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**Annie:** Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today.

Before we dive into today's conversation, how much did you love EnneaSummer? I know. I know. Okay. Don't forget you can still go back and keep listening to those. Share them with your friends. We have a free downloadable at [AnnieFDowns.com/EnneaSummer](http://AnnieFDowns.com/EnneaSummer). The summer is not over. Your EnneaSummer also does not have to be over.

Before we get going in today, man — what a summer we were having on the pod — I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors, [AG1](#). Okay, listen. Y'all know AG1 is a part of my morning routine for a long time. And the stats speak for themselves.

AG1's done a ton of research. The results showed that after 60 days, 82% of people in a research study feel less stressed. 91% of people in a research study notice that they need less coffee. That is awesome. I feel so different in the morning when I drink my AG1. I love how easy it is. It covers all my nutritional bases.

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And if there's one product that I really like lean on to support my whole body health, it is AG1. And that is why I've partnered with them for so long.

It's easy and satisfying to start your journey with AG1. So try AG1 and get a free one-year supply of vitamin D3, K2, and 5-3 AG1 travel packs. I believe in the travel packs. That all comes with your first purchase at [drinkag1.com/soundsfun](http://drinkag1.com/soundsfun). That's [drinkag1.com/soundsfun](http://drinkag1.com/soundsfun). Y'all check it out.

And remember, that link and every other link you're always looking for are in the show notes below wherever you're watching or listening, or you can find them in Friday's AFD Week in Review email that we send out. Have you signed up for that? Listen, you do not want to miss it. You do not want to miss it. So make sure you sign up for that. That's also in the show notes below.

**Intro:** Today on the show, I get to talk with my friend, Pastor Rich Villodas. Rich is a best-selling author, the lead pastor of New Life Fellowship Church, which has multiple locations in New York. I got to sit down with Rich at the Hephzibah House

in New York City, talk about his latest book, *The Narrow Path*, which came out last week.

Rich calls this book his attempt to reintroduce the Sermon on the Mount to followers of Jesus and those who are curious about Jesus, because it is arguably the most significant set of teachings from Jesus in the entire Bible. Y'all know we love talking about the gospels, so this was a joy.

We talk about New York. We talk about Matthew 25. I mean, we go in. So I think you are going to love this. So buckle up. This may be a note-taking episode. Don't say I didn't warn you. Share this one with your friends. It's a great conversation with Pastor Rich Villodas.

[00:02:43] <music>

**Annie:** Rich Villodas, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

**Rich:** So good to be here, Annie. Thanks for the invitation.

**Annie:** Thank you so much for teaching me how to say your name. Will you say it both ways that people can say it?

**Rich:** There's two correct approaches we can take. We can go Villodas. We can also go Villodas. So depending on where I'm at. I grew up with Villodas.

**Annie:** Oh, really?

**Rich:** But if I'm in Puerto Rico, it's not Villodas.

**Annie:** Because they know the word. They just say that all the time with other people's last names.

**Rich:** Exactly right.

**Annie:** Okay, will you back up? We're recording in New York at the Hepzibah House. It's your first time at the Hepzibah House?

**Rich:** First time. First time in a brownstone like this here. I'm from Brooklyn, but I'm not used to this kind of space here. So it's beautiful and wonderful and massive.

**Annie:** I can't wait for you to just Google about this place. It's such a special history. Like Elizabeth Elliott slept here, Corrie Ten Boom slept here. Whoa. I mean-

**Rich:** And Annie Downs did her podcast.

**Annie:** Right, right. But you are an OG New Yorker.

**Rich:** I am.

**Annie:** I am a fake New Yorker. I'm here when it's easy, I leave when it's hard. So I am part-time. Will you tell us a little bit about your growing up life, because we're gonna spend some good time on New York here.

**Rich:** I'm 45 years old, born and raised in a neighborhood called East New York, Brooklyn, which is on the border of Queens and Brooklyn. Grew up around 20 family members who lived within two blocks of each other. So I needed that because it was quite a dangerous neighborhood in the 80s and 90s, probably the most dangerous neighborhood in all of New York City, that part of Brooklyn.

**Annie:** Really?

**Rich:** So grew up there. Some of my most formative memories of joy and pain are in that neighborhood. Lived there for 33 years, apart from going to college and all that, and then moved to Queens 12 years ago, lived there for 10 years. Then now I'm out in Long Island. So for the first time, for two years, first time in my life I have parking, which is like, I've made it.

**Annie:** It took you so long to get here.

**Rich:** Yeah, it's all right. 43 years.

**Annie:** So sorry.

**Rich:** But I've made it, Annie. It's like I'm a baller and a shot caller now because...

**Annie:** That's right, because you can park your car wherever you want. Okay, what made you move out to Long Island? The church is in two locations?

**Rich:** The church is in Queens and Long Island. My wife is from Long Island, which is not too far out. It's like 12 miles from the church. But the pandemic, not having any space to breathe, accelerated our leave. We realized we need a little bit of grass and we need to breathe. So that accelerated our move.

