**EPISODE 231**

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:02.6] PF:** Welcome to Episode 231 of Live Happy Now. I’m your host, Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us.

If you feel like the world is moving a whole lot faster these days, you’re not alone. We’re consuming information at an unprecedented rate, and we’re staying connected 24/7. It's no secret that that's taking a toll on our health, our relationships, and our overall well-being.

Today's guest, Jeff Bethke, looks at how this fast pace is zapping our sense of purpose and meaning. His new book, *To Hell with the Hustle: Reclaiming Your Life in an Overworked, Overspent, and Overconnected World*, looks at how we can shift our focus from our online life to our inward life and find greater purpose and meaning.

[INTERVIEW]

**[00:00:49] PF**: Jeff, welcome to Live Happy Now.

**[00:00:51] JB**: Hey! Thanks so much for having me.

**[00:00:52] PF**: Well, you talk about a book for our times. I know that your new book is written for millennials, but it really applies to anyone who’s overextended in today's world, and I think that's just about all of us.

**[00:01:05] JB**: It is. It is. I mean, I think, yeah, definitely. The core is definitely to more kind of my peers. I would say generationally millennials at the peak of this problem. But at the end of the day, because I get pretty heavy in the book actually on some deep dives on some research in the Industrial Revolution and the light bulb and our concept of time.

When you really dig into it, a lot of this is actually not a millennial problem. It’s a Western problem. There's a lot – We kind of have created this moment. This is the logical conclusion of about a 100 or 200-year build. But, yeah, that’s the essence of the book is that this pain point that we’re all feeling for sure right now.

**[00:01:37] PF**: What inspired you to write it? There had to be some sort of trigger I'm guessing that made you think, “All right. I got to address this.”

**[00:01:43] JB**: Yeah. I mean, just yeah. My own life, that same thing. I talked about this I think at the first paragraph of the book of just kind of basically our narrative became basically what everyone's narrative was that – What I kind say is the trajectory the American dream puts you on is actually a deeply toxic, corrosive, and problematic one, because it only exacerbates this.

You’re supposed to get a bigger and bigger house the more you get older, a bigger and bigger mortgage. You’re supposed to get a bigger and bigger job and climb the ladder so that you’re going to get busier and busier. You’re supposed to have kids and then more and more kids. Then as those kids get older and older, then they’re going to have more and more activities.

So the literal trajectory of our ideal Western selves is one that actually kind of only puts you on this treadmill of exhaustion, burnout, and basically frying yourselves to death and kind of totally commodifying yourself and kind of killing your humanness.

**[00:02:29] PF**: So when did you realize that and realized you also had a solution that you wanted to present?

**[00:02:35] JB**: I think, yeah. For me, as a follower of Jesus, that's where I first came back to and kind of just said, “Man, what is –” Does Jesus show us something here that's antithetical? When you do, whether you believe in Jesus or don't, obviously a historical figure 2,000 years ago had a massive impact more than almost anyone else in human history. It’s clear from the text that we have of Him, historically speaking, that He seemed to be a non-anxious presence. There seemed to be a good way in which He went about His life that was non-hurried, that was non-hustled, and that that actually led to the flourishing of His own humanness and then blessed all those around Him.

So going back to that, is there something in Him that He can teach us, and that was basically the essence of the book. I say yes, and I think there's kind of this reclaiming of this, recalling of you can call them spiritual disciplines. You can call them kind of practices for life. But recalling ourselves to things like silence and Sabbath and solitude and obscurity and all these different things that actually we kind of now see as a curse when historically actually have been a blessing to some people and actually of things that kind of fill you up to be able to resist against those pressures I just mentioned.

**[00:03:39] PF**: Yeah. One of the things that first caught my attention was your statement that information is killing us, and I found that whole chapter of your book really interesting. Can you tell us what it is you mean by that?

