



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

Prayers of REST with Asheritah Ciuciu

Season 3, Episode 4 Transcript

[00:00:09] - [Intro] Welcome to the Gospel for Life podcast. We help people grow by connecting truth to life. Here's your host, Darryl Dash.

[00:00:09] Darryl Dash: Hey, welcome back to the Gospel for Life podcast. And today we're going to talk about Prayer.

Do you feel too busy to pray? You're not alone. We all know that we should be praying more and we genuinely try to make it happen. But everybody that I know, everybody that I've talked to, including really mature believers, often admit that they feel like their prayer life could be improved.

Today I'm really excited to talk to Asheritah Ciuciu, and she's written a new book called *Prayers of REST*. It's a series of prompts to help you hear God's voice. She provides guided prayers that focus your mind and heart on Scripture. And I'm excited to talk to her today.

Asheritah is somebody that I've actually met in person. And before we started recording, we were catching up a little bit. She is a best-selling author, a speaker and she is a podcast host. And she's also the founder of One Thing Alone Ministries, an online ministry that helps women all over the world find joy in Jesus.

[00:01:23] Asheritah grew up in Romania and lives in the states now, not that far from me in Ohio. Asheritah, thank you for joining us on the podcast today.

[00:01:33] Asheritah Ciuciu: Darryl, thanks so much for having me, it's my joy to be here.

[00:01:36] Darryl Dash: So Asheritah, everybody that I know seems to really struggle in praying. I remember talking to somebody, and we were in a group of pastors, and he said “I'm really struggling with my prayer life. Some days I only managed to get in 2 hours of prayer.” I immediately looked around, and all of us put our heads down because he beat us. I mean, if you've just measured the amount of time that he spent praying, he beat us. I don't know that we can measure our prayer life by necessarily time. I don't know if that's the only metric, but why do we feel like we're struggling? Why do most of us feel like we are struggling with our prayer life?

[00:02:13] Asheritah Ciuciu: Yeah, I think you hit so much in that question already Darryl, and one of them is the comparison. We all play this comparison game whether we are in full-time ministry or whether we're just sitting in the church pews shuffling in and out. We're constantly comparing, ‘Am I reading my Bible enough? Am I studying the Bible enough? Am I praying enough? Am I sharing the Gospel enough? And how much is that person doing?’ We tend to have this sliding scale of like, well I'm not as good as that person, but at least I'm not as bad as that person, right? As long as I'm averaging somewhere in between, God must be okay with me.

And of course, we know that is not how the gospel works, that is not the good news of Jesus. It is not our good works, it is not the number of hours that we spend in prayer that acquires our approval in God's presence. It is solely based on the sacrifice of Jesus. That said, we still struggle, and I'm right there with you and with your listeners. I grew up as a missionary kid and from a young age was just involved and immersed in the ministry world and now doing ministry as kind of my full-time job.

[00:03:24]: I know what it's like to spend a full eight to ten hour a day doing ministry work, doing Kingdom work, and realizing oh, I haven't really talked to God about these things, right? About these books I'm writing or this message I'm preparing or these emails that I'm writing or these people that need to hear from me. And so we can be so busy going about doing God's work and yet not quieting our hearts to be with him. And I think what we're finding, especially right now in this pandemic, post pandemic world, however we want to classify it, is that so many of us are struggling from burnout. We are tired, we are weary and heavily burdened.

And that phrase right there is probably ringing a bell for listeners because that's from Matthew 11, where Jesus looks at the crowds and he says “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest.” That is an invitation not to a self-help program, not to more productivity or efficiency, not to

like a streak in your habit formation. That is an invitation to a person. Jesus invites us to come be with him.

[00:04:36]: And I think that's where we must start this conversation, it's reminding ourselves that prayer is not some abstract thing that we're supposed to be doing. Prayer is the vehicle that allows us to come into God's presence, and it's all about that person and that relationship.

[00:04:54] Darryl Dash: You mentioned the origins of the book having something to do with COVID, how did this book come about? What led you to write it? And how did the pandemic factor into the origins of this book?

[00:05:06] Asheritah Ciuciu: Yeah well, I've been toying a little bit with the REST acronym, pre-pandemic, and some messages that I had given. But Prayers of REST per se started two weeks into the lockdown, so this is March 2020. I don't know how many times we had heard the word unprecedented up to that point. We were on lockdown, I was at home with my husband and three children, right now, their ages eight and under, so they were even younger at the time. And I tend to be a bit of an introvert, and so two weeks in was about that point where I was like I can't do this anymore, I just cannot. If anyone asks me for one more snack or what's for dinner or if it is like not going to bed on time, so that I can have some alone time. Pile that on top of the uncertainty of what was happening in the world and just the fear that we were all swimming in at the time. And Darryl, I remember leaving the kitchen, locking myself in the laundry room, and sliding to the floor, sobbing. I had broken into a cold sweat, and I was hyperventilating, and seriously, I thought I was having a heart attack.