**Annie:** What do you miss about leaving? If the win is parking, and the win is a yard, and the win is space-

**Rich:** CVS down the block. I'm just walking half a block to CVS and getting whatever I need there.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Rich:** So accessibility, running into congregants in the neighborhood. Lots of people who go to my church live in the Queens neighborhood that I lived in for 10 years. And the subway right there. So pretty nice. Other than that, I'm okay on Long Island now.

**Annie:** I have a thing I've run into here that I would love for you to speak into as a pastor and as a New Yorker. I'm at Cross Point in Nashville. That's where I go to church, and I'm on the teaching team. My July sermon is about Matthew 25. "I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty. I was a prisoner, and you came to visit me."

One of the profound gifts and the profound problems of New York is you're surrounded by need and it is very close. Like in Nashville, my honest to you is it's not very close to me. It's not in my neighborhood. I'm not seeing homeless people on the regular in my neighborhood in Nashville. I see them when I go downtown. I see deep need when I go to help somewhere or when I go to the women's prison.

That section of scripture is super challenging for me here, because Jesus says, If you feed me when I'm hungry. Rich, everywhere we turn.

**Rich:** Certainly.

**Annie:** On every corner. Teach me about how to deal with that.

**Rich:** For folks to get just the scope of New York. I lived in Queens. So if Queens was an independent city, it would be the fourth largest city in the country.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Rich:** And then Manhattan's like number six or something like that. So there's a lot of people in a small part of the world. So I don't know that Matthew 25 is a very true reality, the pressure of it. This is how I think about it. I think about it in how do we hold together compassion in our limits? It's very easy when you're surrounded by so much pain or need.

And depending on where you go in New York as well. Because some places like in Manhattan, you might not necessarily be as exposed to the level of pain because New York City neighborhoods are so different. But in a neighborhood like mine

where I grew up in, how do you hold compassion? At the same time, recognize I do have my own limits as well. And that is a delicate dance to hold on to.

**Annie:** So hard. Right.

**Rich:** Because I want to give, but I can't give all the time. So how do I dignify? I'll give one example.

**Annie:** And that's what stresses me out is Jesus didn't say "when you can".

**Rich:** Part of it I think is dignity. The dignity of people. For example, I remember driving with my daughter Karis. We were coming from a gymnastics class in Queens Boulevard and we were on Queens Boulevard and there was a woman who was selling fruit. As she's walking towards me, and as I see her walking towards me, I'm thinking, "Okay, she's going to ask for some money."

So I continue to drive up as she's walking towards me, kind of not looking into her eyes at all, avoiding her. My daughter's in the back, who's about nine at this time, and she screams out, "How could you just ignore her like that?" And with tears in her eyes. And I'm thinking, "Karis, what are you talking about?" She said, "You saw her." And I said, "I didn't have any cash on me to give her." And she said, "But you just totally ignored her."

I realized at that moment, even if I don't have cash on me, what does a dignifying look like to honor the image of God in people? I think that's one of the great challenges before us.

**Annie:** Okay, that helps me a lot to be given some permission. Because there have been days really, Rich... There have been days where I've been like my insides are turned over eight times because I've walked by five people who are hungry in a block. Then there's the, are they hungry? I saw someone give a muffin to a person up here on the Upper West Side. The person was saying, Can you just help me with one meal? Can you just help me with one meal? The person gave her a muffin. She set it in the door, in the stoop, and then turned around and said, Can I just have one meal? Can anybody just give me one meal?

And then you're like, well, shoot, I want to believe all of you-

**Rich:** There was a guy one time who was asking for money on the train, and he got maybe a dollar or two, and then most of the folks ignored him. As the doors are closing, he takes out this wad of cash and starts counting it in front of everyone. I'm thinking like... It's a very delicate thing to be in the city, so we want to have our hearts softened and open, and at the same time recognize we have limits as well.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's really helpful to me. And just being a dignified look, because it is much easier to look away. And when you have your earbuds in and when you have your whatever, it's easier to just keep going.

**Rich:** Absolutely.

**Annie:** It's been really messing with me, dude, I gotta tell you. Especially, you know this, as I'm in like sermon prep to teach this, is when the Lord stirs everything up. I can't imagine when you were writing *The Narrow Path*, the whole thing is about Sermon on the Mount. I mean, was this just happening all the time to you about every... I mean, just the chapter titles, enemies, anxiety, money, desire, words.

**Rich:** Anger. I mean, it's all the time as I'm writing it. Which I think as a preacher, I think that's part of the deal. If we're gonna speak God's word, we have to allow the word to pass through our lives first, if we're gonna preach it with integrity. So I think God wants to give us many opportunities to practice that.

**Annie:** I know, it's been brutal. I was like, why did I pick this to teach about? It's a summer series, so it's kind of like-

**Rich:** Easy.

**Annie:** B-Y-O? Yeah, yeah, yeah. Versus being in a series. So I was like, of course, why didn't I pick "the joy of the Lord is your strength?" Something so much easier. But thank you for that. I have found some real profound beauty in New York. Obviously, I love it. That's why I'm living here part-time.

But the faith communities here... it is in the South, in the South I've lived in, so I won't speak for before we get emails. It moves your career and your social life forward to be a Christian, whether you mean it or not. Up here, that is not true.