**[00:03:52] JB**: Yeah. Well, I mean, I think I – I’m trying to remember the exacts that I have in the book. I think it’s something to the effect of like two days’ worth of information now currently in 2019. We consume more in two days than like a whole if someone in medieval times would consume their whole life in regards to just data that we have to read and perceive. That’s like it’s making us. I think we kind of need to think of information like calories or think about it like alcohol. It’s making us obese. It’s making us drunk, and we’re not –

So we’re stumbling around with just like overstimulation, overstuffing our metaphorical faces, and it's killing us right. It’s not real. It’s not human the way we actually engage with information. We’re kind of trying to treat ourselves like robots when we’re not and kind of just we’re trying to treat ourselves like computers that just download software. But that's now how humanness works. That’s not how real life works. We’re people of process. We’re flesh beings who kind of the process itself is just as important as sometimes the results.

**[00:04:42] PF**: But it's difficult when you're in a situation where you're expected to keep up and you're expected to take on all this information and process it and be able to spit it back out at work or however your life situation is. So how do you balance that intake of information with being able to find some solitude, being able to separate yourself from that?

**[00:05:04] JB**: Yeah, that’s a good question. I think because we feel the pressures and then we say, “What can we do about it?” I think I told people two things, and they seem contradictory but they're not. The first one is don't be afraid to make drastic changes where you aren’t unafraid to actually make the changes for your health and flourishing. A lot of us, we are willing to make those big changes that we know will actually change our life. Maybe it is quit a job. Maybe it is move across the country? Maybe it is move back in with family. Maybe it is, say, know the relationship you’re in, whatever it is. So I think drastic changes you need to realize that you can bring some of the most drastic results.

Then two, small incremental changes one by one or would actually change you over 50 years. So don't also think that you have to kind of like change your whole life and just seven different things all at once, but actually just slowly but steadily kind of point yourself in the right direction of your habits and you’ll be a new person in 10 years.

**[00:05:56] PF**: Yeah. We recently had Tiffany Shlain on the show, and she talked about unplugging. She takes a Tech Shabbat. She’s of the Jewish faith and unplugs every week for a full day. So your book kind of addresses that too in the sense of being able to step away from it and give yourself some time to breathe. How does that affect you when you let yourself do that?

**[00:06:20] JB**: We do the same thing. Actually, I’ve had a whole chapter on Sabbath, and we talk about the practice of Sabbath, its historical root, what it can mean for us today. Yeah, we take a Technological Sabbath as well. I turn my phone for a day a week, and some people just think that’s crazy. But I’m like, “You do realize that that’s basically how all of human history has lived all of the time, so it’s really not that crazy at all.” I think that's the first thing too is we don't realize. We just assume that everyone should be able to be reachable 24/7 when it’s like that’s like a 15-year-old problem.

But, yeah, I think what it does is just constant. I think we’re born and created to live in a cadence of sevens, to live in a week, to live in a rhythm, to live into something you're coming back to over and over again. Crops are like that. Land is like that. The earth is like that. Everything is like that, and I think our bodies are like that too.

So I think doing that is really helpful and really kind of just resets you. It gives you a day of delight. It gives you a day of fun, celebration, and joy. That’s because we don’t just turn off our phones but we make it like a day of family, a day of fun, a day of joy. Stuff like that I think is really, really huge and really, really is necessary I think to kind of reclaim our humanness in today's age.

**[00:07:26] PF**: Because it helps not only with you personally and how you feel internally. But it helps your relationships with your family as well. Is that correct?

**[00:07:34] JB**: Yes, exactly. The more we’re tied to our phones, the more we’re saying no to the people around us. So I think remembering that and realizing like, “Man, making actually really good hard boundaries with our phone will allow us to only have more and more flourishing relationships around us.”

**[00:07:48] PF**: In this connected world, part of it is you refer to Facebook as the empathy killer, and I really like that. Can you explain to us why you call it the empathy killer?

