

{99} [Ashley]

Katie Axelson: Welcome to Have Hope, Will Travel, the show where we get to know people who are different than we are. We hear different perspectives and we better understand others stories. We allow the world to become a smaller place as we stand with people instead of having opinions on issues. I'm your host, Katie Axelson.

Katie Axelson: This week, we're having a hard conversation with Ashley. We're going to talk about child loss. If that's not something that would be a good conversation for you to dive into right now, maybe check out some of the episodes that were most popular in 2023. Episode 77, Authentic Storytelling Meets Spinal Tumor, with Kelsey Pfleiderer.

Katie Axelson: Or episode 81, Finding Freedom in Sexuality and the Church, with Keith Menhinick. Or there are tons of other episodes you can explore, like a hundred of them! Y'all, can you believe this is episode 99? I can't either. All right, let's go. Come on. Welcome to Have Hope, Will Travel. I'm your host, Katie Axelson.

Katie Axelson: Today I'm here with a new friend, Ashley. Ashley and I met through a podcasting group that we are both part of, and she's got a heavy story to share with us. Um, she's interested in sharing the story of how she lost her firstborn son when he was only three months old. So Ashley, thank you so much for coming on the show and thank you for trusting us with your story.

Katie Axelson: I'm sorry that it's something you've gone through, but I'm glad that you're willing to share it with us.

Ashley: Yeah. Thank you for having me.

Katie Axelson: So that was kind of like the high level quick overview of what happened, but I would love to hear a little bit more from your perspective of what that experience was.

Ashley: Oh yeah, most definitely.

Ashley: So, July 21st, 2009 was the day that my life unexpectedly changed forever. I started my day normal, got up, first time mom. I had just returned back to work three weeks prior, and I was getting my son ready for the day. We

typically took him to a home daycare. We were trying to kind of navigate the new dynamics of having a new baby.

Ashley: I had a very irregular schedule. I was at that time a mobile phlebotomist for the blood center here in Austin. And so depending on what my schedule looked like for the week, I kind of made my schedule with my home daycare. And so it was an early morning. I had a busy day that day. I went to go take my son to the daycare and he was still asleep at the time that I dropped him off and I just quickly kissed him goodbye.

Ashley: I pumped a bottle for her because I hadn't fed him yet and I went on my way. The day went on normally and it was at the end of our blood drive that I got a phone call from my director saying, Hey, I'm coming out to the blood drive. I need to speak with you. Um, it'll just be really quick. And I was like, okay.

Ashley: Of course, I'm thinking, what did I do wrong? Did I violate some protocol? And, um, so when we were done packing up, it was a busy blood drive that day and I hadn't had a chance to pump. So I jumped into the back of the van and I pumped really quickly. And when she got there, she said, I need to take you to your son's daycare, something happened.

Ashley: And that's really all she kind of told me at that time. So of course, my heart's racing. Thoughts are going a million miles an hour, and I'm trying my best not to suspect the worst. The drive going to his daycare was the longest drive of my life because she was kind of tense and awkward driving me there, and then I, you know, was a nervous wreck.

Ashley: It wasn't until I turned the corner going into the neighborhood that I realized, um, for me, it's like this image ingrained in my head of seeing down the road yellow caution tape. Uh, and it was then that I knew my son was probably in that house, dead, unfortunately. Um, and so, Everything kind of progressed really quickly.

Ashley: Um, when we got there, I remember falling out of the car into the grass because it had taken so long for them to get ahold of me and try to find me on the blood drive that I was on. My father, who was like the second emergency contact, had gotten there first. And so, I remember falling out of the car into the grass, and he was there kind of to, like, help me up and comfort me.

Ashley: And I just remember yelling and crying in his arms. And it was a very busy, hectic scene because there's police on scene, there's investigators. They

had to contact all the parents for the other kids at the daycare to come pick up their children. There's, you know people that are walking, looking to see what's going on.

Ashley: By the time I had shown up, media crews had already started coming because it was a child's death at a daycare. And so it was just a very busy scene. And I just remember that it was such an It was such a blur. There's key moments that I do remember. Um, I remember when my husband at the time showed up, we kind of met and were just like crying and fell into each other's arms to hold each other.