**Rich:** No, not at all.

**Annie:** And so it doesn't help you in work. It doesn't help you... I mean, I remember John Tyson teaching a sermon on being honest at work. And I thought, "We have never taught that in Nashville."

**Rich:** Wow.

**Annie:** But here, it's like, hey, you're different than the other people in your office, and your responses need to be different. So will you talk a little bit... what's the sacrifice

in big cities or in post-Christian cities of being an open believer? Is there a sacrifice to you or no?

**Rich:** My perspective has changed on this since the pandemic.

**Annie:** Ooh, tell me why.

**Rich:** Before the pandemic, it was kind of like, you know, wherever you're at, you're dancing around faith. You don't want to be weird, awkward. The pandemic hit and my personal perspective changed on it because I became so proximate to a level of pain and despair in people, Christian, non-Christian, whatever faith. I came to a place where I realized I'm not going to be ashamed of God's power to heal people anymore because people are desperately longing for comfort, encouragement. People are lonely.

So for me, I think that perspective has shifted in me because of the depth of pain from the pandemic. Then you start figuring in all the other realities of our lives, the loneliness, level of polarization, and fractured lives.

So something shifted in me in 2020 that before I might have been maybe a little more hesitant, especially if I was in a public space that was not overtly Christian. Now I think I'm figuring out how can I bring this into whatever conversation I'm in in a way that's not marked by fear because there are lots of people that are hurting and in need of the good news of the gospel.

**Annie:** And more open to it than they were maybe five years ago.

**Rich:** A lot more spiritual. I mean, we're seeing in our own church lots of young adults, lots of people who are not Christian, who are exploring faith and such. So I think we are in a particular moment where people are longing for something. And I think we have an opportunity to say, yeah, this is what you're looking for.

**Annie:** I'm 43, so it's also maybe our age. But there's some... it's been interesting to me that at this point in our lives, and whether it's the pandemic or us being in our 40s, so our peers, a lot of our peers are in their 40s and late 30s, it does feel like it's kind of like, yeah, you've tried all that, how's it going? What else? Because I haven't had to do any of that, and I've got the answer for you. I feel more confident of my answer now than I even did a decade ago.

**Rich:** Certainly. And I think part of it is just life, just living, pain, realize I've tried it on my own, I tried my own wisdom, I tried my own strategies, and I'm still kind of back to square one. Let me try maybe something else here. And I think we have the great message of Jesus.

**Annie:** I don't know if you know this, but we did a podcast for a year and a half called Let's Read the Gospels, where I literally read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John out loud every month for 17 months. So we just finished at the end of May. We did the Book of Acts in May. So starting this month, people can go back and listen to any of them. So anytime a book comes across my desk that is in the Gospels, I'm like, My people love it.

So *The Narrow Path* felt like such a great... You are kind of the conglomerate of my favorite things of like a New York pastor pastoring in this context, and a guy who loves talking about the Gospels, like surefire win. And friends with Sharon Hodde Miller. You're in. You're in. That's it. I want to make sure people know y'all have the podcast, The Resilient Pastor. Tell me about why you started that.

**Rich:** 60% of pastors are lonely. Many pastors are giving up. And so we wanted to create a space where we could talk about some of the unique challenges that pastors face, especially in a kind of post-pandemic world with all of the... You know, I used to say in the pandemic, we were living in a CPR world. The convergence of COVID, political hostility, racial injustice is like the convergence of those three things. And then, oh, by the way, the regular problems of being a pastor.

So we just needed a space to offer language, frameworks, practices, sharing our own struggles about being a pastor. So that's why we created it.

**Annie:** On behalf of other women who lead in churches, it's so beautiful to see a podcast about pastoring that has a woman on the show regularly. YA lot of them have women on the show, which I'm really grateful for, but it's different when you're like, no, we're the three hosts. Like, the three of us are equals. Yes. And that's just... So thank you for that. It's been really a-

**Rich:** I don't know any other way of doing it. So yeah, it's great.

**Annie:** I'm glad you don't. This is not your first book, you've written others that are excellent. Let me read the titles, because I know them in my heart. Or you can say them. Do you want to say them?

**Rich:** Yeah, *The Deeply Formed Life* and *Good and Beautiful and Kind*.

**Annie:** *Good and Beautiful and Kind*. But with *The Narrow Path*, why was this the right next one? Why are you digging into The Sermon on the Mount? It is so hard.

**Rich:** It is really hard. I think there's a narrative part to it in my own life. I became a follower of Jesus at 19 with 15 family members on one night in Brooklyn.



**Annie:** What?

**Rich:** Small church in Brooklyn. After that Sunday where I said yes to Jesus, 19 years old, my grandfather who lived down the block from me, remember I said I grew up around 20 family members, I had lots of questions about what just happened. My grandfather, holy man of God, knows Jesus, knows the scriptures, I would never have extensive conversations with him, but after that Sunday I said, Grandpa, I have some questions about what happened.

**Annie:** Did he just pray you all in?

**Rich:** You want to hear something cool. So the evangelist that day who led my family to Christ, about 20 years prior, he was a drug addict trying to sell percussion instruments to my grandfather at his church as they were coming out of church. My grandfather did not want to purchase an instrument from him. The guy was drunk and high and all that. And he said, "Why don't you come into the church? Let's pray for you."