[00:06:16]: I had never experienced anything like that in my life. And I just kept repeating the same phrase over and over again, "I can't do this anymore, I can't do this, any of it." Being a wife, being a mom, being a ministry leader, being an author. I quit, I'm done, I can't do this anymore. And the more I repeated that phrase in that moment, in that stillness, these words came to mind "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble." And I said, I can't do this anymore. And the response was God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble. I think I was on that laundry room floor for probably 20 minutes before the sobbing stopped and my heart rate slowed down, and I realized this is God's invitation to me. In the midst of this pandemic, in this moment where everything is turned upside down, I have the opportunity to get to know God as my refuge and strength in a way that I never have before. And so I understood clearly his invitation to come and spend time with him.

[00:07:32]: I am not the most disciplined of people, naturally, and so I thought I need some accountability here. And I know that if I need time and prayer in

God's presence, I can bet other people need it too. And so I posted this on my Instagram account, I said hey, starting tomorrow, I'm going to get up at 07:00 A.M, I'm going to go live on Instagram, and I'm going to spend half an hour praying. And if anyone wants to join in, you are welcome to. And the first time I hit that go-live button Darryl, I remember being so nervous. I was like, I don't know if anyone's going to show up, I don't know what I just committed to, but I know I need this time of prayer. And making that public commitment just kind of made me show up. And we had dozens of women from around the world gather to pray that morning and the next morning and the next morning. And Darryl, we went for eight weeks of daily morning prayer, prayers of REST where we can talk about the acronym, but we recited God's goodness, expressed our neediness. We took time to be still and seek his presence, and then we trusted his faithfulness.

[00:08:43]: And every time I got off one of those prayer calls, I just felt the peace and the presence of Jesus flooding my heart and my life. And it was like I had just enough to face that day. And after those eight weeks, we had lots of readers saying like hey I would love to join in, but it just doesn't work with my time zone, can we do something else? And so it evolved into a weekly podcast, we're now coming up on a year and a half anniversary of that podcast. And we've had thousands of people from around the world join in and pray and rest in God's loving presence. And it is just our good God to take one of our lowest moments of weakness of saying, "I can't do this," and make something beautiful out of it.

[00:09:31] Darryl Dash: Asheritah, I really appreciate your honesty and even sharing your struggles. I do a lot of these, and I've noticed with some people that I interview, there's just a realness. Not that the other ones aren't being real, but there's a level of authenticity or maybe even struggle that is behind this. What would you say to somebody right now who might be listening, who is where you are at and just saying "I can't keep going, I thought the pandemic was over, I'm tired?" I hear a lot of ministry leaders or you just hear that a lot of people are ready to quit the first chance they get. What would you say to those who are right now where you were at that day, and just like "I don't know if I can keep doing this?"

[00:10:14] Asheritah Ciuciu: I don't know that I'm in a position that I'm qualified to speak to that. But I will tell you my first response is to say God loves you, and he loves you not for what you're doing and what you're accomplishing and how much you're getting done. He loves you not because of your hustle or your accomplishments or your productivity or your attendance or membership numbers. God loves you because He created you and wants to be in a relationship with you. And there are times after intense seasons of ministry where I think He invites us to come and rest with Him. And I don't know what

that's going to look like for you, but it's probably not going to be continuing to go at the speed you're going. Darryl I think of when Jesus sent out His disciples, and I'm going to paraphrase it here, but He sent them out to proclaim His Kingdom coming. And they came back and were super excited. They had cast out demons and people's lives were being turned around and there were healings. And these fishermen and these simple men that were Jesus followers had never seen anything like that, let alone actually be the people doing it.

[00:11:25]: And if you have been in ministry any amount of time, you know that ministry has its low moments, but it also has this mountain moment, right? Has this euphoric like, yes we did it. I didn't know if this church plant would take off, but look, it's going, or I didn't know how people would respond to this Bible study, but they're showing up, like this is amazing. Darryl, we were chatting a little bit before you started recording about some of the internet waters we're swimming in about productivity and 10Xing your effect and leaving a legacy for people to follow. And I feel like in the midst of that, we would expect Jesus to look at His disciples and be like awesome guys, alright, let me tell you how you can take it to the next level. Like this is what we're going to do, and instead, Jesus rejoices with them. He says yeah, that's great, but rejoice more that your names are written in the book of life. And He then says come away and rest awhile. Come with me, let's go to a quiet place and let's rest because Jesus knows that we are human.