Ashley: And, It was just us sitting in the grass kind of alone. And that's when it really sunk in of like what was going on. And then I remember, um, the owner of the daycare, who is my best friend's mother and still a huge, a huge part of my life today. She just came over and was like apologizing, apologizing, and just trying to emotionally explain what happened, that they started CPR, they went to go check on him, and he wasn't responsive, he was asleep in the bed, or in the area that he was napping, and When the other baby next to him woke up and it didn't wake my son up, that's when they were like, okay, we need to check on him.

Ashley: And he was unresponsive and not breathing. So they started CPR and unfortunately weren't able to resuscitate him because it was considered an active investigation, we weren't allowed to immediately go in and see our child. They kept us out until they could like, you know, obtain all information before they would let us go in.

Ashley: And then I do remember at one point they had taken both my husband and I two separate vehicles, and investigators questioned us on, like, everything that we did that day, leading up to, like, dropping him off, um, what we did the day before with him. And it almost, in a weird way, felt like this horrific interrogation.

Ashley: And I remember yelling at them at one point, like, why are, at this point, are you asking me these questions? I'm trying to figure out What is going on and why this is all happening and I remember yelling at the investigator But I get it now that that's probably just their protocol and what they have to do So I remember there were people that prayed with us prayed over us there was Strangers and probably people that I knew that they had formed like a human barricade so media wouldn't come on to the property.

Ashley: And now I'm so thankful for that because I can't even imagine like what some of those questions would be like if media had been allowed to come on to the property of, of the staycares home facility. Wow. And so. Then when we were finally allowed to go in, it was, that was tough because they had him perfectly swaddled in like a little Moses basket.

Ashley: There was, that's an image that kind of stays in my head to this day. Um, there was like a little drop of blood coming down from his nose and they had told me that that was from CPR and, um, but other than that, he looked like he was just perfectly asleep and we weren't allowed to touch him. I wasn't allowed to pick him up because they had instructed us prior to going in that because it was at a home daycare at a daycare that they had to do toxicology, they had to do an autopsy and so we weren't allowed to.

Ashley: Touch him or hold him or do anything like that. So we had to go in, say our goodbyes as we like looked at him and go home. And that's when everything starts to sink in. And that's when you're like, okay, the case, the craziness is over. Now what do I do? Yeah. Yeah. So,

Katie Axelson: wow, that's heavy. That's really heavy.

Ashley: It definitely was for sure.

Katie Axelson: So what did the grief journey look like for you?

Ashley: For me, the grief journey, I mean, it was Something I would never have expected it, something I would never wish upon like any parent at any time, but losing a child is something that you never expect to have to go through, especially as a first time parent in your mind, you're like, okay, the natural life cycle is what's going to occur.

Ashley: I'm going to grow old. My child's going to grow up and they're going to have to see me pass, not me deal with the. the casualties of and the emotional pain of losing a child, especially as an innocent little baby. And you're so excited that it's like you're first born. Um, so right after there was definitely different stages right after it was just like, I felt like I was just this empty shell, kind of existing, and the world was just, like, traveling.

Ashley: It almost looks like those scenes in a movie where you're standing still and the whole world is, like, blurred around you, moving a million miles an hour. That's what it felt like for me initially. But then you're also going through

being sleep deprived and just kind of existing, that those first few days leading up to like even his funeral were completely a blur for me.

Ashley: Um, there's definitely moments of complete like agonizing sadness where you're yelling and screaming and crying. I remember so many times just lying in my closet like in a fetal position and just crying and not wanting anyone to touch me, not wanting anyone to be near me, um, not wanting to be consoled or comforted.

Ashley: And then there was moments of anger where I would like Just have loud conversations with God and be angry and mad at him. Like, why, why, how could you do this to me? How could you take an innocent child or how could you take my child out of my life? Um, and then there was moments of like praying and begging and like trying to barter with, like, how could I have him back?