My grandfather opens the church up again, prays for this guy, leads him to Christ, puts him in a program. He becomes an evangelist, and 20 years later, leads my grandfather's family to faith in Christ. So yeah.

**Annie:** I have got goosebumps. That is unbelievable.

**Rich:** Yeah, pretty amazing.

**Annie:** Wow. Okay, keep going, sorry.

**Rich:** So I go down the block, I say, "Grandpa, I have questions." I sat next to him for shoulder to shoulder, side of his bed. He was very ill at the time. And for about two hours, we had a conversation about the Bible.

He gave me two assignments. One was to start memorizing entire Psalms.

**Annie:** The whole book?

**Rich:** Yeah. Like, we're gonna do Psalm 27 this week.

**Annie:** Gosh.

**Rich:** "In addition to that, I want you to read the words of Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount." So, from the time I was 19, reading the Sermon on the Mount has been kind of an annual thing for me.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Rich:** Because of his influence in my life. That's number one. Number two, I wanted to write a book on it because I do believe that the Sermon on the Mount is the most important set of teachings in the Bible as it relates to following Jesus. It's interesting. Relative to that, it might be one of the most under-read and under-practiced set of teachings in the entire church.

Then thirdly, I wrote it because I think Jesus covers the gamut of life issues, that we can get some significant direction through those three chapters, specifically in the Gospel of Matthew.

**Annie:** Underpracticed is true for me. I mean, I think that feels really true. I read it out loud 17 times. And I mean, there would be days, Rich, where... so I would read it, my COO, Ashley, would be sitting in the room, and our engineer, Craig, just to make sure I said all the words right. So they'd fix me all the time. I had like four perfect chapters in 17 months. But we would finish on some days, and they were almost always Sermon on the Mount days, and we'd go, It is hard to follow Jesus.

**Rich:** Yes, it is.

**Annie:** It's actually harder when you actually do it.

**Rich:** Yes. Which is why the word "narrow" for me... the reason I put narrow is at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, Narrow is the gate that leads to life. The image is, it's narrow, it looks constraining, it looks restrictive, but as you get in it, there's a spaciousness that it leads to. The image is... actually, I read all the Harry Potter books and all that.

**Annie:** I love that you start and you're like, stick with me even if you don't love Harry Potter.

**Rich:** In the *Goblet of Fire*, there's a scene where the Weasley family, they're at this Quidditch festival. They go into this tent. It looks like you can fit two or three people in the tent, but the tent has been charmed. So as they go into this narrow entry of this tent, when they enter it, it's like this spacious loft. And I thought, oh yeah, as I was watching that and reading it, I thought, oh, that's the way of Jesus. On the outside, it looks really restrictive and constraining, and it is hard. But when

you walk in, it actually leads to a spaciousness of soul. So it's a narrow path, but it does lead to a spacious life.

**Annie:** Yeah. A multi-bedroom mansion under there. I wanted that scene in the movie to go on like eight minutes longer than it is. Like suddenly it all gets burned down and I was like, no, this is the cool part! Show me this!

[00:21:16] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Earth Breeze](#). Okay, let me tell you about my life in New York. When I was there in June, I paid with my American dollars for 12 packs of Earth Breeze. And I used our discount code because I wanted to keep six with me in New York and bring six back with me to Nashville, but it was cheaper to buy them in one pack. They were so easy to put in my suitcase and bring home. The joy of Earth Breeze.

If you haven't tried them yet, I am telling you, you're going to love them. They're just like ordinary dryer sheet, but it's actually ultra-concentrated liquidless laundry detergent. So you got to pay attention, make sure you're using the right one. It is tough on stains and odors while also being gentle on the planet and your skin.

Using Earth Breeze can stop millions of detergent jugs from entering our ecosystem, which I love. In fact, 500 million detergent jugs end up in landfills and oceans every year. I hate that. Earth Breeze's lightweight cardboard packaging takes up hardly any space in your laundry room or your apartment or your suitcase. And they have flexible subscriptions that ship right to your door, which is what I did, so you'll never have to worry about running out of detergent again.

Right now, my friends and I get 40% off of Earth Breeze just by going to [earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun](http://earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun). Again, that's [earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun](http://earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun) to cut out single-use plastic in your laundry room and claim 40% off your subscription. [Earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun](http://Earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun).

**Sponsor:** And I have another incredible partner to tell you about, [Lumen](#). Y'all, I love my Lumen. It is so fun. Y'all know I love stats. Listen, if you haven't heard of it, it's the world's first handheld metabolic coach. It's this device that measures your metabolism through your breathing.

And on the app, it lets you know if you're burning fat or carbs. It gives you tailored guidance to improve your nutrition, your workouts, your sleep, and even stress management. Thank you very much. It is so cool. I think it's so fascinating, too.

All you do, all I do, is breathe into my Lumen first thing in the morning, and then it tells you exactly what's going on with your metabolism. And then it gives you this personalized nutrition plan for the day based on your measurements. I can also breathe into it, and you can too, before or after workouts or meals. It is like a constant science experiment on your own body. It is so fun. You know what is happening in real-time.