[00:12:32]: He was fully human and fully God and still is. We are not, we are not divine, He knows that we are flesh and blood and we are weak, we get tired and we need sleep, we need to rest. We're not superhuman. And so if you're at that burnout point, God is not embarrassed by that, He knows that. And it is in that weakness that He is inviting you to come away and rest awhile and get to know how much He loves you for who He made you to be, not for what you can accomplish.

[00:13:06] Darryl Dash: I'm struck by when you talk about resting in God's goodness, I think that would be something that most Christians would say is a good thing to do. But then you talk about expressing our neediness, and that's very countercultural these days to even stop to say Lord, I don't have what it takes, and then to seek His stillness.

I don't know if you're into Enneagram or not, but I tend to be, and I know not everyone buys this stuff. But I remember we were listening to a book on Enneagram and I was wondering, I don't know which one I am and got to Enneagram three, which is like the never ending worker, the workaholic. And my wife just starts laughing, she's looking at me thinking, nailed it. My biggest battle is that I really struggle with stillness, so expressing neediness, seeking his

stillness, that is very hard for me, and then trusting his faithfulness. So how did you come up with these steps of prayer and explain a little bit of the reasoning behind them?

[00:14:15] Asheritah Ciuciu: Sure. Yeah, like I said, I grew up in a Christian home, and so I learned how to pray at a young age and prayed with my parents, and that was modeled for me. I think around grade school I learned how to pray the Acts way, and so many of your listeners will be familiar with that. And I think it was such a great way to help me focus on okay, what do I say to God? As I got older and as I got involved in ministry myself, I found that not only did I not spend 2 hours in prayer every day, but the time that I did spend in prayer, I felt like I was just talk, talk, talk, and then run off and do the thing, right? Like all right, this is great God, I'm glad we got to talk about this, and I'm going to trust you with it, but now I need to go do the thing. And what I found in Scripture, especially over the past few years, is that God really invites us to do life with Him, to walk in step with the Spirit, to become aware of His presence in our lives, to seek His face and to be with Him.

[00:15:19]: And for the longest time, I interpreted that as spending time in my daily devotions, however, you want to call that. Like doing Bible study and preparing my messages and maybe praying through my list of people that I'm praying for, even doing warfare prayer. So all those things are important, but the stillness part, that got to me because it just felt like a waste of time and a little bit 'woo-woo', if I'm going to be honest. Like am I supposed to just sit here and empty my mind, how does this work? The more time I spent with Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus' this invitation, that we come to discover Him as the one who is lowly in heart, who is gentle, and that we take His yoke upon us. I realized I'm missing something in prayer, and so that's where this acronym REST came from to help get me not just in that mind space of resting in God's presence, but actually, as we'll see with the S, building in time to be still with God. So typically I'll be praying Scripture, whatever it is I'm reading that day or studying that day.

[00:16:30]: Sometimes the way that this works in my life is that it's not always connected to a devotional time. It might be a situation with a child that triggers something, and so I'll take time at the kitchen sink to rest in prayer for a little bit. That might just be like a 60sec time of emergency prayer. Like I need your rest right now God before I respond to my child. But usually it's attached to a passage of Scripture, so let's take Matthew 11:28-30 for example. I'll look at that and I'll say okay, recite God's goodness, what does this passage tell me about God? How can I praise Him for who he is? How can I worship Him for one of His attributes revealed here? And then in what way have I seen that transpire in my own life? Like this is where I'm taking what I'm learning and applying it as a lens to see God's goodness in my own life. So it goes from theoretical to

experiential. I have tasted and seen his goodness, so it might be Jesus' invitation. Like come to me, come to me, you're weary, you're heavy burdened, come to me. I want you.

[00:17:37]: And so I might say God, thank you for that invitation. Jesus, thank you that you welcomed me the way I am, that I don't have to pretend with you, I don't have to try to improve myself with you. You invite me to come just the way I am and taking some time to become real, to take down the mask and praise God for His welcome in that way, so that's the R (Recite) God's goodness. The E is (Express) your neediness. And like you said, there are a lot of us who struggle with this, and I'm right there. In my own pride, I think I can do it on my own. I think if anyone asked me, I would give the correct answer like no, of course I need God's strength, of course I'm relying on Him to do this. But if you looked at my schedule, if you looked at the way I spent my hours, most likely you would see me hustling on my own as if I can do it by myself. And so the E, expressing your neediness is really just getting honest with God and saying these are the sins I'm struggling with right now. These are things I need to confess to you. These are areas of my life where I'm admitting I need you. I can't do this on my own.

