the dark. It starts when we are helpless, when we can't do anything, when we can't make our bodies do all of the amazing things that they do that sleep provides. And like it's from there that our work proceeds, that our work comes out of rest and it is not something like a device. Our bodies aren't devices where we work really hard and then fall and collapse because we're tired.

I think unfortunately in most North American contexts, we are working to earn our rest and we think of ourselves in technological terms, we're like our iPhone that we plug in at the end of the night and so we only rest because we can't work any longer. And so if we are able to flip the script and say actually rest is a gift from a good God and Sabbath shows me that I am really incapable of providing all that I need. Not only my body but my soul, and my mind and my community. It kind of reorients us from thinking of ourselves as technological or mechanistic things and actually as creatures, as beloved children of God. But it has to kind of get into our bones like into our processes and our habits and our weekly rhythms.

I haven't figured out how how to do that well at night very well, I usually just kind of like collapsed but I am trying, I'm going to make sure to not check email past like six p.m. And take a bath or read a book, to respect the limits of how much information we can take in and Sabbath too begins, it's a little bit tricky because my husband's a pastor, so Sunday is a workday really. But you know for us we even just try to take a nap on Sunday afternoon or make sure we have dessert on Sunday, so it feels like something special. A.J. Swoboda has written a book called *Subversive Sabbath* which talks about that Hebrew children will be woken up on the Sabbath with honey, that they would always know that the Lord stays sweet. So our thing and our family is we make sure we have dessert at least on

a Sunday. And so some of those kind of rhythms are ways that we remember in our bodies that we're cared for and we're seen and we don't have to prove ourselves. And it also does help us actually work well, but that's not the point, the point is to first receive and then secondarily to see our work in response to what we've been given.

[00:21:23] Darryl Dash: It's such an amazing gift, and I always find it funny how we struggle to receive that gift. It's so weird because it's just incredible. How loving is God that he's like right from the start, I'm going to begin from like day one for the first created beings is okay, it's rest day. It's so gracious of him to do that.

[00:21:43] Ashley Hales: Yeah, I know you'd be like okay, let's get at it.

[00:21:46] Darryl Dash: So Ashley, I know there's a big question, in the book you talk about how our no's, saying no, makes room for the right yeses, so how do we begin to even know what to say no to so that we can begin to create margin in our lives to say yes to other things?

[00:22:05] Ashley Hales: You know it's so tricky, and I think it's just wise to remember like we're going to mess this up or not going to do it right. We'll probably say no to things we should've said yes to and yes to the things we should have said no to. But I think often when we hear about this idea of limits and we're like, oh that sounds amazing. Like to actually respect the limits of my time and attention and my body, we can tend to think that the limits then are just whatever makes me happy, right? So I don't want to set up church on Sunday, so I'm going to say no to that, you know? But I think God's given limits really are the invitation to know him and to become more like Jesus. And we can see in the life of Christ, it wasn't like he lived this life that was always up into the right, right? His limits led him to death. And I want to just encourage listeners, as you're thinking about what do I say no to, what do I say yes to, it's not just about you. The freedom that Christ has set us free from is freedom from sin, and it's also freedom for others. And so what that might look like is that love often looks like the edition of constraints. We see Jesus who has limited himself for the sake of love, which means he's constrained.

So sometimes our limits, as we love other people are not going to feel like this expansive spaciousness. But I think we find that sense of spaciousness and that sense of rest when we bring even those hard limits and we participate in them with God because ultimately he is our spacious place. You know Paul talks about I've learned the secret of being content and want and in plenty. And so the sense of spaciousness isn't dictated by our circumstances, and yet we find it as we kind of maybe protect Sabbath. That may be one way in which we

choose to say no, right? My kids, we don't play soccer on Sundays and that doesn't always feel good, but to choose to protect the Sabbath as a day of rest is one way that you can then spend time as a family, you are choosing to delight yourself and the things that God has created in his creation. You're choosing to hide yourself in him and participating in worship.

And all of these things I think kind of retune those muscles to know and follow the Spirit about what I should say no to and what I should say yes to. But I don't really have a hard and fast rule like how do we say the right no's, but I trust that as I'm following and prioritizing the sort of rhythms. Whether it set daily prayer throughout the day. practicing Sabbath. And then also saying what are the things that God has made me in and how has he called me and what is my vocation and how can I follow him in that?

There are also kind of good starting questions, but you know, I think it's a lifelong journey to figure out what are the right no's, what are the right yeses and then probably repent when we've said too many yeses and the wrong no's.

