

Denise:

Hi, and welcome to your Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast. I'm Denise Beck here, joined with Sarah Hilkemann. Hey, Sarah.

Sarah H:

Hey, welcome everyone.

Denise:

And this month we're so excited to bring you a Living Legacy story. You are in for a treat. Sarah Hilkemann and I just sat with a dear friend of ours, Sarah Yardley. And Sarah Yardley is an amazing woman serving in the UK. She's the mission leader for Creation Fest. She regularly contributes to Lectio 365. She's written a book called *More Change, About Change*, which is lovely 'cause it's our theme for this month. And we are so excited for you to get to hear this amazing interview with Sarah Yardley. Sarah Hilkemann, what would, what, what, what do you want people to be excited about? What, what, what did you take away from this?

Sarah H:

Oh, goodness. I was just so encouraged by Sarah's heart for Jesus, one, and the people that she is serving among. But also, there are so many points where I was like, this, this is why we do this podcast. This is all about, um, legacy and pouring into people and the people that pour into us, and the ways that we can also then cheer other people on. And Sarah Yardley just did, um, and does an amazing job of that. So I'm so excited for people to hear what all that she has to say.

Denise:

You are gonna be inspired by this conversation and we just, we just encourage you to sit back and enjoy this month's Velvet Ashes Living Legacy Podcast.

Denise:

Hey, welcome to your Velvet Ashes Legacy podcast. This month we are joined with Sarah Yardley by Sarah Yardley. Hey, Sarah, so glad to have you with us today.

Sarah Yardley:

It's such a joy.

Denise:

Um, so I just need to, I just need to also bring to mind that there are two Sarahs on this call, so be prepared to be confused. Sarah Hilkemann is also with us today, so, um, lovely to be here for this conversation. Just a reminder to everybody, this is our Velvet Ashes Living Legacy story. So we are joined with Sarah just because we are inspired and encouraged by the work that she is doing over the all over the world. But, Sarah, a little bit about yourself. Um, I just wanna say how we met because I think that's such a fun story. Um, do you remember, do you remember, Sarah?

Sarah Yardley:

I feel like it's one of my most interesting and fun stories. And when you first sent me the email reminding me about our Africa encounter, I was like, surely not, surely not possible, but you tell it because the details will be fresher for you. And I, I marvel every time I hear it.

Denise:

Isn't it so funny? So we, uh, my family served in Uganda and South Sudan for a time, and this was so many years ago, back in 2010 maybe. Um, we had gone, we had gone on a safari in Uganda and you happened to be on our group. And we, um, you were so outgoing and kind and generous to my family and my children who thought you were amazing. And you took this picture of us, actually. 'cause I think maybe you were in the car behind us or something, and you took a picture of us that as we were like driving through or whatever, and you sent it to us. And, and forever that was like our profile picture as a family. And so, and so, this was just this fun encounter. And then I think years later I was friends with someone who actually I believe works with you sometimes or had in the past with Creation Fest doing a skateboarding ministry, and they happened to be with you. And I was like, Sarah Yardley, is that the same <laugh> Sarah Yardley from the Safari all of those years ago? So there was this really sweet reconnection of our stories and so, so enjoyed almost following where the Lord has taken you. Because back then this was not the work you were doing.

Sarah Yardley:

No, back then I was on, I was on just like my little trip to Uganda, first time going to Africa. Um, it's that fun moment, isn't it? And I think this is one of the realities of all of our lives following Jesus. It's very rarely that we know a moment is significant in the midst of it. Um, but often kind of the sparkle of the Holy Spirit and the joy of his presence kind of transforms these moments that are unexpected. So I think at the time that I took the picture, I don't think I knew that you guys were serving in that way. I don't think I knew much about your story, but I love taking family pictures. And so I was just doing all the things that caused joy or delight for me. Um, and then obviously we connected over email and stayed connected. And I often just laugh at the kindness of Jesus and the way that, um, friendship and relationship and these organic moments of just faithfully doing the next thing next are multiplied and expanded in the kingdom of God.

Denise:

Amen. Oh, I love that. Okay. But Sarah, let's just tell everybody what is it that you are doing now?

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah, absolutely. So I serve as a full-time missionary in the UK. I've been here for 10 years now. Um, but as anyone who does 21st century cross-cultural mission work in an English speaking country, knows Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, I do not introduce myself in most contexts as a missionary, uh, in the UK it immediately leads to a somewhat crude joke, actually, <laugh> Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And, uh, then for those who are Christians, there can even sometimes be a bit of a sense of defensiveness around, well, we, we don't need missionaries to come here. We send missionaries out. And I think one of the beautiful things about a life lived on mission is that it's actually the call of every follower of Jesus. We're all called to be the sent out ones who carry and announce and demonstrate the story of the good news of Jesus Christ. Um, and 10 years of living in the UK later, much of my life looks like a combination of daily faithfulness.