Ashley: Like those unrealistic expectations or desires. Um, there was definitely feelings of. Just wishing that it was like a bad dream that I would wake up from and that it would just all kind of magically disappear, go away. There was, um, feelings of isolation. I am very much an extrovert and there was days where I didn't want to be around anyone, including my husband.

Ashley: I didn't want to be consoled. I didn't want to be comforted. I just wanted to be left alone in my bed. Um, but really I think the stages of grief were the hardest. And this is what I don't think a lot of people realize after, after a few months, when people's lives start going back to normal, you see social media posts of people being happy and, Oh, I'm expecting a new baby. I'm getting married. I just got proposed to and there would be feelings of hatred and disgust and anger towards people that have been a part of your life for so long. And I didn't understand why I felt that way. I wouldn't want to go to social events.

Ashley: I wouldn't want to go to family events. Because I didn't want to accidentally slip up and say something to someone out of like rage or anger because People were putting their lives back together Not necessarily forgetting about my hardship But moving on with their life and I didn't even know Where to begin to pick up the pieces of my puzzle in my life And so for me, it was probably several months after he had passed where you're like How do I move on from this?

Ashley: I can't even begin to heal. Yeah.

Katie Axelson: How did it affect your faith?

Ashley: I think for me, it, it definitely, I've always had a strong faith in terms of believing in God and knowing that There was a God in my life. I was raised, I was raised Catholic from a young age, but for me, this was like the turning point of having more of a relationship with God and being able to allow myself to be angry with him, be vulnerable with him, speak to him and like deeply pray, whereas before growing up as Catholic, as a Catholic, it was like religion and going through those processes of, Being faithful with the church, where this allowed me to kind of deepen that relationship and be more vulnerable with that relationship with God.

Ashley: Um, And know that it was okay to kind of have those hatred feelings and be angry with him, but it was actually my pastor at the time that had said, you know, You know, God didn't, didn't take your son from you. Unfortunately, we grew up in a very imperfect world and it's those circumstances that allow for these things to happen.

Ashley: And I forget how he worded it exactly because the way he worded it was definitely better than what I'm probably wording it, but it was everything that I needed to hear in that time. And so I was like, okay, there, I can still be faithful. I can still have a God that I believe in, um, and still be angry and still be emotional and still feel these raw feelings of pain.

Katie Axelson: Yeah. That's hard. And that's heavy too. And I'm glad that you were able to feel that pain and that it, it drew you closer to God. One of the things that they teach us in pastor school is the only theology that actually stands is what is true at the funeral of a child. And so to know that, like, your pastor was able to offer you comfort and able to offer you truth and grace, um, to help you move forward is

Ashley: huge.

Ashley: Yeah, definitely. He, I mean, we actually have friends now that were not religious or faithful at that time that Being at my son's funeral, they said changed their life and, you know, introduced that relationship of God to them. So it's definitely, and then in the hindsight, it brought our families closer to be more of a blended family.

Ashley: And so there was definitely, you could see those beauties in it for sure. Yeah.

Katie Axelson: What do you wish others knew about child loss?

Ashley: For me, I think it's, Not always having to have something to say to someone that has just recently lost someone, or a child in particular. People would often tell me, like, even at the funeral, and I know they had the best of intentions, but they would say things like, you will get through this.

Ashley: I promise you'll get through this. Or one day you'll be able to move past this. And for me, that's, that's not true. Like I've never moved past it. I've never gotten over it. I kind of put one foot in front of the other one day at a time. And at the very beginning, it was literally like a minute at a time, an hour at a time.

Ashley: Okay. Can I make it to the next day? Because there were days where I just so desperately wanted to be in the casket with my son. I wanted to be dead with him because I didn't want to go on and the days would start passing. And I was like, okay, I got through a day for me. It was. I always use the analogy, it felt like I was down in a trench, in like a thick, muddy, sludgy trench trying to like walk my way through this thick mud and dig myself out.

Ashley: And I felt like I never could. Some days I would move forward, and then some days I would move back. And then it was there's a Christian rock band called Third Day, and there was a song on the radio called "Tunnel," and I heard it for the first time driving, and I literally had to pull over because I was crying so hard.

