

# Finding Holy in the Suburbs: Living Faithfully in the Land of Too Much

*Ashley Hales*

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## **Finding Holy in the Suburbs: Living Faithfully in the Land of Too Much** Ashley Hales

Suburban life—including tract homes, strip malls, commuter culture—shapes our desires.

More than half of Americans live in the suburbs. Ashley Hales writes that for many Christians, however: "The suburbs are ignored ('Your place doesn't matter, we're all going to heaven anyway'), denigrated and demeaned ('You're selfish if you live in a suburb; you only care about your own safety and advancement'), or seen as a cop-out from a faithful Christian life ('If you really loved God, you'd move to Africa or work in an impoverished area'). In everything from books to Hollywood jokes, the suburbs aren't supposed to be good for our souls."

What does it look like to live a full Christian life in the suburbs? Suburbs reflect our good, God-given desire for a place to call home. And suburbs also reflect our own brokenness. This book is an invitation to look deeply into your soul as a suburbanite and discover what it means to live holy there.

## **Finding Holy in the Suburbs: Living Faithfully in the Land of Too Much Details**


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# **From Reader Review Finding Holy in the Suburbs: Living Faithfully in the Land of Too Much for online ebook**

## **Adam Shields says**

Short Review: I am glad that Christians are more carefully thinking about space and geography in relationship to our faith. We are Christians in a space, not just abstractly. Evangelicals started thinking more about being Christians in cities in 1990s and 2000s and people like Wendell Berry have been long writing about being Christians in rural areas, although that has had a resurgence as well.

It has been easy to bash the suburbs as Christians. The suburbs are about ease and wealth and hiding from your neighbors. But more importantly the Suburbs are not as cool as being Christian in the city and don't have the pastoral settings of rural areas and are not foreign lands. But Ashley Hales is thinking clearly about what the suburbs mean to how we are Christians, both positively and negatively.

In some ways this is an introduction to the concept of being Christian in a space. Because I have read pretty extensively about these sorts of ideas from an urban perspective this did feel fairly introductory to me in many areas. But not all. Hales handles that balance between the positives and negatives better than many space oriented books I have read.

For me the spiritual disciplines that are included in each chapter to minimize the negatives and encourage the positives was something that was missing in most other explorations of Christianity and space that I have read.

My full review, about 1000 words is on my blog at <http://bookwi.se/finding-holy-in-the-...>

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## **Lauren Fee says**

I found myself tearing up at so many points in this book as I relate so deeply to the author's own story of being forced to wrestle with moving back to the suburbs. The author does an incredible job of highlighting the idols of the suburbs, giving many practical ideas of how the principle she brings forth in each chapter might be applied in one's own life and suburb, as well as ultimately pushing the reader towards remembering and reflecting on one's eternal home and that because we are at home with Christ, we can be home anywhere and be bringers of His shalom to anyone. A needed read for me this year.

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## **Rachel Ollivant says**

"He has shown me how a life in the suburbs does not absent us from the problems of other places, even if the suburban idols fashioned here are different, more insidious, and harder to root out." - Ashley Hales

In Finding Holy In the Suburbs, Ashley Hales discusses the unique challenges of ministering to communities of affluence - the biggest challenge being that Suburbanites often don't appear to have any immediate "needs" that churches meet through typical outreach ministries.

With that in mind, Hales demonstrates about how spiritual brokenness can be in all of us regardless of our place in the world, and brings out the idols people residing in the insulated life of the suburbs can use to try to mask their deeper needs, such as consumerism, individualism, busyness, and safety. By drawing awareness to how seeking "stuff" and "things to do" and cutting ourselves off from the uglier aspects of the world won't fulfill our deeper spiritual needs - she compares it to running a treadmill and getting nowhere - what we can seek out for more substantial, lasting fulfillment.

I read this book after I received an advanced copy from the publisher, and enjoyed it so much that I not only decided to review it, but to share it "in real life," and will be leading a "Finding Holy In The Suburbs" book club at my church.

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### **Kendra says**

Ashley is a lovely writer. Beautiful writing + solid theological grounding + practical implications are not always present in Christian writing for women, and this book was a refreshing read for those reasons.

But not only for those reasons. This book had me laughing and crying, convicted and longing for more of Jesus. I was grateful to benefit from it even though I don't necessarily live the suburban life. Ashley gets at the heart of our longings – "to belong, to find home, to root ourselves in place," and also the lure of suburban solutions – consumerism, individualism, busyness, safety. She is not afraid to call out our idols and challenge us to consider biblical solutions. She offers practical ways forward for engaging our place, including being rooted in a local church and loving our neighbors. I'm still pondering the many points of impact.

This would be a great book club read. The questions at the end of each chapter would lead to good discussion.

Also, the audiobook was very well done.

I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher; this review is my own.

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### **Noelle Ammerman says**

Great book for anyone. Love how this book shows you how to be an influencer where you are planted by practical advice and application process for you at end of each chapter.