Sarah Yardley:

So sometimes that's, uh, emails and doing the dishes and just loving my neighbors really well. It looks like a reasonable amount of communication. So I get to do a, a, an amount of both teaching, preaching, conversations, mentoring, discipleship, um, one-on-one Bible studies, just spaces where we're encountering God together in his word. And then I also get to do the occasional really unusual type of outreach event. So every summer put on a large scale festival. I mean, that's a lot of fun. It, it's skate parks and music and arts, big tops. But alongside that, I would just say I'm always looking for ways that I can creatively share the gospel of Jesus. And in the last two years, that has looked like a lot of meals, that's looked like a lot of conversations around a table where I'm intentionally inviting my friends, my local community, my baristas, uh, the people who work in my local grocery store and just saying, do you wanna come around for a meal?

Sarah Yardley:

And, uh, those who are around me know that Jesus is at the center of all that I do. And yet that I'm also with them for the long story. I think one of the interesting things about anyone living a missional lifestyle is that we love to tell the, the big stories, right? Like the triumphant someone's been set free and their lives have been changed forever. But even right before recording this podcast, I was with a longtime friend, doesn't yet know Christ, and she was just saying, you know what? I'm sad all the time. I just doom scroll on Instagram.

Sarah Yardley:

I see all the ways that my life has no purpose or meaning. And I was just able to speak to her about, um, considering beginning to pray about the fact that my meaning in life doesn't come because I know who I am, but it becomes because I know that I'm loved by God, that the burdens of the universe, which are quite heavy and tiresome aren't mine to carry. But that in prayer, I begin a conversation with a God who loves me and cares about me. And then she shrugged her shoulders and said, that's not really for me right now. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But so much of our missional life is like that, isn't it? It's just walking with and planting seeds, um, both in the big beautiful moments and in the ordinary everyday one.

Denise:

Sarah, I was actually, it's interesting you bring up, you know, just that tension of working in a post-Christian culture as an American and wondered like, have you gotten pushback as an American, you know, not just as a Christian, but as an American being there?

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah, absolutely. Do you know, I think one of the interesting things is that my first three years living in the UK I had real loneliness, real challenge. I kind of felt like I was like pushing a rock uphill and knocking on doors saying, can we be friends? Can we be friends? Can we be friends? And, and I think I needed to live through a little bit of that one to soften some of my cultural gaffs. Like as an American, you sometimes can come in slightly too loud, slightly too strong, and slightly too proud. I like that that is the reality, or at least it was for me. So I think I needed to live through that experience in so many ways. But I think the second thing that that gave me the space for, and I think we talked a little bit about loneliness on a previous conversation, is it gave me the space to experience a little bit of genuine loneliness and isolation.

Sarah Yardley:

And I don't believe anyone is meant to live in that space for the long haul. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. But in a country that is surrounded by a deep epidemic of loneliness, a deep sense of isolation, I think the Holy Spirit used that time to give me a space to relate to the culture in which I live. So I, I would say at least once a week, maybe once a day, someone quote, makes fun of me for being American, but I probably choose to and genuinely hear the endearment of that. So, um, I, I did a podcast recording not too long ago where, um, the British recorder said, you know, Sarah, you sign off your emails With Joy, but do you actually mean that <laugh>? And, um, so I think there's like that little bit of a, is that just your American over enthusiasm.

Denise:

Yeah.

Sarah Yardley:

So I don't hear it any longer with aggression. I hear it with recognizing you've chosen and, and made yourself at home here, and yet you still carry some of the marks of the culture from which you came.

Denise:

I love that. And the, and the 10 years, I mean, just longevity itself speaks something that only longevity can speak, you know? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>.

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah. Absolutely. And, and as many of the listeners here are living in places where they've chosen to commit, I try to also guard against a spiritual pride for those who do come and serve in a place for a shorter period of time or for a specific purpose, because there's a real gift in that as well. But if there's anyone listening who's thinking about what would it look like to commit a longer time or space, I would just say that as one of our themes is legacy. Um, so many of the beautiful stories that I could tell from this past year wouldn't be fully possible if I hadn't cultivated the years of relationship, or wouldn't be perhaps as sweet or wouldn't be as deep as if we hadn't had all of that time to journey together. And I think that one of the beautiful things about being called to long-term missional work is to say that I'm with you in the high points. I'm with you in the low points, and I'm not planning to leave you. And even as my time now has taken me into more and more travel, I do try to really root myself locally at the times that I am home. And just recognize that so much of what we get to do in gospel mission is be rooted in a place and really have the deep sense of home and belonging in the place that God calls us to.

Denise:

I have lots that I can say Sarah Hilkeman, but I want you to hop in as well. <laugh>.

Sarah H:

Yeah, absolutely.

