



Foreword by Emily P. Freeman



# FINDING HOLY



# in the SUBURBS

Living Faithfully in the Land of Too Much



ASHLEY HALES



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love can only be built when we reckon with our failure, when we practice repentance. Love can grow only when our stories are not focused on ourselves but when they move toward the other (even when hurting) and offer to take off the burden of all the golden calves we're shackled to.

Failure is a gift. When we are forced to drink the dust of our idols, we can begin to turn our sights toward home. It is a gift when we run into the places where they cease to satisfy. We fight with our spouses. Our children don't perform. Our job hijacks our time and fails to capture our affections. We suffer from depression, anxiety, and trying to wrestle a family schedule, all the while wondering what we do so much driving for. Success, esteem, good work to do, sharing food with others on your granite countertops, all point to the weight of glory that mere objects cannot hold. And when the objects break, when you lose your job, when your wife gets ill, when relationships are rocky, it all crumbles like the dust it is.

To practice counterliturgies to consumerism, we must also learn the rhythms of fasting and feasting. In a wonderful book on technology usage, Andy Crouch writes, "of course we are meant to eat, and even to feast, but only when we *fast* do we make real progress toward being free of our dependence on food to soothe our depression and anesthetize our anxieties." In other words, we need to hold fasting and feasting together; each only makes sense alongside the other.

We must create times to fast from a lifestyle of affluence we've become accustomed to. If we are to find holy in the suburbs, we must detach from stuff, but not in the sense that the material doesn't matter. God after all called his created order good, and deigned to come save us through his human body. And not in the sense that we are already detached from the forms of production, where we don't know the human cost of our cheap toys and clothes. Rather, we must see how, as Cavanaugh writes, "Things are not ends in themselves; they are means to greater attachment to others. . . . But to have a good relationship

with others, it is necessary to have a proper relationship with things.” We do this by fasting.

Some ideas are explored at the end of this chapter, but fasting from consumerism might look like putting your phone down, not buying something just because you can, interrogating your heart about your vacations and your granite countertop kitchen remodel. Because if the story of Jesus is true, then it means that, as Abraham Kuyper said, “every square inch” is under the lordship of Christ. If he is Lord, he is Lord over your stuff too. And because he loves you, like he loved the rich young man, he longs for us to be free—to take the heavy weight of consumerism off our chests and give us abundant life.

We must feast well too—which means loving people for who they are, enjoying our things for what they are and not the dreams they promise. May we not turn our families, homes, neighbors, strangers who produce products we consume, or communities into commodities to be bought and sold.

Our stuff must find its proper place—not as signifying objects but as harbingers of another world. C. S. Lewis writes, “They are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.” Our good golden objects are pictures that foreshadow glory. They tell us a true tale where we will one day be home in a place of rest, peace, and belonging. They are appetizers of the feast, but not the feast itself. We are not to gorge our bodies, minds, efforts, and hearts on mere nouns.

As we practice counterliturgies to consumerism, we ask for hearts that are not content with the thing itself but hunger for the source of our desires. We sit in this uncomfortable space as we realize how we have been more formed by a liturgy of consumerism than by the Word of God. When we step back and see how we’ve used our money in ways that are antithetical to what we say is in our hearts—that we’ve been worshiping a golden calf next to the altar of God—may we search desperately for rescue.

For now let's sit and feel our ears bare. May the dust of our idols catch in our throats and awake us to our deathly habits of consumption. For it is there—in the pulverizing of our golden objects, the bitterness of drinking it down—that grace starts in the suburbs.

## COUNTERLITURGIES

to Consumerism ←

Consider these as starting points: a few practices to help shape your habits away from consuming people, places, or things.

1. *Failure.* Practice praying a historic prayer of confession to help reacquaint you with a healthy understanding of sin, confession, and repentance.
2. *Feast.* Surround yourself with things that you love. Enjoy great food and drink and focus your time on others as you enjoy. Plan times of feasting in your schedule rather than just getting by.
3. *Fast.* Practice removing yourself regularly from sites of consumerism—where you're tempted to consume things, people, or experiences (the mall, ads on TV, your favorite stores, social media). Instead take up the practice of writing down a gratitude list. Clear out your closet. Donate your stuff or find friends who would appreciate the things that gather dust in your home. Make a plan for how you engage with social media.
4. *Dare yourself to live on less.* Shop your closet instead of buying more. Save what you'd spend going out for a month and give someone an anonymous gift. Sponsor a child. Generosity begets generosity.
5. *Tithe your time.* Evaluate your schedule and ask why you do the voluntary things on your list. Schedule a block of time to help someone out, to spend uninterrupted and undistracted time with your family, and to be outside to meet your neighbors.

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