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### **Kaytee Cobb says**

Ashley really nails down the already/not yet of suburb life. We live in a homogenous, safe little community, where it's easy to pretend that everything is perfect. It's easy to feel like there is no mission field here, no calling to be God's people. But Ashley teases out both the hard and the blessing of living a suburban life as a Christian. Worth picking up.

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## **Abby says**

Ashley speaks with tenderness and truth to souls dulled by the lure of granite countertops and perfectly arranged calendars. Without shaming the monotony of the suburbs or praising their excess, she invites readers to know God, themselves, and one another more fully through a deeper understanding of place and rooted faithfulness. I encourage anyone who knows the longings of the individualized heart to find hope and healing in these pages.

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## **Seana says**

I am so thankful for this timely book that is helping me see the suburbs are just as valuable for the Kingdom of God than ministering anywhere else. I thought ministry life would take me to much different places, but God led us to a safe, friendly suburban neighborhood. Instead of feeling guilty, I'm now feeling placed with kingdom purpose. So thankful for this read. The gospel is not limited by zipcode. I recommend this read for every mom—no matter your location.

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## **Christina says**

I was interested in reading this book because I've found myself living... I think, in a suburban area. Well, that is not entirely true. I do live in something similar to the suburbs but I really was interested in reading this book after a conversation about church planting with a friend. We were talking about what church planting could look like, where we would be interested in planting a church and who we would want on our team. I brought up the city of Philadelphia, because I love it there and I love a lot of people that still live there (I graduated school in the area). My friend looked me in the eye and said that she had considered planting a church there to build community, not in the city proper, but in the suburbs of Philly. It was the first time that I had ever heard of suburban people being one of the least reached population. Because the perception is that the people that live there are "fine"--as though the people in the city are not.

Anyway, Hale does an excellent job bringing to light some of the struggles that people find themselves facing (or not facing if they are unaware of its happening) while living in a suburb. Safety is a expectation of moving into a suburb, but where does trusting God fall into that? How does hospitality and community fall into that if you never see the people that live just across the street?

I frequently found myself wondering if some of these problems might mirror the things that people living in the city have to face. I don't know if finding holy is a problem specific to suburbanites or more so something people in general have to "find".

Something else that I appreciated throughout the book was Hale's mention of how to implement what she had written about at the end of each chapter. Some of the ideas seemed like something we should already be implementing in our lives but sometimes we need someone else to not only mention an idea but to also tell us that those "simple" steps are a part of something monumental.

I received a electronic copy of this title in exchange for my unbiased review.

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## **Amanda McClendon says**

(Full disclosure: I received an advance copy of this book as part of its launch team, but the following is my full and honest opinion.)

I grew up in the northwestern suburbs of Houston, in a private Christian school. My family lived there because it was "safe," even though a lot in our own family wasn't safe (but that's another story for another time). I got out of the suburbs as soon as I could, and here I am, well within the city limits in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. But I've found a lot of the same problems I had have followed me here: Materialism, the worship of success, envy of other people who seemed to have their crap together, a feeling of smug superiority to those who just settled for the status quo. (Hi, I'm an Enneagram 4w3, can you tell?)

Enter Ashley's book, *Finding Holy in the Suburbs*. Don't let the title fool you; it's just as good for us city dwellers as it is for suburbanites. This is a book for those of us who are what Tim Keller would call "middle class in spirit" but who are also trying to follow Jesus in our affluence and privilege. It is convicting and beautiful and true in its call towards generosity and an others-centered, God-focused life. (And did I mention that Ashley's a heck of a writer?)

Anyway! Read this, no matter where you live. Pass it around to your friends and talk about it.

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## **Kyle Dunn says**

What does it look like to follow Jesus while living in Suburban America? *Finding Holy in the Suburbs*, by Ashley Hales, is a wonderful answer to that question. The book has a joyfully subversive flavor. Many of us in the suburbs are either oblivious to, or drowning in, the consumerism, individualism, busyness, and pursuit of security that are so common in Suburban life. Our stories are marked by the pursuit of things that won't ultimately satisfy us. What Hales does so well is show us a better story - the story of God bringing beauty where there is brokenness and redemption where there is sin. Instead of living for ourselves and our security or individualism, Hales invites us to imitate Jesus right where we live in the suburbs by losing our life through self-giving love. Hales has a sparkling, creative voice that gives a freshness to the time-honored truths of the Gospel. She asks great questions, converses with all kinds of thinkers old and new, and provides very practical guides (counter-liturgies) following each chapter.

This is a book to soak in. Read it with your spouse, your small group, or your church. There are all kinds of objections to life in the suburbs and to Christianity in the suburbs. What *Finding Holy In the Suburbs* will do is show you that through Jesus there is a better story for you and your place - even in the Suburbs.

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## **Heather Caliri says**

A useful handbook for suburban Christians considering how to 'seek the good of the city' when they aren't IN the city. Hale gives practical theological insights about how to live deeply in a place known for being superficial. I was especially moved by her vision of what a redemptive suburb would look like. I would have loved to see more stories of how the tough practices she advocates are working imperfectly in her life, but

overall, I think she captures useful praxis for our suburban everyday.