Sarah H:

Well, Sarah, can we go back? I would love to hear did you grow up thinking about being a missionary? Like, um, was this something that you felt like God was calling you to when you were young? What did that look like?

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah, absolutely. Our younger years are so interesting, isn't it? Aren't they? Because, um, we're, we're like the fragile versions of ourselves. We're slightly unformed. And I've, um, been thinking a lot about this idea of legacy and lineage. I'm working on a lineage piece that I'm gonna publish publicly. And in my younger years, I think a combination of deep insecurity alongside a lack of prophetic imagination meant that in some ways I never would've dreamed of being the kind of person who would move to another country by themselves in order to do public Christian work, like just not on my radar. Um, and alongside that, in the beauty and kindness of Jesus and having praying parents, I was so well prepared for international mission work. I mean, my mom had us read every missionary biography known to man. I, I think I actually feel that I knew Amy Carmichael and Isabelle Kuhn, Hudson Taylor, and George Mueller, like they were my companions. And it was funny because both, uh, myself and one of my siblings, we, we both serve in international mission. And, um, my mom was slightly surprised when we both told her that we were moving. And we were like, but mom, you've prepared us for this our whole life.

Denise:

Amen.

Sarah Yardley:

We, we, we had both the model and the infusion and the preparation. So I would say my answer to that question, Sarah, is both, um, no, I didn't have it on my dream radar. And yet when I look back, I can see, oh, Jesus first prepared me in this way and in this way, and in this way, and in that sense, I already had a, a prophetic suitcase filled with so many of the things that I needed. I just didn't even know how well and how kindly God had prepared me. Hmm.

Denise:

Yeah. I, I love that. I, I was talking with a woman recently who described, you know, your life as this in your younger years as this big funnel and all of these random things are being put into that. And the joys, when you see them all come together into the shape that God has for you, and it's just, it doesn't make sense sometimes all of the things that are getting put in there until he brings it down to this is what I had for you. So that speaks totally right into that as well. Uh, so, so Sarah, tell us a little bit about the process then. It's not on your radar, and yet you've been 10 years in the UK and I ran into you on a short term trip. So fill in the, fill in the gaps.

Sarah Yardley:

Fill in the gaps. No, that, that's a great question. So in that sense of the, the funnel and the, uh, the preparation pieces and all the ones you didn't see, I was working at a church called Calvary Chapel, which is based in Southern California. Um, if you've seen the Jesus Revolution movie, you've maybe seen a little bit of my spiritual birthplace. And as part of my time in that, um, role, I had started to lead international trips for young people. So Denise, the trip that we met each other with in Africa was actually a scouting trip for me. Um, it was myself and two other young people and the superintendent of our school. So what a what a combination that was, um, it was my first time being offered a flying ant as a snack with the particularly nutty flavor as a real delicacy. So, um, they said, you know, just pick the ants wings off the body and then eat the body.

Denise:

Just pick them off. Yes. <laugh>

Sarah Yardley:

I was definitely culturally unprepared with my Orange Country background.

Denise:

That was when you formulated your, with joy ending, you're like, in all things with joy, even flying ants.

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah. I can't think of a more intentional choice than in this moment.

Denise:

Right. So, right.

Sarah Yardley:

Um, so I spent a number of years leading these short-term mission trips. And, um, those teams of young people, gosh, what a beautiful opportunity to be part of a formative moment for a teenager. For most of them, it wasn't just their first real spiritual formative moment, it was also their first time outside of the country. So, man, I, I look back now and I think I don't, I I'm, Bless God, that in my twenties I had the energy for that. I don't know that I could go back to that same level of energy and time. Um, but along the course of that time, one of the places I began to return to was England. And, um, the, the UK has held a really special space in my heart for a long time. Went in 2009 for the first time and actually just promised two five-year-olds that I would come back and visit them the next year. And I try to be a woman who keeps my promises. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> and these two five year olds are now 21 and still my friends. And they were just darling. Cutest little accent you've ever heard.

Denise:

Oh, absolutely.

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah, I, I felt compelled to return and, um, perhaps anyone listening might relate to this. It was less that I had this strategic plan, I will move to England and more that as I visited on an annual basis and developed relationships and began to identify with that community, um, I just thought, this is a place I'm really invested in. Now, my calling to live in England was strange in that I had come over thinking I was coming for a summer trip. I had a suitcase of clothing, and the previous leader of the charity that I now lead passed away quite suddenly. And I felt God's prophetic specific call to stay, uh, quite deeply linked to Isaiah 49. God's calling is on you from birth, from the body of your mother. He has named you by name. He's made his word in your mouth like a sharp sword.