[00:25:17] Darryl Dash: Yeah, I'm fascinated that you wrote this book. I think authors usually write books because they're passionate about a topic, but also because maybe this at least I find with me it's because I really am trying to wrestle through something myself. So could you give us a bit of a sneak peek at your life and what led you to write this book?

[00:25:41] Ashley Hales: Yeah, you know, I think I was just so frustrated initially with kind of all of these even they're labeled kind of Christian self-help books that are selling like hotcakes and are not gospel-focused. They're about working really hard. What really matters is your own self-identity that you self create and you need to uncage yourself and express yourself. And the way that you do that is by working really hard through hustle and hurry, and that is shackling all of us. And while much in our world would say yes, that's how you make a name for yourself and this is what it looks like with ambition, that's not the way of Jesus. And yet I think I realized especially as the pandemic we're on and I was working on this book, like we didn't need more arguments, we really needed an invitation. Our imaginations are kind of stoked for what does a life with Christ look like, you know, meditating on the verses about Jesus' yoke being easy and his burden light. Well, like most of us don't feel like that. And so I really wanted to press into this paradox of our constraints and our limits are actually the things that will lead us towards God and lead us towards flourishing.

But I also realized I was thinking about what would I want to write to my younger self. We have four kids, they're all pretty close together and I just remember some of those early days just feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. Thinking

about a young woman, a younger version of myself, maybe in a similar situation and she's feeling her limits, but they don't feel freeing. And so what did she need to hear, and what did I need to hear more than a decade ago? And then a lot of us entering middle age and trying to figure out okay, my life I live now wasn't what I imagined my life to be. Maybe we experience a sense of angst or malaise and like what do we do with that and is God still good. And even if we have all these ambitions that maybe haven't panned out accordingly, can we experience a sense of satisfaction and contentment no matter where God has placed us. You know Wendell Berry says we live the given life and not the planned and I think I've often kind of dug my heels in. I wanted my planned life, but trying to experience again and again that God's given life is the good life. Even if it looks very different than I would have planned.

[00:28:22] Darryl Dash: I hope that people pick up your book, I can't picture too many people who wouldn't benefit from reading it and thinking about its ideas. I know I need to read it and I've been reading it and enjoying it a lot. I'm trying to read it slowly because I don't want to just skim through the book, I actually wouldn't learn the lessons in there. So I just appreciate what you've written so much.

[00:28:41] Ashley Hales: Thank you.

[00:28:43] Darryl Dash: Let me ask you just two quick questions as we close. What have you been learning recently and what's been encouraging you recently?

[00:28:50] Ashley Hales: Yeah, well I think I'm realizing how much a discipline is of this spacious life. It's very funny because as this book is coming out into the world in a few weeks when we're recording this, usually like they're trying to tell others you gotta hustle and hurry, otherwise there's not going to be buzzed about your book. And I'm like, well I can't really do that when the whole message of the book is to not to give hustle and hurry a kick to the curb. Instead, to embrace the loving limits of Jesus. So I've noticed just how much it's a discipline to choose a sense of the goodness of limits. And so things like set daily prayer has been really helpful for me, like stop what I'm doing, stop my productive work in the middle of the day. Or yeah, taking the Sabbath and that has been really transformative for our family as well as to choose to relocate yourself in the story of God instead of let's keep working harder.

What am I enjoying right now? Well, we recently moved from California to Colorado, so I've really enjoyed just being by the mountains again and some of the trees are beginning to just change a little bit, and that's been a gift again in southern California. We have seasons, but they're not quite very variable, so it's

been really fun to just notice another part of the world, and another way that God is really creative in what he does.

[00:30:17] Darryl Dash: Yeah, that's very cool, and where can people find out more about you?

[00:30:21] Ashley Hales: Yes. So the easiest way is if you head over to my website which you can find at aspacious.life and there I have a free little hustle habit quiz and a road map to help you get out of that rut of whatever hustle you have. As well as a link to pocket practices which are kind of spiritual formation cards that go along with the book. Which is a helpful tool to try to integrate the sense of spaciousness in your daily life, so that's the easiest thing, and then I'm at social media at @aahales as well.

[00:30:53] Darryl Dash: Thank you for your work, I really appreciate it, thank you for your life too. I appreciate you and your husband Bryce and it's so good to talk to you today.

[00:31:00] Ashley Hales: Oh it's so fun Darryl, it's been such a treat. Thank you.