So because your metabolism is at the center of everything your body does, optimal metabolic health translates to a bunch of benefits, including improved energy levels, better fitness results, and better sleep. So if you want to take the next step in improving your health and have a great time doing it, go to [lumen.me/tsf](https://lumen.me/tsf) and you're going to get 15% off your Lumen. That's [lumen.me/tsf](https://lumen.me/tsf), like that sounds fun, for 15% off your purchase. Thank you Lumen for sponsoring this episode and for teaching me so many things I did not know.

**Sponsor:** Okay, friends, let's talk about hair care. And you already know what I'm going to say. And that is because I love it. Y'all it's [Prose](#). Have you tried it? I never knew how much I'd love custom hair care until I tried it. And now I can't go back. I've noticed so many benefits, healthier, shinier hair being some of them.

In fact, honestly, I forgot to pack my Prose for New York and I had a friend ship me my Prose from my house in Nashville, because that is how much I think it matters to me and my hair.

With Prose, it is all about personalization. You do their in-depth consultation — we love a quiz — and they come up with your made-to products. There are millions of possible formulas, but only one that is uniquely yours or mine. Take my custom shampoo and conditioner, for example, that are literally in a box on their way to me from Nashville. They were formulated to make my hair shiny and hydrated and they deliver.

Prose isn't just better for you. It's better for the planet. They're a certified B Corp, they're cruelty-free and they're the first and only carbon-neutral custom beauty brand. Prose is so confident that you'll bring out your best hair and skin that they're offering exclusive trial offer of 50% off your first subscription order at [prose.com/thatsoundsfun](https://prose.com/thatsoundsfun). So you get your free consultation, then 50, five-zero, 50% off at [prose.com/thatsoundsfun](https://prose.com/thatsoundsfun). That's [prose.com/thatsoundsfun](https://prose.com/thatsoundsfun).

Okay, now back to our conversation with Pastor Rich.

[00:25:35] <music>

**Annie:** One of the things you talk about in the book, which I really love the book, so thank you for writing it. This is a great one. I think this is going to be one that churches and small groups and Bible studies pick up and just work their way through, because you go like, You go buy it. You just hit every part of it.

One of the things you talk about a lot is self-awareness and bringing self-awareness to the Sermon on the Mount. I haven't heard anybody talk about that. So will you talk about why does it matter that we bring our self-awareness to this part of Scripture?

**Rich:** I think what Jesus is doing, His version of spiritual formation, His version of discipleship, is one that does not fixate simply on the externals, which is why over and over in one section He keeps saying, You have heard it said, but I say unto you. Heard it said, but I say unto you. You've heard it said, don't murder, which is actually kind of like a low bar of spiritual success. It's just like, I haven't murdered anyone today. I'm doing all right.

So He's like, you've heard it said, don't murder, but I tell you, if you are harboring a specific kind of anger in your heart, it's like you've murdered someone. So over and over, I think with Jesus, same thing, like you've heard it said, don't commit adultery, but I say if you have lust in your heart. So He goes on a few times to offer "to follow Me is not to stay on the surface, it's to go beneath the surface." And going beneath the surface requires a level of self-awareness. This is Psalm 139.

**Annie:** To not be like, yeah, I didn't murder anybody.

**Rich:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm doing it. I think the Sermon on the Mount addresses three particular things. It's moralism, successism, and individualism. Moralism is a kind of spirituality that is content with just being okay on the surface, behavior modification. And Jesus is like, no, no. To follow me is not simply to focus on the behaviors, the right thinking, the right behaviors, the right action. It's really about the transformation of the heart, and that requires a level of interior examination.

**Annie:** When I was reading the book, I was wishing I knew how to read in Greek, because when you talk about the anger part, you're like, "raka". It's not basic anger. Right. It's this other word.

**Rich:** He says, If you say raka, think about the worst word you can say with contempt in your heart. And what's interesting is he says the word of anger is... there's a New Testament scholar by the name of Dale Bruner who's helped me to see this. Where he said that word is *orgasomenos*, which is, it's not simply a moment of anger. It is like this nurturing of anger. You're keeping it alive.

**Annie:** So the internet.

**Rich:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** You're describing the internet.

**Rich:** You're keeping, you're nurturing, you're feeding it to such a degree that it becomes raka now.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Rich:** It becomes this contempt. And he says, that's the kind of stuff that corrodes your soul.

**Annie:** Wow. Let me tell you a chapter in your book that blew my mind that as I was reading I thought, Why don't we talk about this? Is you wrote a lot about not telling the truth, about us lying. And you busted me and all of us by even just going like, Hey, when someone says did you get my text message and you say, No, I didn't, Oh, I missed it, because you just read it and then didn't look again, that's actually a sin. That's actually a problem. It feels like little yeses lead to big yeses situation.

So will you talk to us a little bit about why truthfulness matters? I think we need to be reminded... I need to be reminded, so therefore I bet some of our friends listening do too.

**Rich:** You know, truthfulness for me is really about integrity. It's congruence. It's what's happening on the outside. It's consistent with what's happening on the inside. God is a God of truth. There's no shadow of turning in God. So I think truthfulness is to image God in a particular way.