Sarah Yardley:

He's calling you to bring light to the nations and salvation to the ends of the earth. And so I really just remember writing in my Bible, God, are you calling me to Cornwall, to the coast line of Cornwall. And then the next, um, two weeks, someone came and prayed that particular passage of scripture over me. And it's quite an obscure passage. Isaiah 49 is not one we pray over one another on a regular basis. And so that was, um, in 2014. And one of the things that I would just say really clearly is I did not in 2014 know what I was saying yes to. Did not know that I was saying yes to 10 years. And if I had known, I think

I would've said, no, thank you, Jesus. You can choose someone else. Um, so that sense of like a long obedience in the same direction,

Sarah Yardley:

Mine would've been primarily towards Christ and England was the vehicle that God has enabled, entrusted, and gifted me with. And I would even say now, as I look at the next 40 years, I don't know whether or not I'll continue to be in England, but wherever and however I go in the future, this will be a core and definitive part of my story and journey. And so I've had friends who've been called to a country for absolute life, and I just honor that with such a deep sense of like love and affection. I have a, a sense more that I'm following Jesus mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And that I know that England is the place that he's calling me to follow him. And so I'm, I'm looking at that and saying, okay, wherever I am, Jesus, may I be faithful to you. Um, and 10 years back, I do look back and think, oh, it has been harder than I ever imagined and sweeter than I could have ever dreamed. I think something about the Christian life and experience holds both of these two, doesn't it? Like, oh, there's been such costly sacrificial suffering, and yet the promise and the fruit and the joy is sweeter than I could have ever dreamed.

Sarah H:

Hmm. Well, Sarah, my introduction to you was when you shared for the Velvet Ashes singles gathering, and I just have been so encouraged by what you shared then, but also then just following you on social media and some of the things you have shared about serving single. Um, and so would you speak to that a little bit, how you mentioned kind of the season of loneliness, but how have you seen God's faithfulness specifically in serving single?

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah, absolutely. Um, I actually, I love to talk about this, not because I'm like, I wanna talk about being single, but because I think there are some topics that feel slightly taboo within Christian community or overly tender. And I always want to allow my life to be a parable of hope or encouragement to those who might relate to either personally or even be working alongside single women. Um, so my personal journey is that I'm 40 years old. I am happily single. I have never even had so much as a boyfriend. And, um, there's been some beautiful stories of kind of love and loss and longing along the way, but, um, there's never been a partner accompanying me in that journey. And I think one of the fascinating things is, listeners will come from all sorts of different stages, but if anyone listening grew up in like Christian purity, evangelical culture Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, like if we kissed dating goodbye,

Sarah Yardley:

Maybe like had some other implications around that. I think that one of the things I'm really just happy to share is, um, the unpicking and detangling of some of the actual quite toxic elements of that culture. Like the ways that often women felt like there was only one pathway and that pathway was through a partner. And other than that pathway, you're not really in ministry or even the implications for a lot of my friends around shame towards their bodies, uh, shame towards certain types of clothing or certain types of appearance. Um, I think that one of the things I would just say to anyone listening is that that is not what the Holy Spirit has for any of us who created an identity for relationship with God who loves and celebrates all that we are. And so that there's this space of maybe being able to healthily detach some of the tendrils of a culture that created one framework for what it looked like to be a Christian woman.

Sarah Yardley:

I still remember in my twenties reading like a Proverbs 31 woman Bible study and being like, none of this applies to me. Mm-Hmm. I don't have a husband that I'm cooking dinner for. I don't have, like, I went through the list and I now actually have a sense of, um, of sadness for that chapter because I think, goodness, Proverbs 31 says a lot more than be a good wife. Like it actually speaks about this radically bold, courageous spirit led businesswoman. Why did we somehow make it all about one part of relationship? So anyway, clearly I'm on my little bit of a preaching bandwagon here. Yeah,

Denise:

No, no. The branding was strong with that verse.

Sarah Yardley:

The branding was strong. All the handkerchiefs, all the backpacks.

Sarah Yardley:

Um, so I would just say that as a 40 year old single woman, I feel really content that there's a real sense of one deep relationship with Jesus that has given me the gift of an intimacy with Christ as my primary partner in life. That has been beautiful. Uh, two, and I don't say this in a cheap or a trite way. As a single woman, I have been able to operate in more broad, more geographical, more free ministry than I ever could have if I had been in the same stage of life at the same time as having a rooted partner or children. I celebrate the good of that, but I can recognize that it's been gift in my life to have that sense of freedom. And thirdly, I think I'm just so grateful that God has given me church communities and Christian friends who have celebrated me in my singleness. I've gotten increasingly sassy at some of like the Christian lines, like, oh, you're still single, but you're so pretty. And I'm like, I'll be increasingly sassy and give a little kind of like loving snapbacks at some of those, um, unhelpful comments that create this framework of like, oh, you're single, but you're not ugly. I'm like, what, what are you saying about the single individuals in your church?