**[00:07:58] JB**: Yeah. Because I mean – I talk about this in the whole chapter. Empathy is such a gift to us, and it actually gives us what we need in today's moment, real relationships, real seeing people's faces, real people that we would disagree with but we can still be in relationship with them, go to the store with them, be neighbors with them, go to church with them.

Facebook is kind of an echo chamber where it’s allow – It's one of the first times we’re actually allowed and able to create spaces that are just people that look like us, talk like us, and act like us. You couldn’t do that 5 years ago, 10 years ago, a hundred years ago. But you can now, and what that does is it kills the power of empathy, because empathy you actually need it. They’ve actually done tests on this. So it’s just more devoid of real relationship. So you’re not going to see how that person feels when you say something. You’re not going to be there to offer them hope. You’re not going to feel as the same when you just type something versus say it to their face, and I think that's what really matters.

**[00:08:48] PF**: The relationships that we can build person-to-person when we get off Facebook and we get off social media are so important to us , and it seems like we’re kind of losing some of that ability to bond with people one on one.

**[00:09:02] JB**: Exactly. So I think reclaiming relationships and what that means is really, really important, and it usually does start with kind of making – The phone and real human relationships tend to be opposites, and so you have to make hard lines here, so you can lean into relationships over here.

**[00:09:18] PF**: How do you do that? You’re into that. You’re realizing what this does to you, but you've got a lot of friends I'm guessing and then people – That's their spouses and their families that they also have to get to understand this message. So how you do that because a lot of people love their time on Facebook or any other social media in their phone?

**[00:09:37] JB**: Yeah. I’m not saying that’s evil inherently. It actually is a great tool for kind of keeping distant relationships and kind of keeping tabs on like surfacy things. But when you try to exchange surfacy relationship building with the place I'm going to go for intimacy, vulnerability, community in life, that’s where the breakdown really happens.

So that’s what I think a lot of people – People are making that transaction, and that's the hard part. Let it be what it is, which is just a supplemental tangential gift on the fringes of your life that can maybe allow you to keep in touch with a couple people and maybe make some correlation with the people that maybe have same hobbies with you or whatever. But when we let that come into our center, into our bull's-eye, that's when it becomes really problematic.

**[00:10:14] PF**: Once you realize how it's becoming problematic, how do you manage it? Because it's tough. It’s that slippery slope. You get on there, and you start to look in and you’re sucked in.

**[00:10:25] JB**: Yeah, exactly. I mean, one thing we do as a family is I have what I call our family tech manifesto. We actually have like a whole document that has rules for how we’ll address and interact with tech, and here’s why. Because there is only 3, 400 people in a couple boardrooms in Silicon Valley that affect billions of people on the earth, and they’re spending billions if not trillions worth of value in dollars to get us to do something and to take certain type of behaviors that benefit them. At the end of the day, it is a business. All of these things, these are people trying to just give us good blessing or a nonprofit like Facebook. All these things are businesses or shareholders, they return investments to their shareholders.

So that's literally the whole point. So they have an enormous agenda and mission to do that, and that's fine. But unless we have a competing agenda, we will automatically lose. So I just say you have to have kind of that competing force of like what is your agenda for tech. What's your vision for tech? What’s the return on your investment that you want to get to your own shareholders, which is you? You're the shareholder of yourself on your behavior.

So we have one like that for our family, which has rules like we won’t bring the phone in the bedroom. They got to be plugged in at night. I can't turn it on for the first hour of the day, turn it on one day a week. I turn it off for one week a year. There’s a bunch more in there, but I think we don’t put screens. We have no cable. We have one TV. All that has is Netflix on it, and it is actually on a TV elevator lift. So you press a button, and it goes and hides away in a cabinet, so you don’t even see it.

So there’s things where we want to put it at the fringe of our focus, because I do believe how you shape your environment and your space totally will create certain behaviors and point you in a certain trajectory. So if you’re centering your entire home on a TV, I bet you’ll probably watch it more. If you’re centering your entire home on phones and technology and putting them all over the place and charging, etc., then I bet you'll probably be on it more. But if you shape your space in a way that puts it on the fringe, not at the center, and you put more creating rather than consuming at the center, maybe it’s music, whether it's coloring, maybe it’s books, you put that at the center of your home, that will change how you behave.