[00:18:54]: Even recently, the last three to five months maybe, I've become super specific in prayers and saying not just this book, I need your help to write this book, but this chapter, this segment, this passage of Scripture, this example. This email I need to write God, would you give me the words to speak in this situation? And so coming back to Matthew 11, saying to all you who are weary and heavy burdens, I will bring those burdens to Him and express my need for Him. It just has a way of humbling me, reminding me how great and good my heavenly Father is and how needy I am, and he meets us in that place. So having laid that groundwork, this is the part where typically I would then run off and do the thing. But the S and rest reminds us we have recited God's goodness, expressed our neediness, and now is the time to (Seek) his stillness. And so that passage from Psalm 46 that I mentioned in the laundry room, "God is a refuge in strength, a very present help in time of trouble."

[00:20:04]: Later in that chapter, verse 11, God says, "Be still and know that I am God." We run into a refuge or tower, and then we're still with Him. And so this might look like taking a few deep breaths, quieting my heart, becoming aware of God's loving presence surrounding me and filling me with His Holy Spirit. It might be meditating on a passage like the one from Hebrews that says "Because we have a high priest who has been tempted in every way as we have been, He is able to empathize with us." And so we can come before the throne of grace with boldness, knowing that we will find help in time of need. So I might actually visually picture myself walking into God's throne room and just sitting

with Him, just being still with Him. Sometimes I might ask, God, is there anything you want to say to me about this situation, about this project, about this Bible study, or these relationships in my life? Is there something you want to show me that I'm missing? Like through your Holy Spirit, would you bring your wisdom and discernment in this situation? And I'm going to be quiet now and I'm going to listen.

[00:21:22]: And I don't know if you struggle with distractions like I do, but sometimes I remember like oh, there's a load of laundry that needs to switch to the dryer right that moment. Or my car needs the oil changed, or I have a friend whose birthday is coming up. And so I try really hard to be silent and still, but instead my mind is distracted because that's the world we live in. And so I either keep a piece of paper next to me so I can jot down things and know I can come back to them, or I actually use those as prayer prompts. So I say okay God, my friend whose birthday is coming up, maybe you brought her to mind for a reason, maybe she needs prayer today. Or the car oil change, like God, thank you that you provide for my needs, and thank you that you care about the little things, what a good God you are. And so I'll give that to Him and then come back to a place of stillness and silence, just delighting in God and allowing myself to experience His delight in me, not because I'm the perfect child, but because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus.

[00:22:30]: And then from there, we move to T (Trust) his faithfulness. If God has revealed something that He wants me to act on, then this is the time to obey. This is a time to preach the gospel to our hearts, that God is who He says He is and will do what He says He will do in the world and in our lives. And so we look at how He has been faithful throughout Scripture, and we declare to our own hearts, we preach the gospel to ourselves that that same God is the same today, yesterday, and forever. So He will continue to be that way in our lives and in these situations. And we go into the doing of the work that we have, out of a place of rest, having spent time with Jesus, having quieted our hearts to listen if there's anything He wants to say to us. Then moving into our life, being aware of His presence going with us. Whether it's 2 hours or even just two minutes, this time of prayer of rest brings so much peace to those of us who are in ministry, and really I think to everyone.

[00:23:42]: Darryl: It's really powerful. I love this. Ray Ortlund talks about when you hear the gospel, sometimes you feel reoxygenated, you just feel like you can let go of all the stuff that is anti-gospel, trying to measure up, and you're just breathing in grace. And as you're describing the Prayers of REST, it feels a little bit like that right? It feels like believing the gospel and drawing near to God and enjoying His Grace in the middle of our need, and I really appreciate that

Asheritah, could you talk about how Prayers of REST could be used as a discipleship tool?

[00:24:21] Asheritah Ciuciu: Yeah, well like I mentioned, we had these live protocols in the midst of the pandemic, and that was such a great opportunity to gather together in a virtual way. Which I know pretty much every pastor and church leader has experienced during this time. But I truly believe in the value of local face to face relationships, the power of praying together. I've experienced that in my own life. And so what I found in my own experience is that people really want to learn how to pray more. They desire to be the people who are in continual conversation with God, they just don't know how. They don't know what to say, how to pray, they don't know how to deal with the distractions when those come to mind. And it's kind of intimidating to walk into a prayer meeting if your church still has one of those. And so I think part of what we can be doing in our churches and what I've been grateful to be a part of is, for one thing, modeling and teaching on how to pray because sometimes I've been guilty of this. I will be the first raise my hand. If I pray in public, I might pray a bit more flowery than usual.