Sarah Yardley:

But alongside that, I, I do just really try to celebrate the, the life that God has invited me into, that at least for this moment, it is still a moment of singleness and that Jesus' kindness, his love, his presence, his favor toward me. And I try to cultivate that as well with the communities that I live in just normalizing Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> that being a single woman and loving Jesus and leading well, um, is something that we should all be able to celebrate together.

Sarah H:

Yeah. I love that. Are there specific things that people have done either, um, people in, you know, the US, in your passport country, um, people around you, local friends that have really encouraged you? Are there things that they've done that have made you feel really supported specifically as a single?

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah. Do you know what, that's a great question. I actually don't think I've ever been asked it in that specific way before. Um, I think probably the, the initial answer that just springs back is just that I feel broadly welcomed. Mm-Hmm. And I know that that hasn't been the case for every single woman. So if you're listening here today, and it's been a particular pain for you to feel unwelcome as a single



individual, I know that that is quite common. And I don't want to gloss over that pain. I pray the presence of the Holy Spirit with you in that. Um, but I would say in my experience, I've had spectacular community both in friendship and in local church. And I think that has really helped lessen it. One of the things I'm really aware of as I age is that I need to forge not just intentional, but honest friendships, because when you're in a marriage partnership, you're rubbing against someone every day.

Sarah Yardley:

And man, there's some beautiful, and then there's some challenging moments of it, but it means that somebody is honest enough to reflect back to you, oh, here's some growth areas. I'm sure that everyone always hear that as kindly as that. Versus I think when you're a single woman <laugh>, you can end up in a slightly siloed perspective. Um, and so I've tried to cultivate not just like intentional, but really honest friendships, friends who will say to me, Sarah, the way you said that was a bit sharp. Because sometimes we actually are hesitant to have those kinds of friendships. And, um, I think one of the greatest lacks I have is the, the person who sees me through every chapter and can speak to me with honesty. But alongside that, I would just say that, um, probably the way I feel most welcomed and most cheered is the fact that in my current community, it isn't made awkward or weird that I'm a single woman.

Sarah Yardley:

And that both the men and the women in my community treat me with genuine companionship. Think one of the real legacies sometimes of that purity culture mindset is you can't be friends with a man once they're married. And I do think there needs to be honor in our male friendships and transparency and, um, wisdom. But if I wasn't allowed to be friends with married men, I probably wouldn't have many men in my life. Mm-Hmm. And I'm so grateful that so many of my longtime and newer friends have invited me into friendship with both parts of a partner, and I feel really cheered and championed by both the women and by the men in my life.

Denise:

Mm-Hmm. Yeah. Thanks for sharing that. I'm so encouraged to hear that. I love, I love hearing about how can we encourage, walk with and be there for our single women that are on the field and serving in those ways because they're, they are a force to be reckoned with. And sometimes I think when we have these kid gloves on and we don't know how to interact and have these conversations, we're just doing a disservice to an army of women who are out there just trying to follow God's call in the place that they're in. So, I love, love, love these conversations with you, Sarah. Another area that you're in serving has to do with young people. In fact, one call, we were on with you previously. You had someone in there in the middle of the call and you were working with them and talking with them, and it's just, this is your life. You are in it with young people. What, you know, what are you seeing as far as the biggest challenges? I mean, just to be real honest, moving forward, missions and missionaries, we're coming upon this real crossroads of, even in Christian circles, there's questions of is it ethical to, to push your opinion about Christ on someone else? Mm-Hmm. And, and so what, what are you finding, you know, in your fields with Christian and non-Christian youth that you're working with?

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah. It's such a huge and really important question. I feel like God's both given me a real favor with young people. And I think just something to recognize is wherever we're called in mission work, we're looking for that place of favor or that place of God's, you know, our great gladness, the world's great need. Um, I think that the, the reality and the challenge of integrated work with the under-twenties

generation is that they're being disciplined by their screens and their attention has been primarily gripped into that space. Um, there's always two ways to look at every type of ministry, right? There's the challenges and then there's the open doors. And I've both been really encouraged by, and practically used a lot of the Barna research around the open generation. So statistically in both the US, the UK, and many other countries, they've actually done it on an international level.

Sarah Yardley:

The under-twenties are the most open generation to spirituality that we've seen in, I think, the 50 years. I need to reread these. And the way I see that played out in my local context is that actually most young people in my life are deeply hungry for relationship. And so I try to be really mindful of appropriate boundaries. And I'm really grateful. I live in a community house right now, so there's five people in the house with me. So I'm actually able for the first time in years to invite young people to come over because I can do more communal life. That's not just a, a one-on-one, which wouldn't be appropriate in the country in which I live. But I think what young people are often just literally hungry for is a space to be heard and loved and listened to. And I found, at least in the area in which I work, the average teenager, if I just say, do you want an ice cream?