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## **Bob says**

*Summary: Suburbs reflect our longings for the good, that we often fill with gods of consumerism, individualism, busyness, and safety. Only when we repent and find our longings met in belonging to God, can daily life in the suburbs become a holy endeavor.*

Nearly one-half of Americans live in suburbs, and yet many view the suburbs as a place of desolation, a deadening affluence and isolation that James Howard Kunstler has described "the geography of nowhere." In many Christian circles, the "cutting edge" Christian life is one lived in urban neighborhoods. So what does one make of a call of God to leave an urban community that has been a thriving place of ministry and rich relationships to return to the California suburb of one's youth? That was the challenge faced by Ashley Hales and her husband as they moved from urban Salt Lake City to that California suburb.

Hales discovered that there was a hunger in the suburbs, a longing for "home" that people filled with consumerism, individualism, busyness, and safety. In the first part of this book she described her own wrestlings with these false gods. She describes the consumeristic fantasies of granite countertops and therapeutic shopping at Target. She describes the individualism of measuring worth in the square footage of suburban castles that close us off from community. She narrates the busy life of the mom in a minivan ruled by the schedules entailed by all the childhood experiences our community says our children must have. She confesses the fears for safety that lead to walls and fences and gates that end up shutting out the joyous life of the kingdom.

Hales believes that "healing begins at the place of hunger." It is when, in conversations over coffee, or the back fence, the doubts and frustrations arise that expose the brokenness of this life and the chance to "find holy" opens up. The middle part of the book deals with two movements that are critical. The first is repentance, when we acknowledge that the "glittering images" of suburban life mask an inner emptiness. The answer is not to double down or to look for a different place, but to acknowledge our mess, and stay put, waiting for God's grace. The other part is to know that grace, that we are God's beloved, and that our belovedness is not in how "ripped" or svelte we are, but in finding a better Lover who sees us in our beautiful brokenness and will not let us go. The challenge is to live in that reality each day in the little acts of suburban life.

The concluding chapters commend an alternative life in the suburbs that arises from repentance and belovedness. It begins with hospitality that doesn't worry about how Pinterest-worthy our homes are but shares meals together as family and invites others into the warmth, with children interrupting, and crumbs in the sofa. Instead of consumerism, we live with an open-hearted and intentional generosity with our stuff and our time and our money. It means choosing vulnerability over safety in opening up our lives to our church and our neighborhood. It is living into the shalom of God in the midst of our broken-busy lives.

Hales writes in a style that at once evidences deep spiritual reflection, and personal honesty about her own moments of failure, repentance, and of rooting her life in the suburbs in an awareness of the presence of God in the ordinary. Each chapter concludes with some practices that individuals, families or groups may use.

As one who has lived in a suburban community for 28 years, there was much that I recognized, from the dreams of kitchen remodels to the minivan lineups at schools, practices, and fast-food drive-throughs, to the

concerns for safety (far greater than in the urban community of my youth). I appreciate the insight of the author to see beyond these things to the hunger and longings of her neighbors, and the needed posture of Christians who live in this setting.

At the same time, I wonder if her and her husband's commitment to minister in that community sets them apart from many. Our suburb significantly empties out during the day as people spend the bulk of their waking hours working somewhere else--often a place where they form their most significant friendships. She doesn't deal with the transience of suburban communities (the house next to us has had four owners during the time we have lived here, the house behind us seven). Suburbs have life cycles from the squeaky clean "new build" stage to aging housing stock and changing demographics as many move to newer exurbs while some stay after raising families to become empty-nesters, and eventually, those who choose to "age in place."

I hope the author and her husband will stay long enough to wrestle with these realities and work out the practices described in this book, which I believe reflect what kingdom presence looks like, as believers in the suburbs. Many suburbs really are a "geography of nowhere," removed from shops, services and workplaces, and with attached garages that allow us to enter our "castles" without any interaction with neighbors. Many communities have no real identity and have little beyond the local schools to offer cohesion. This work describes well the spiritual landscape of suburban life and the posture needed for those who will minister there. I look forward a sequel to this book, something like, "Further Adventures in Finding Holy in the Suburbs." This is needed work!

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Disclosure of Material Connection: I received a complimentary review copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review. The opinions I have expressed are my own.

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## **Laura says**

REview pending.

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## **Kristine | A Lovely Bookshelf says**

This book was startling in its impact upon my mind and heart; at times I felt almost defensive, in large part because of the distaste I feel towards myself for having fallen into the trap of looking to my Suburban life to meet my hungers and needs. Reading Hales' words was like looking into a mirror, feeling a bit trapped in there, and then being lovingly shown the way out.

It has been some time since I have been as deeply convicted by the simple truths presented in a book, but here it is. Hales' work speaks to the Christian life in Suburbia, but in truth I think anyone in any place could read it and find her thoughtful, theological, and practical writings appropriate for where they are.

I will be referring to this book for a long time to come, especially the many counterliturgies and practices she offers at the end of each chapter to reorient ourselves to Kingdom-living, as exiles, no matter our place.