Jesus in that passage says, "Some of you said... if you take an oath to strengthen your word, that was kind of a standard practice there, Jesus said, you know what, you don't need an oath to do that. Your word should be so clear that your yes is yes, your no is no. That there's a definitive integrity about your words that line up with your soul.

And yet, it is very easy not to live that way, for a number of different reasons. We want to be liked, the pace of life is so violent that we'd have no time for any processing of our words. But I think ultimately what we're getting at is integrity and congruence.

**Annie:** You talk a lot about not disappointing people and superficiality. It would just be easier and I would get this done quicker if I just said, Hey, I can't do that. I'm so

sorry, I can't do it. I mean, I canceled something today, Rich, and I rewrote my text twice because I was like, It's not not true. That's just not the full truth.

Can you retell the story you tell in the book? Do you remember the story of Jerry explaining to you, "I'm afraid if I say no to volunteering for the church?"

**Rich:** Yeah.

**Annie:** I just think that is like so... it changed me this morning.

**Rich:** So I'm meeting with this congregant and his life is out of control, his family's being impacted, but he does not want to lose kind of the status he has of... He knows he should say no, but the status that he has as a leader, as a volunteer, and so he does not tell the truth in terms of what he can do, what he can't do.

I think that's the superficiality. It's so easy to get caught up in a value system, in things that are stroking our egos, and not live from a deeper center of what can I say yes to, what can I say no to, which requires, I think, a slowing down to take inventory, which is why it's so hard. I live in the city that never sleeps. It's not easy to do this, to slow down, to say, are my words really reflecting the current ordering of my life and the reality that I'm facing day in and day out?

So that was actually probably the chapter that challenged me most, because I'm just so easy-

**Annie:** I mean, you told some real, true stories about you. I was like, Okay, Rich, just tell us how you respond to a text message.

**Rich:** Yeah, I'm making stuff up. I'm just like, can't do it. Kids are sick. I'm sick. As opposed to just saying, no, I can't do that. I'll have to pass on that. Or, yes, I can do that, and I'm gonna stick with that.

**Annie:** I wonder when... I haven't been a person long enough to know, but I wonder when, maybe this has been forever, when it was... it switched in our culture to "I'm a believer. I love Jesus. I worship on Sundays. I have my quiet times. I do all the things. And also, sometimes I just don't tell the truth to the people in my life." About little things. This isn't... I mean, people having affairs, people stealing money, there are big deceptions, of course. But those text messages.

Talk a little bit about what that leads to. No one woke up today and thought, "You know what, I hope by Christmas I have an affair." I mean, that's not the plan. But do you think some of these yeses of not telling the truth on a daily basis are how we compound to getting to bigger yeses?

**Rich:** Absolutely. I think there's an erosion of trust between us and someone else. But I think there's an erosion of life between us and God. The evil one is known as the father of lies.

**Annie:** The father of lies. Oh, Rich.

**Rich:** If that is true, then our lives have lots of resemblance with the evil one when our lives are not marked by truthfulness. Now the challenge is... this is the tension. Like, how do I look in this outfit, you know? So it's just like, now what do I say here? Although my wife has no problem telling me like how... She's like, "That does not work for you at all." It's like, okay.

There's tact. There's understanding context in a way that we don't want our truth... you know, Jesus is full of grace and truth. So how do you hold together grace and truth in a way that honors God, serves our neighbor? But over time, not telling the truth, I think leads to a level of lack of integrity within our own conscience and soul that over time I do think leads to larger areas of compromise in our own lives because we're not really living out of our true center in Christ. We're living out of a different place.

**Annie:** What I've done before is choose a sin and then go, "I'll never do that again. I promise I'll never do that again. I'll never do that again." And then I don't get struck by lightning and it comes to me again and I go, I didn't get struck by lightning last time. I'm waiting to get struck by lightning. And when it doesn't happen-

**Rich:** It's like, I'm okay.

**Annie:** That's right. When Jesus is going like, "No, no, no, you're getting struck by lightning. You just don't know it," eventually you're going to burst into flames.

**Rich:** Which is why I think there's so much extreme language in the Sermon on the Mount. Like Jesus says, If your eye causes you to sin-

**Annie:** Oh, we're going there.

**Rich:** ...pluck it out. And it's just like, Well, wait a second. We're not gonna have any arms or limbs if we do this, Jesus. But I think He's talking about the extremes. The reality of sin in our world is very dangerous. And so we must have extreme kind of solutions, not to approach it in a way that "I didn't get struck by lightning, I'm okay." And Jesus is saying, No, there's something subterranean happening, and if you're not careful, sooner or later, you're gonna be in a bad place.



**Annie:** Talk about this for a minute. I mean, I wrote down gouging eyes and severing hands. Because dude, for every time that I read that in Let's Read the Gospels, I was like, why are we not cutting our hands off? He is saying, pull out your eye, cut off your hand. And if we met someone who cut off their hand, we'd be like, what have you done? What have you done? So does Jesus actually mean that? Does He not actually mean that?