Sarah Yardley:

Do you want a slice of pizza? You wanna just sit down and tell me about your day? There might be a second in which they're suspicious. Just a second of like, does she want something from me? Are they my teacher? Are they come to spy on me? What, what do you need from me? Uh, but as soon as you've disarmed that immediate suspicion that you want something from a young person, man, their hearts are often so wide open. And of the young people I work with right now, none, literally zero, have chosen to follow Jesus. And there's moments where that's like hugely discouraging. And then sometimes I lean back and I think the parable of Sower just reminds me that Jesus didn't say, I'm only gonna scatter the seed in the fruitful field. He scattered the seed, or the sower scatters the seed wherever there is soil in which to scatter it.

Sarah Yardley:

And there are so many moments and so many stories that we hear, especially around this idea of legacy, where someone had an encounter as a young person when they were 12 years old because a local youth worker told them, Jesus loves you, caress about the details of your life, Jesus cares about the details of your life. And that fruit might not come up for 10, 20 years. But if I believe the Holy Spirit is as kind as I believe he's, then I'm believing that that actual scattering of the fruit is all about God's work to regenerate rather than my work to save anyway. And I know that, that one of the places God is calling me to is just to proclaim love, proclaim love, proclaim love. And even if I don't see the results or the output that I was hoping for, that I am seeing in those teenagers lives, the impact of them knowing they're loved.

Denise:

Hmm. Absolutely. And in a generation when you're so far removed from personal contact as a natural outflow of interaction, you know, it's, you're right, it is screens. But, um, one of the pushbacks that we hear is, you know, we're in a global economy now. We're in a global, global international economy where you don't have to be in person. Is it still important to be a missionary in person somewhere? Because you could, you could FaceTime, you could do what we're doing, sit across from a screen, and yet Jesus came. He could have come at any time in the world. He could have come at this time when you

could be the, the word of his miraculous things could have spread instantly. But he chose to come when it had to be in-person and face-to-face. And I just feel like that speaks so much to his heart and his desire for in-person ministry to happen, is that he chose to come in a time when it had to be in person. And so, and so, the fact that you have the ability to sit there and say, tell me about your day in a culture where maybe they're not hearing that from anybody else, to sit down and just do that in person, I, I love, I love that you're, you're the boots on the ground to Jesus in that way with these young people. Mm-Hmm.

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah. It's fascinating, isn't it? 'cause it's both the incarnational element like Jesus and, and the presence, like personal presence. But I also think one of the commitments we have to make is to be able to be interruptible. Um, because so often these moments of real depth or intimacy or conversation or need, they don't come at the time that we strategize them <laugh>. It's not like, oh, it'll be convenient in my schedule to share the gospel with you from 2:00 to 2:40 PM That's when my schedule will allow. Yes. Um, so I, I'm always holding that tension, um, one being a person of presence. But two, have I built enough margin into my life and have I created enough breathing space that I'm actually able to be interrupted because so much of the miraculous presence of Jesus came in these interruptible moments. And so, um, it's an area I'm always pressing more into, but I'm really aware of as well.

Denise:

That's a great word for a culture that does not like to be interrupted. And I speak of my Americanness in that as well. But Sarah, your, uh, willingness to say yes to Jesus in your call right now to be follower of Jesus who is in the UK has opened up other doors for you.

Denise:

Talk, talk a little bit about some of these amazing spaces you've been invited into.

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah, absolutely. Um, it's such a fascinating thing, the way that God opens doors that as it says in Revelation, no man can shut Mm-Hmm. And there's so many beautiful spaces that I would never have dreamed of. So my favorite is that I get to be part of a team called Lectio 365. We record prayers for an app, um, that comes out. Quarter million people listen to those prayers every day, which is astounding.

Denise:

I'm one of them.

Sarah Yardley:

Oh, fantastic. I'll be on for a couple times in the next, uh, chunk ahead. And one of the beautiful things about being part of that team has been the space to just really listen to, attend to the presence of God, and then write the prayers that might point or turn people's hearts towards listening to Jesus from a passage of scripture. So, um, I've really enjoyed my, not just work with, but my genuine friendship with the 24/7 prayer team and it just gives you quite a bit of wider ministry outreach work. Um, and I'm, I'm grateful to both have some spaces to get to travel and input. Um, end of November, I'll be speaking at the National Youth Ministry weekend in the UK and, uh, part of a prophetic evangelism training for the Diocese of Winchester. Just some, some pieces that I never could have dreamed of at the time. Um, but

also really feel a heart to just encourage anyone wherever they're at in their stage of walking with Jesus, to be bold in exactly what you just said, saying yes to Jesus.