Ashley: And it's basically talking about how there's a light at the end of the tunnel. And at that time I was like, no, there's not. That's a lie. I can't see a light at all. But then there was a day I remember that I was like, okay, I feel like I can be hopeful. I feel like I can see a light somewhere at the end of some tunnel and then it would go away and then it would come back.

Ashley: And then sometimes it would last for a couple of days where I felt optimistic about the possibility of not moving on, but maybe moving forward. And those days started becoming more and more frequent to the point where eventually I was able to talk to people about or talk to my husband at the time about the possibility of what does moving forward look like.

Ashley: And of course there was definitely assistance with getting to the point of realizing that I needed outside assistance with therapy. Um, and so I sought out a Christian based therapist that we both went to and she was a lifesaver. She really was.

Katie Axelson: That's awesome. I'm glad that you had that support system even if it took you a while to get there.

Katie Axelson: So you talked a little bit about what people have done and said that were not supportive but intended to be. What are some other things that are supportive or things that may be well intentioned but are not supportive?

Ashley: I think what I've told people I'd love for people to realize when they're supporting someone in grief after loss is it's the little things.

Ashley: It's the very simple things that mean the world. People just being present, like you don't need to say words, you don't need to offer a life advice piece of insight. Sometimes it was just those long hugs because I didn't have the energy to entertain conversation for quite a while. I didn't want to have to process your words or I didn't want to have to say something to someone to spark up a conversation.

Ashley: It was those silent long hugs that meant everything. And then months later, when, people were moving on with their lives, it was just the quick text messages or messages like on social media, just thinking about you. Hope you're having a great day. That allowed me to realize, okay, people are still thinking about me.

Ashley: And then the support of knowing that you're true friends understood and knew that you may not be a great friend in that time. I, I was, I missed so many life events in people's lives, weddings, birth, birthing of like children, family events, holidays, because I just couldn't bring myself to go and pretend to be happy for other people.

Ashley: And so when people understood that, that was a huge support. When they were still there for me as a friend or as a family member knowing that I just couldn't be present that was a huge support. Yeah, and then in terms of what was not so supportive or what wasn't very helpful helpful is those comforting words that people tried to put on to you or provide words of wisdom That was always tough because either one, they wanted a response and they wanted to engage in conversation and I didn't have the mental capacity to do it, or their words would almost feel insulting.

Ashley: And so I would be angry with them and usually just kind of walk away because I didn't want to entertain those conversations even though I knew that they had great intentions.

Katie Axelson: Yeah, that's really hard. We a lot of times feel like we have to say something and it's really the Ministry of Presence that makes a difference.

Katie Axelson: For sure. So, now that it's been a while and you're obviously not in the acute part of grieving, how do you keep aspects of your child's life alive or remember him?

Ashley: For me that is the easiest part. I kind of knew that I couldn't let his memory die because for me then that was yet another piece of him dying.

Ashley: Um, And so it took me a while to get to those next phases, I think. So he passed away in July of 2009. We moved forward with adopting a dog in February of 2010 because I wasn't ready to entertain the conversation of Um, and I want to have children again. And then eventually a couple of months later, we started looking at those aspects and now I have four beautiful boys.

Ashley: So I always tell people I have five boys. And so that kind of, even with strangers starts that conversation where people are like, oh, well, where's your fifth son? And then I will gladly tell him, oh, well, my oldest son passed away when he was three months old. And once you get past kind of that initial awkwardness of people being like.

Ashley: Oh, I'm so sorry. I can't even imagine how you went through that. That's when I start to like share his story and with here in our home with my boys, there's pictures up of their big brother. They know about their big brother. They know they have a brother in heaven. I go and I don't like to call it the cemetery because it just sounds like such a negative word.

Ashley: So we call it the field of angels. And so I go and I take flowers. Kind of by myself, because for me, that's not where I feel his presence or peace. It's kind of a quiet place for me to pray or meditate or just be present in silence. Because with a life of four boys and I homeschool, it can be very chaotic.