**Rich:** No, I think He's using... in the Bible, there's lots of hyperbolic, exaggerated speech. But I think that exaggerated speech is not simply to go, Okay, that's just a figure of speech. Don't worry about it." I think He's trying to say no. Because again, He's trying to get at the issues of the heart. The same thing with murder. He's saying, "Okay, don't kill. but there's something deeper at work here."

Jesus does this in a number of places. If you don't hate your mother and hate your father, you can't follow me. It's just like, No, wait a second. This is someone who would have honored the fifth commandment, honor your father and mother like no one else. Jesus is without sin. How could he say that?

He's using, again, exaggerated hyperbolic speech to help us go, we better pay close attention to what He means here. And what He's saying is to allow our desires to be disordered, our lust to be disordered, requires an extreme approach to discipling that particular area of our lives.

**Annie:** Okay, let's talk about lust for a minute and talk about pornography. You write about it in the book. What I am noticing in my group of friends and in myself is women are being very invited to read books that have very graphic scenes in them. I have read some too. So this is not everyone else but me. But is that pornography? How high should our barriers be? I don't like to "should" people. But talk to me. Because for men, it's like this conversation since I was in youth group. Like, they'd split us up and they'd talk to us about how we treat our bodies and being good to not having eating disorders, and they'd talk to y'all about not watching porn. And now it feels like pornography's for everybody.

**Rich:** Sure. I think the issue of pornography, graphic novels, whatever it might be, is the sin of objectification, it's the sin of creating relationships in our head that make it... It's easier to create relationships in our head than to actually have true intimacy with someone.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Rich:** And then next thing you know, people become a tool to be used for my own self-gratification. I think that's what Jesus... that's not loving our neighbors ourselves anymore. So to the degree that our hearts are disordered, where we are

now using others for the sake of our own self-gratification, I think that's what Jesus is saying. Human beings are not a tool for our own pleasure. Human beings are to be... they're holy, they're image bearers, they're thous, not its.

Now, when it gets to some of the specifics of specific books or what have you, as a pastor, I get asked this question all the time. And I think there is this-

**Annie:** Are people bringing you actual books and going, what about this one?

**Rich:** They haven't done that yet.

**Annie:** Or are they just kind of going like-

**Rich:** General, yeah. How about this one? Read this excerpt for me, Pastor. It's just like, wait a minute, what's going on?

**Annie:** You've shown it to me, probably you're fine.

**Rich:** You know, as a pastor, I'm trying to hold together the tension of how do we honor scripture, honor Jesus and His teachings at the same time, which lots of people don't talk about. It's like the conscience as well. It's how do we make room for the conscience where things are not as black and white as we want them to be. The larger question is, to what degree am I avoiding real relationship? To what degree am I using people as a means to an end? To what degree am I creating relationships in my own head to avoid true intimacy? I think those are the deeper questions, as opposed to, don't read that or don't watch that.

**Annie:** Yes. And all of us should not read that or watch that. I've had the thing that... the nuance of getting... This is probably us being in our 40s again, is going like, hey, where my conscience pricks does not have to be where everybody's conscience pricks. Because my history is different than their history, and my exposure to things is different than their exposure to things, and what happens to me may not be exactly what happens to everyone else.

So I just have to pay attention to, this feels like a no for me, or this feels like a yes for me, whatever it is, and therefore I walk in this path without expecting God to have everyone on the exact.

**Rich:** Yes, that's a great word. Along those lines, specifically with pornography, I have come to discover, as a pastor and in my own life, in my own journey, that so much of pornography, much like addiction, is about self-soothing. It's about trying to soothe a wound. So it's not someone trying to "I want to do something bad."

**Annie:** "Can't wait to objectify people."

**Rich:** It's like, no, there is some area in my life that I need soothing. And whether that's food, whether that's pornography, whether that's work, whatever it is, it's just another attempt to try to soothe the ache in our souls, in our bodies, the wounds. I think that's the larger conversation that needs to be had as opposed to, "Stop watching that." It's like, No, what's the wound that you're trying to soothe in this moment?

**Annie:** My counselor would often... she's one of the people I'd confess things to, and she one time said to me, "Okay, I'm glad you're saying all this out loud. I care less what you're doing. I care a lot about why you're doing it. I want you to keep telling me, but tell me why. What happened that morning?" Or "what happened that night? Talk me through the rest of it."

And that's where we found that piece that you're talking about, the self-soothing, where she was like, Do you notice every time there's this trigger, every time? "Oh my gosh, well, if I back up an hour before that, I can make a different choice so that I don't feel that thing that makes me want to go to that thing."

**Rich:** Absolutely right.

**Annie:** I mean, that's the Sermon on the Mount. That's what Jesus is saying.

**Rich:** Yeah. Jesus is... He's helping us look beneath the surface in a way that doesn't just... He says, you should have a righteousness deeper than the Pharisees. The Pharisees, they have their act together. Usually, they get a bad rap, but they're trying to obey the law in a way that's pleasing to God. Problem is they're so surface in their religiosity. So they're doing all the right things, but they have the wrong lies behind it. So Jesus is trying to get us deeper than the righteousness of the Pharisees.