Sarah Yardley:

I think so often we're our own limiting factors, and there's something about just the quiet daily holy walk with God, but I love to just be one of the people who walks around and sprinkles a little bit of cheerleading. Mm-hmm. <affirmative>. And actually in this term, I'm saying no to far more than I'm saying yes to. But everything I say no to, I send a list of like four or five people who could do it really well. And what I love about that is sometimes it's someone who's done it before, but sometimes someone gets their first chance to share on a little panel or be part of a speaking gathering and perhaps begin to spread their wings. So for everything that I get to step into, I actually prefer in some ways to be able to say, oh, do you know who I could send? Do you know who I could recommend? Do you know who could really smash this and do it with beauty and honor of Jesus? Here's some names. Maybe pick one of them. And so that's one of the things I really love to do as well.

Denise:

You saying that makes me think somebody did that for you. Somebody poured into you, shaped you and encouraged your gifts in that way. Talk a little bit about maybe some people or resources that have really shaped you and equipped you to do what you're doing today.

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah, that's such a great question. And, um, there are so many, which I feel very grateful for. I, I feel actually really quite moved by that. Um, I'd say that a big part of my spiritual discipleship has come through reading, and I'd say the trio of, um, Henri Nouwen, and Frederick Buechner and Eugene Peterson are the three spiritual companions to my soul. Um, I'd also just say Ruth Haley Barton's work, particularly around strengthening the soul of our leadership and sacred rhythms have just been mm- Hmm, <affirmative> huge resets for me. Um, I actually have done a couple podcasts where I've spoken about some male leaders who influence my life. So I'm gonna choose some female leaders on this podcast because it's important, I think, to name the beauty of both. Um, Cheryl Broderson, who is the granddaughter of Chuck Smith, or sorry, the daughter of Chuck Smith <laugh>, and a dear lifelong friend, has committed for the last 10 years to pray for me every single day.

Denise:

Wow.

Sarah Yardley:

And she has cheerlead and spoken and, uh, defended me in ways that are astounding. And Cheryl is one of the most charismatic and anointed preachers I have ever known. I mean, there's no one like that woman, the way she knows scripture, the way she tells a story, I'm just gripped in her presence. And she has exactly as you just said, modeled for me the kind of giving away style of leadership that's been phenomenal. And then in more recent years, um, and I, I'm gonna say a name that I'm not just saying to say, um, a woman named Christine Cain has just been an extraordinary cheerleader. Uh, we met because I sent her a message online, and then we met up and had a three hour coffee. And she took me recently to Greece and Bulgaria to visit some of their work there, and we're in touch really regularly.

Sarah Yardley:

And she is one of the most incredible evangelists of our generation, but also just most cheerleading individuals. We were messaging back and forth last night. And she, she literally just started her message with, I just wanna start by saying, I love you so much, and she's just extravagant in the way that she speaks forth love. And exactly as you just asked that question, it's just so true. I'm able to cheer others on because what's been modeled for me is not a competition, not a sense of, um, passive aggressive, oh, you're doing that, but that some of the women in my life have just been like, oh, I'm so glad you're doing that. I hope you do it better than I ever have. I just wanna let you know that I'm cheering you on and I love you, and I believe in you. And that sense of real generosity has actually been hugely shaping in my ability to step out in all that God has for me.

Denise:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, I love that. I'm actually so engaged in what you're saying, that I'm forgetting that we have to think about what I wanna, where I wanna go next, <laugh>. And that, I mean it. So, so I moved recently to a town where I don't know very many people. And so that ministers so much to me, just these women coming alongside and cheering you on in hard places. And so, um, I love, I love, love, love hearing about that. And it's such an encouragement that we could be that for those of you, obviously everyone's listening, there's no video of this. Sarah is wearing this beautiful necklace that, um, I asked when we got on, and it just, it says joy. And you just, you exhibit that so much, and I love that it was purchased for you by your friends, because that's what they see. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative> in you. And, um, so I, I wish you all could just see the beautiful, um, necklace. It's just, it's you, it just speaks before you even arrive <laugh> of your joy. Um, Sarah, what is on the horizon for you? What do you have coming up? What are you looking forward to?

Sarah Yardley:

So one of the big landmarks I'm looking forward to is in December I get to apply for my indefinite leave to remain in the UK. So, uh, prayers would be appreciated. Any listeners, I've gotta pass a right to life test and just started studying. And man, I, I thought I knew a lot about UK but the reality is I've, I've got some, some studying ahead of me. So, um, that's kind of a quite big landmark moment. Um, I've got certain rhythms from my year now, so, um, my work with Creation Fest is a significant portion of my time. I work with Lectio 365. We, we do kind of blocked out retreats on a regular basis. And then I'm really looking forward to hopefully starting work on my next book. Um, I'm trying to carve out some regular time to begin to write more regularly. And, um, in the course of this next chapter, I'm really trying to take prophetic wisdom about when and where I travel.