So these are all different things that that's how you start kind of competing with that agenda that then starts putting your life in the trajectory you want it to go.

**[00:12:29] PF**: So it really becomes about being very intentional about what you want to do with your time and how you want to approach the technology.

**[00:12:37] JB**: Exactly. I mean, I think the word intentional is basically the ethos of the book of like we have to be intentional to carve the life we want to carve that brings us the joy-flourishing depth and vitality we want from our friends, our relationships, our marriages, our life, and our work. You have to be intentional to carve that, because our culture isn’t taking us there. So you don’t have to be intentional to float downriver. You have to be intentional to swim upstream.

**[00:13:00] PF**: There you go. You just ask a stick, right? They’ll tell you.

**[00:13:04] JB**: Exactly.

**[00:13:05] PF**: Now, you say that in order to successfully focus on the meaning in our lives, we really have to thin out the noise and distraction that surround us. That’s so much easier said than done, because we are so distracted these days ,and there is so much noise. So what are some ways that we go about doing that?

**[00:13:21] JB**: Yeah. I think the same thing. I mean, as the phone thing of like start implementing small, really small practices that actually cultivate you in the right direction. So instead of saying like, “Oh! Yes, I believe that. That sounds awesome,” and then trying to be silent for a full day, tomorrow try to take 15 seconds where you turn off your phone and think maybe about people you love or things and goals. For me, that’s usually me kind of when I’m opening the Scriptures and all that and I talk about on the book.

Mr. Rogers hasn't had a great practice where he would start every single meeting ever for 30 years, including meetings he even had with the president and the cabinet when he was invited there with 60 seconds of silence. That was his actual ritual. Every meeting had to start with 60 seconds of silence, thinking about one person who has greatly impacted you and why you’re thankful for them. I think starting those kind of small rituals and practices really allows you to kind of start to see the change and the difference you're looking for.

**[00:14:12] PF**: How have you found that that's changed you to do things like that and implement those practices?

**[00:14:18] JB**: Yeah. I mean, I think it makes you a lot more of a non-anxious presence. I think if you're not cultivating silence, for lack of a better term, you’re kind of like flimsy and flaky and hollow and reactionary and just kind of this. You’re not dent. You’re not centered. You’re not anchored. So I think that is really, really important, and that’s the difference I’ve seen is the more I'm stepping into that practice, the more I'm able to be present and proactive, not reactive in my own life.

**[00:14:46] PF**: That speaks to something else that you talk about, because you talk about how our roots or our principles give us meaning. Today, we seem very rootless in a lot of ways, and people are looking for their purpose. I do think that a lot of the distractions and a lot of the noise have taken us away from that quest, because we get caught up in all the things that are going on around us, instead of being able to sit down and take the time and identify really what we want, what our purpose is, where our roots are. So how do you recommend that someone goes about identifying what their reason for being here is?

**[00:15:19] JB**: Yeah. I would probably say there's a lot of answer to that one. I would say probably one of the more beneficial things you can do is instead of trying to shoot for the moon of like this is what the dream and this is the hope, what are you doing right now and how can you love people better in that. When we love people really well, when we go about our day not trying to consume from other people and extract from them but actually live in love and live in sacrifice, it sounds counterintuitive. But that's where true joy is at. So I say do that.

Another way to put that is what makes you come alive. What do you do that you feel like makes you come alive, and you can love people well in it? That’s usually a good collision of where you can start finding that space for yourself.