[00:25:39]: There's a certain voice that we take on when we pray in public. There's a certain way of praying that we hope is a blessing to listeners, but there is also an awareness that people are listening to me pray. And I think we can get past that and instead model genuine conversation with God in a way that's instructional. And Darryl, I will be totally transparent, my hope with this book is that it becomes a prayer discipleship tool. That if people are wondering, how do I pray, that REST becomes that prayer format that walks them through it. And so even in the relationships that I have and the Bible studies I've been involved in, as I pray, I will recite God's goodness. That's where I start. I'll move to confessing my own sins, expressing my own needs, bringing our congregation in a way of that expression. And then more and more Darryl, I've been allowing time, and this might not work in every scenario, but allowing time of stillness and silence in the middle of the prayer to acknowledge that this is a two-way conversation. And yes, there's a program we need to move on with. And yes, there are time workers on that sheets, but we can take 30 seconds, 45 seconds of stillness together, corporately to quiet our hearts, to hear from God.

[00:27:08]: And then we're going to wrap up by preaching the gospel to our hearts, by trusting His faithfulness and having this modeled from the pulpit or the stage. Having this be part of how we disciple people in our church, and having it be something that we do together. Like I said, my kids are eight and under, and so I'm actively teaching my kids how to pray. And I'll be honest, I don't know that REST is the best acronym for them because these words are a bit big for their three and five year old to understand. Like what does recite

God's goodness mean? What does express our neediness mean? And yet they'll understand things like, let's thank God for the gifts He's given us today. Let's tell Him where in our life do we need His help? Let's take some time to just be quiet with God. And what is it that tomorrow you're going to trust Him for? You're going to look for God on the playground, you're going to look for Him in the classroom. You're going to remember how kind He is toward you when your sibling wants to borrow that toy. We can have these conversations with our children and anyone in our congregations.

[00:28:24] Darryl Dash: That's so good. I have a million questions I want to ask you, but we're running out of time. So let me ask you a couple of personal questions, if that's okay. I like to ask these at the end of every interview. What are you learning lately? It doesn't have to be related to your book, it can just be related to anything that God has been teaching you these days?

[00:28:44] Asheritah Ciuciu: Oh, my goodness. So you talked about the Enneagram, I am a five on the Enneagram, and so that means that I love observing and researching and learning. So I am learning all the things these days about ancient Persian culture. And I'm working on my first fiction novel, so I'm also learning how to write fiction. And in the intersection of those two, I'm just reminded every day that you never arrive. There is always so much more to learn about the world, to learn about people, about history, about relationships. And I love that we can never exhaust learning because of our good God and there's always more to learn.

[00:29:38] Darryl Dash: And what's encouraging you these days, and these are crazy days and arguably very discouraging. What's keeping you encouraged?

[00:29:47] Asheritah Ciuciu: All right, this might sound like a cop out, but the most encouraging thing to me right now is cuddling with my kids.

[00:29:54] Darryl Dash: Not a cop out at all.

[00:29:56] Asheritah Ciuciu: I mean, I read somewhere the research that has to do with how skin-to-skin contact and hugs actually help relieve good feeling hormones in your brain. Not that I needed research to tell me that, but these last few years especially, God has been bringing my heart back closer to home. The importance of serving my husband and my children first before any online ministry or reader on the other side of the page. And so to prioritize that by spending time on the couch, cuddling, tickling, playing games, hearing their stories, that has just brought so much joy to my heart.

[00:30:39] Darryl Dash: That's awesome, I love that answer. That's a great answer. And final question, where can people find out more about your ministry and the book?

[00:30:47] Asheritah Ciuciu: Yeah, so if you're interested in *Prayers of REST*, the website is prayersofrest.com. And like I said, we also have a podcast weekly guided prayers that are shorter than ten minutes. And you can find that on Apple podcast, Spotify, wherever you listen to podcasts, it's called Prayers of Rest. And then everything else ministry-wise, other books and resources that we have, the church, you can find on Asheritah.com, that's just my general website.

[00:31:17] Darryl Dash: Asheritah it has been such a joy to talk to you. I've enjoyed every time we've been able to talk and even today, I'm renewed. I just feel refreshed talking to you and you've helped me a lot, so I really appreciate talking to you. So thank you for joining us, God bless you and your ministry. I'm very grateful for you.

[00:31:33] Asheritah Ciuciu: Darryl, thank you so much for having me. God bless.

[00:31:36] - [Outro] Hey, thanks for listening to the Gospel For Life podcast. If you're interested in growing and helping others grow, please check out our monthly newsletter. Go to gospelforlife.com/newsletter and please don't forget to leave a review of this podcast on your favorite podcast platform.