Sarah Yardley:

Um, I have a ministry trip to a closed country, so I won't speak about the details of that yet, but I, it's my first ministry trip into a closed country. And I'm really looking forward to, um, learning from those who are on the ground in those teams. And, um, really feel a sense that in this next year ahead, there's going to be both the raising up of new leaders and some interesting new opportunities that I don't actually even yet know. Um, but a number, some of you might have some prophetic friends in your life. So a number of the prophetic friends in my life have begun to contact me with these recurring words that God is going to open some new doors and there's some new spaces. And so perhaps even I'll look back at this podcast Mm-Hmm. Which is the first time I've even said this in any form of public way.

Sarah Yardley:

And, uh, see the inklings of what God has began to do. But I think alongside that, my sister and I were just speaking about this. For all of the big new beautiful things I'm really also just leaning into every day, encountering Jesus in his word every day, praying and walking with God every day. Uh, trying to learn how to love my literal neighbors on my street and my local community a little bit more generously. Um, I was really struck, I've got two new housemates who moved in and, uh, I got a call from someone about a really hard time they were going through. And I had said to my housemate, I'm so sorry. I've gotta go take this call privately. Um, my friend's, she's calling me 'cause she's having a hard time. And she said, you know what, Sarah, I don't know anyone else who has so many people who call them when they're in the middle of their hard times. And I actually thought, that's such a beautiful, that's such a beautiful reflection of trust that for many of my community, if there is a painful space or a wrestling space, um, I get to be the one who navigates and walks and prays through it with them. And so I look at the next year ahead and there's some big things, there's some little things, but above anything else, my hope is just that I might be continually learning to love Jesus and show his love to others.

Denise:

I have one final question I would love to ask you. It's, it's maybe a little bit taboo as far as women who are listening to this, women in our community are women who are missionaries who are serving on the field. You mentioned the sweetness of your time with the Lord, and I can't help but think there's so many of us that may be like, I don't even know what to do. I don't even know how to feed myself. I don't, I'm here to, for it to be an overflow. And yet I sit here with my Bible and I'm like, what? Where do I, where do I go right now? I I'm supposed to know this and it's embarrassing because I can't just ask because I'm supposed to be the one that knows this. You know, what word of encouragement would you have for that woman today who's like, I don't know where to start anymore.

Sarah Yardley:

Yeah. Do you know, I could talk for a long time about this. I'm, I'm just like editing in my mind for a moment. But the first statement is just this, the love of Jesus is towards you. And I think that if we've grown up in any sort of Christian background or we're in any sort of Christian leadership, we carry this inherent set of expectations or burdens or output. And so just would say to anyone who might just resonate with that question, know the love of Christ that's towards you. And, uh, 40 years of walking with Jesus later, so many of my rhythms have needed to stretch or grow or expand or shift for the space in which I found myself. So if you've never engaged with contemplative prayer, um, there's this beautiful book by Joyce Hugget called *The Joy of Listening to God*. And it just describes Joyce tired of all the Bible reading and doing all the things because she just kind of felt like she was supposed to and learning to sit and listen in the presence of God.

Sarah Yardley:

And one of the things I've loved about learning contemplative prayer is that it's prayer without output. Um, and for a period of time in which I just needed to know how to be with Jesus, that had transformed and changed my prayer life. But a second kind of piece to offer, because for some you might say, no, that's not for me. Um, I've recently been really diving into Ignatian spirituality and read this beautiful book called *Finding God in All Things* by Margaret H. And the whole rhythm of Ignatian spirituality is based around knowing our places of joy and knowing that God meets us in those, and then recognizing our places of pain and then asking God where his presence is and relativity to those as well. And one of the ways that you just engage with scripture is by going on like an imaginative journey with Jesus.

Sarah Yardley:

So literally you can pick any passage of scripture, water, and wine, and then just sit with it and say, what would it have felt like to be at that wedding? Would I be a guest? Was I sitting at the same table as Jesus? What did I think when I tasted the wine? What did I do afterwards? What did it look? How, how did I feel? What would I have said to Jesus if I was there? And, um, I just think sometimes having the freedom to dwell imaginatively with scripture and then ask that the presence of God would enliven our hearts, not for any sense of output, not for anybody else, but just so that we would enjoy the sweetness of God's presence. If your prayer or scripture or personal life has grown dull, don't be discouraged. Just know that there's whole new ways to discover the love of Jesus towards you. Be playful with discovering it.

Denise:

Ladies, I know that as you're sitting here, whether you're doing dishes or going on a walk or you're, you're driving your car, that your hearts have been warmed and filled with hope and encouragement from this conversation. Sarah, thank you so much for, for letting us interrupt your day, for making enough space. For that interruption to happen. And, and thank you for living a life and being willing to share it with others because the legacies that will be inspired by your life are gonna just be endless. So thank you so much.

Sarah Yardley:

Absolute joy.

Denise:

Ladies. Um, remember until the next time we get to meet with you again, you also might be living a life that's going to inspire the courage for someone else's legacy. Thanks for joining us for this month's Velvet Ashes Legacy Podcast.