**[00:15:59] PF**: Yeah. Because it's a great thing to ask people at a party or when you’re meeting people. We always ask like, “What do you do?” It’s a lot of fun to ask them what do you do for fun. What I've noticed more recently is when you start asking that question, they think it’s going to end with what is it that you do, and they start gearing up to talk about work. But when you add that for fun, there’s kind of this hesitation, because a lot of people are like, “I'm not really having fun right now. I'm busy. I’m like always on 24/7.” So I think that’s something that's really interesting. People aren't necessarily sure of what it is that they really even enjoy doing.

**[00:16:37] JB**: Yeah, exactly. So it does take time, and it does take space. But I just think sometimes we try to shoot for the moon. We try to – The reason we can't figure out that question a lot of times is because we’re trying to think of the dream we have 10 years from now when it’s like, “No, no. There probably is some type of way and space for you to love others well, sacrifice, and find out flourishing that meaning right now.” But sometimes, it’s not as flashy as we think.

**[00:17:00] PF**: Yeah. One thing that you talk about is that you’re a big fan of saying no, and you write about this. Can you tell us why you love that word so much and why it’s so beneficial?

**[00:17:14]** JB: Yeah. Well, I think it’s just pure math. We don't have any more hours in the day than someone did 500 years ago. But we by a light year have more accessibility to people to ask us of things. So that’s just pure math of like, “We’re going to get asked more of us than people who are 500 years ago.” But, yeah. They didn't have any more hours or we don’t have any more hours than them, but they clearly still were able to fill their day 500 years ago. So unless we are saying no, you'll just go crazy.

Basically, the only option is to say no more, because we’re able to get asked more, and our days can’t stretch. So it’s right. Honestly, I know it sounds a weird way to answer it. But that’s how I think about it. That’s just like it has to be that way. We are more reachable. We’re more accessible. But yet our days can’t grow. There’s only 24 hours. Unless we just say no more, then constantly as we go into this future of connectivity, that’s just going to kill us unless we understand that's how it is.

**[00:18:05] PF**: So how does someone learn to say no, because it's hard? It’s hard when that's not been your norm when you’re used to saying yes to everything or you feel like you have to say yes to everything.

**[00:18:18] JB**: Yeah. I mean, I think you got to have frameworks. If people have frameworks for their own life and mission, then yeah. You'll say you'll serve everyone else’s life and mission. So what do you like to do? What do want to do? What trajectory are you on? What do you feel like your calling is? What do you enjoy? Why do want to sacrifice and serve other people? Make a priority list of your life, marriage, kids, job, etc. and what would that look like.

If something comes in, put it through those filters. Does it serve these things? If not, then I probably should say no. Because if not, then you'll just be going off and doing things that don't really matter, and they’re actually –

**[00:18:47] PF**: Perfect. Well, Jeff, we’re going to come back in just a couple seconds. We’re going to tell people a little bit more about you, more about your book, and where they can get it. But thank you so much for coming and sitting down and talking about it with us.

**[00:19:00] JB**: Hey! Thanks so much for having me. You can join the resistance at some level. There’s an active mindset you can have about carving and crafting the life you want and not in the sense of like be a millionaire and do that but like actually like for depth. The relationships you want, you can have. If you’re burned out, you don't need to be burned out. You have permission to carve this life of intentionality, but it does take work and you have to kind of put one foot in front of the other.

**[00:19:24] PF**: Perfect. Well, Jeff, we’re going to come back in just a couple seconds. We’re going to tell people a little bit more about you, more about your book, and where they can get it. But thank you so much for coming and sitting down and talking about it with us.

**[00:19:37] JB**: Hey! Thanks so much for having me.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[00:19:42] PF**: That was Jeff Bethke, talking to us about how to embrace a slower life for greater meaning. If you'd like to learn more about Jeff and his book, *To Hell with the Hustle: Reclaiming Your Life in an Overworked, Overspent, and Overconnected World*, download a free chapter or learn more about where to find Jeff online. Please visit us at livehappynow.com, and we’ll give you more information.

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That is all we have time for this week. We’ll meet you back here again next week for an all new episode and until then, this is Paula Felps, reminding you to make everyday a happy one.

[END]