Ashley: And so sometimes I just go to be there in my thoughts and pray. Um, and then I take flowers out there. We always celebrate his birthday. That's the hardest time of the year is kind of the countdown of when he passed, but I, we talk about it. And I, I talk about my feelings with the boys. If they see me cry about something pertaining to their brother, Joseph, um, we talk about it.

Ashley: And so I love keeping those stories alive and I love sharing his story and that's where more recently I've been called to use his story or that. That process of grieving and getting through it in such a resilient way to potentially hopefully one day help others getting through the grief of losing a child because it is, it's a struggle.

Ashley: We all grieve differently. There was days that I felt like I was going crazy because my husband had gone back to work and was like muscling through it, and I couldn't even, I couldn't even function. Um, so there was days that I felt like I was crazy and. It, it was a tough time and so now kind of knowing that I've had a beautiful life post losing a child and that there was the possibility of loving more children again, I knew that that was something, a beautiful struggle that I went through that I hoped to share in the future with others.

Ashley: Yeah.

Katie Axelson: And I want to highlight something that I think I heard you say is like grief has changed. It hasn't gone away. It just looks different now. Is that accurate?

Ashley: Yes, most definitely. Um, you know, it becomes easier to kind of navigate. I definitely with, you know, years of therapy and my newer therapist have been able to kind of hone in on how those changes have occurred because for me, I didn't realize that after having more children there was this sense of like being paranoid of the possibility occurring again.

Ashley: So it kind of almost manifested in being hyper sensitive of what my boys call being a helicopter mom, where I wouldn't let them do things because I was so scared of potentially something happening to one of them. And so that is actually, I guess, a later stage that I've worked through with my now therapist, um, on how Those aspects of grief affected me or sometimes still affect me as a parent today.

Ashley: Um, but yeah, it definitely was kind of this evolving thing, realizing and understanding that one as individuals, we all agree very differently. And I had to accept that and embrace that because there would be times of anger where I would yell at my husband and tell him like, how could you not be crying?

Ashley: How could you not, just be here and not do anything. How could you go back to work? And it was just, I guess, as the male role, he felt the need to kind of muscle through and be strong for me. And it was just simply the fact that we grieve very differently as individuals.

Katie Axelson: Yeah, that's so real. And we do all grieve differently.

Katie Axelson: And so it is a matter of having grace for yourself and the people around you and realizing that just because their life looks different and their grief looks different than yours doesn't mean the grief isn't there. Correct, yeah. What have I not asked you that you want to

Ashley: talk about? I think for me it's not being too, because there was moments where I felt like I was too prideful to be honest with myself about how I felt in those times, where you feel the pressure of putting on a facade.

Ashley: You have to show people that you're getting through this. You have to show people that you are moving forward. You have to entertain people's desires of wanting to see you in a happy place. And I wish in hindsight that I would have just been okay with. Not having to do that sometimes, like, oh, I've got to, you know, get dressed.

Ashley: I've got to put my makeup on. I've got to go to this family event. And that was a struggle because I, in some ways, didn't allow myself that time to just be emotionally vulnerable and be okay with being a mess. But I did also know very early on, I didn't want to medicate. I didn't want to take antidepressants.

Ashley: I know that that's a great avenue for some, but I I wanted to feel the rawness of those emotions. I wanted to try to deeply understand what I was feeling and why. Um, and so there was pros and cons to both, to do that for sure. There was sleepless nights, there was, Not eating. There was my habits when I deal with my emotions is overeating.

Ashley: So there was days where I would just binge and eat and absentmindedly put everything into my body. I had put on quite a bit of weight and then didn't deal with that. Um, so there's so many different, I guess, ripple effects that occur with grief that you don't. truly understand until I think looking back on it when you're starting to kind of be on the other side of that storm.

Katie Axelson: Wow. That's so powerful too, to be able to hear this is what worked for me, this is what didn't work for me, and this is why I made the choices that I made. Um, do you feel like you handled the grief, the different aspects of grief well, or do you feel like you would do things differently in hindsight?

Ashley: I don't know if I could wish that I would have done things differently because when you're in that situation trying to navigate something for the first time, you're trying to do whatever you think might be best in that time.

Ashley: Um, looking back, I probably would have started therapy a little bit sooner. However, I think it all happened the way that it happened for a reason. I gave myself that time to kind of just be an emotional mess. Um. But I also knew, I guess, my limits and my boundaries. Like, if it got to the point where I wasn't sleeping for days on end, if it got to the point where I couldn't get out of bed and, like, brush my teeth, then maybe I needed more assistance.

Ashley: And, I mean, early on, I would still make myself do those things, but then sometimes I would return back to bed. Um, so, for me, it was a, it was a journey. It was a learning process. It was an understanding process. It was But it was also being able to prove to myself, because when I've shared the story years later with so many loved ones, friends, family, strangers, I get people telling me all the time, you are so resilient.

Ashley: There's no way we would have ever been able to handle it the way that you've handled it with so much grace. And at that time, I didn't see it that way. I still sometimes don't see it that way. But now, as a woman that has gone through that, it makes you feel kind of In a special way, more powerful in what you know you can get through as a person.

Katie Axelson: Oh, I'm sure. Because you know that you've already experienced probably the worst. Mm hmm. And you've gone through it.

Ashley: The one downside I will say that I do still struggle with sometimes, and I guess it's not a downside, it's just the reality of how life works sometimes, is I told my therapist a while back it's almost the feeling of being robbed of the opportunity to grieve death after losing a child because nothing, nothing compares.

Ashley: Nothing compares to losing something that was a part of you, that you grew inside you, that you felt their heartbeat inside you. And so post, I've lost relatives, I've lost grandparents, I've lost aunts and uncles. I don't, you're almost kind of numb to, to losing other people in life. It's definitely emotional and it's definitely sad, but nothing compares.

Ashley: Um, so in some ways I feel like I, I'm not able to grieve. The same way, uh, after losing a child. Yeah,

Katie Axelson: wow. That's something I would not have thought of, but I could believe it. I understand it, now that you mention it. Do you know of any good resources for someone who may be experiencing child loss or may be walking through child loss with a friend?

Ashley: Yeah, there's so many, depending on where you live in state, city, it's, I mean, that's the beauty of having everything kind of at our finger, fingertips with internet is you can search support groups. You can call local churches. If you're looking for more of a Christian based support group. There's non religious support groups, but there's so many free support groups out there.

Ashley: There's, volunteer opportunities that before COVID I was a part of where it's like a grief line where they can call. And at any time of the night you have like a rotating system where people will call you back and just kind of sit and listen and talk. If you want them to talk or offer support from someone that has gone through it if that's what you want, but sometimes it's just listening to someone cry.

Ashley: Um, and then I've also had people that have personally connected me with others that have lost children and so then in some ways it's like that ripple effect where they reach out to you and ask like, how did you get through this? And there may be just like a month out from losing their child. So there, there are, there are a lot of resources out there.

Ashley: It's definitely not something that you have to go through alone or just with like your immediate support system. It helped so much having, and honestly I didn't utilize it as much as I probably should have after losing my child, after losing my son. But. There's something different about having support from someone that has gone through it versus someone that's trying to support you that doesn't know where you're coming from.

Katie Axelson: Yeah. No, there's power in that and being in a room with people who understand because they've experienced what you've experienced or similar experiences, whether that be a physical room or the other side of a phone. For sure. Ashley, would you be willing to pray for us?

Ashley: Yes, for sure. Heavenly Father, thank you for The beauty around us.

Ashley: Thank you for everything that you give us, the beauties of life, the journeys that we go through, the struggles that we go through, because at the end of the day, even though you may be in the thick of a storm and you don't see the end of going through this storm, putting your faith and trust in God and allowing him to carry you through those.

Ashley: hard times truly is a beautiful journey. It's a hard journey and it's a journey that sometimes I know we don't wish on others. But being on the other side of it, there is beauty past that. And thank you, Father, for just giving us that

grace of understanding and knowing that even if it's just you getting us through the next minute, the next hour, the next day, the next week, that with you beside us, we can get through that.

Ashley: You've given us the grace and the beauty of Knowing what you've created in us, you have woven us together, Father, and you know the journeys that we will go through in our life. And so I thank you for the gift that you've given us. I thank you for the gift that you've given others. And if this is a journey that other people have to go through, I pray that they can find you, that they can find your peace and comfort, that they can be angry with you and vulnerable with you and know that You are a loving God and you are our creator and that you are going to forgive and love and wrap your arms around them.

Ashley: In your name we pray. Amen.

Katie Axelson: Amen. Thank you. I love hearing people pray because I love hearing them connect with God, especially when we've just spent time talking about the hard parts of their story to hear them come. To the feet of God the Father and to say, Hey, thank you. I love you. Um, and just to get to, to experience that intimacy with him.

Katie Axelson: So thank you for sharing that with us.

Ashley: You're welcome. That is definitely newer for me because again, growing up Catholic, it was like you had prayers you had to say. So being able to have a deeper conversation with God. That's actually probably, it's been a long journey since losing my son, but it's definitely grown the last couple of years for sure.

Katie Axelson: Wow. What has helped it grow?

Ashley: Finding myself. Um, you know, I think we have ebbs and flows of life. And so after losing Joseph, moving into having kids very quickly back to back going through struggles and journeys with my now ex husband. Um, I had lost myself even after losing my son. I had kind of lost myself in the thick of life.

Ashley: And so it was rediscovering myself and my strength and following and like really kind of letting God unravel me and kind of bring me back down to my foundation and core to start rebuilding in a way that I never knew was possible.

Katie Axelson: Wow. It's beautiful that you've been able to rebuild that too.

Ashley: Still a process.

Ashley: I guess it's always a process. Always a process.

Katie Axelson: We're all in the process for sure. Yeah. Because the show is built around the idea that we're always learning from somebody else's perspective, it's always fun to get to hear what people have learned. So I would love to know what something you've learned recently, doesn't have to be about child loss or any of your experiences, it can be whatever

Ashley: you want.

Ashley: Something I've learned recently is just recently going through a divorce and being able to kind of find myself again. So in the last couple years, I've gone through gastric surgery. So I've lost almost 120 pounds. Um, finding myself and being okay with, it's okay to be not selfish, but follow God's calling in a way that you don't have to feel guilty about pursuing that for yourself.

Ashley: Um, you know, there was always the worries and fears because I homeschool and I'm an at home mom that That was my life. I couldn't have a faith filled career or journey in pursuing something that I felt called to pursue. And I've learned that it's okay. It's okay because if you're doing it for the right reasons, and God is a part of that, He's gonna find a way to allow you to have and wear those many hats.

Ashley: That's really good. Yeah.

Katie Axelson: Ashley, thank you so much for sharing your story with us, for trusting us with it, for being vulnerable. Um, and admitting this is hard. Um, I think we all would have known that from the beginning. But to be able to, um, walk through the summary of it with you has meant a lot to me. So thank you so much.

Katie Axelson: Thank you for

Ashley: having me. This was really exciting. I was nervous, but very excited. You did a great job. Thank you.

Katie Axelson: As always, a big thanks for listening. I hope hearing Ashley's perspective was both challenging and insightful. She mentioned a couple of things that we have talked about in other episodes as well.

Katie Axelson: So if you're looking for something to listen to next, She mentioned her divorce, and we heard Sarah's perspective on divorce in the church in episode 97. She also mentioned Catholicism, which Carrie educated us on in episode 89. Be sure to check those out. If you haven't already, hit subscribe so you don't miss episode 100, which is coming next.

Katie Axelson: Oh my goodness. I can't believe 100 is finally here. I have been looking forward to episode 100 for, um, a very long time, like, Since episode, I don't know, maybe 24 or 25, I have had my plan for episode 100. So I'd be sure to hit subscribe. On a personal note, I've been considering doing more writing. And if that's content you miss from me, could you let me know by subscribing at katieaxelson.

Katie Axelson: com? That's where information is always announced first. If being an email friend is a little bit bigger of a commitment than you want to do right now, let's at least connect on Instagram. That's where information is announced. Second. And where I show up the most often. Till I see you next, my friend, know that you are loved, know that you are seen, know that you are cared for, and I will see you again soon with episode 100.