**Annie:** Man, and I've got some good Pharisee blood in my bones.

**Rich:** I think we all do.

**Annie:** Oh man. I'm just like, give me the rules. And I can live by the rules, and I can for sure check and see if you're living by the rules. But the joy is not there. Correct me if I'm wrong, Pastor. That almost feels like the wide way. Because I think a lot of times, behind the scenes, for podcast listeners, whenever you get a new book coming out, they send you a list of questions. I read them because I respect them. I don't often use them. But one of yours, I was like, Oh, yeah. We think the narrow path is for Christians, and the wide path is for people going to hell.

**Rich:** Right, which is my biggest thing I'm trying to say here... which, by the way, I said that on social media, not everyone was happy about that.

**Annie:** Oh, weird. Weird about that, yeah.

**Rich:** Because I was basically saying, when Jesus says, Choose the narrow path, He's not... in this specific text here, He was talking about end times, like when you die, you're going to heaven, the narrow path is for those who go to heaven, which basically means there's not a lot of people in heaven by that logic. The broad path, a lot of people. So that's number one.

But number two, I think what Jesus is getting at is we're not talking about going to heaven when you die. We're talking about who is going to choose the way of the kingdom of God, which is narrow, it's hard, it seems constricting and who's gonna choose the broad path, which is the path most taken by our culture? And here's the hard part. There are lots of Christians that are not on the narrow path. And people get upset with that. What do you mean I'm not a...?

**Annie:** People don't like being told that.

**Rich:** No, no. There are a lot of Christians that are carrying a lo... the level of anger and resentment, they're not on the narrow path. There's times I'm not on the narrow path.

**Annie:** Yeah. I was about to say, me too, unfortunately. There are times that...

**Rich:** So if we're looking at it as, I'm a Christian, I'm on a narrow path right now, not so fast. You can be a Christian and say, yeah, I trust in Jesus, and... which is why later on in Matthew 7, Jesus says... They go, Lord, we've done all these things in your name. We've casted out demons, we're prophesying your name. Jesus says, "I never knew you." So we're doing all the good things in the name of Jesus, but we don't know Him. I think that's what He's saying. You can be on the narrow path in name, in what you're doing, but I mean missing it in the process. And that's not to give stoke fear. That's hopefully to offer a proper assessment, do good inventory of our own lives and say, where am I on the journey of what it means to follow Jesus?

**Annie:** I mean, it's almost like chapter by chapter, narrow or wide, narrow or wide? Where am I on telling the truth? Where am I on, you know? I think that is hugely important.

[00:44:45] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Shopify](#). Y'all are super creative and business-minded people. Listen, I was just on Carlos Whitaker's podcast talking about running a business, and I got more comments from businesswomen than I would have ever dreamed.

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And now back to finish up our conversation with Pastor Rich.

[00:46:13] <music>

**Annie:** Part you talk about, which I think is really interesting going into election season, you talk a little bit about politics on socials and on here, which I appreciate.

**Rich:** One of my favorite things to talk about.

**Annie:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, because your skin is so thick. Well done you. I'm always like, there's an election? Everybody prefers, right?

**Rich:** We don't call people enemies anymore. I think one of the tricky moves of the father of lies is if we don't call someone an enemy, we don't ever have to repent for how we treat them. So we don't ever have to go, well, I'm supposed to love that person because they're my enemy. We would never say, The other political parties are enemy. We would just say they're wrong.

We would never say the woman who lives next door to me who calls and complains about the sound in the apartment, I would never call my enemy. She's just annoying. So do we need to call people enemies that we're treating...? Talk to me about how we deal with enemy problems in a culture that doesn't call anybody our enemy.

**Rich:** It's a bit self-deluding not to think that we don't have enemies.

**Annie:** You do think other people think of us as their enemy.

**Rich:** Sure.

**Annie:** We're quick to be someone else's enemy. We don't ever say that we have them.

**Rich:** When I think about enemy, I can frame it in two ways. Number one, an enemy is someone who is overtly, actively against you. Someone who is seeking to undermine you, your harm, whether in words, in actions, whatever it might be. So we might consider that person to be an enemy. So capital E, Enemy.

**Annie:** Got it.

**Rich:** But I think it's also helpful to think about the little annoyances as: who do I have a hard time loving? Who do I have a hard time seeing as people made in the image of God? Who do I have a hard time moving towards? I think it's just helpful for us to be honest with ourselves and say, Yeah, that person might be a lowercase e, enemy, that I need the grace of God for.

I've never been asked that question, Annie. Should we be labeling people enemies? Perhaps, yes. Perhaps to properly situate the nature of the need that I have for God's grace to flow through me in this particular moment for this person, as opposed to saying, this person's a little annoying, so I'm just gonna avoid them. No, what does it look like to see them as maybe a person I'm having a hard time loving, and now I need the grace of God in my life to live not according to the broad path, which is the normal path people take, but this narrow path?

**Annie:** Yeah, it has affected me. You know the phrase "frenemies". The term frenemies.

**Rich:** Yeah.

**Annie:** So I even have some friends in my up-close circles that I will have seasons where I go like, Man, that is the most annoying dude I've ever been around, but he's married to my friend and therefore... But then when I started going like, if you called him an enemy, how would you treat him differently? Well, then all the teaching comes up

and all the love your enemy. So what does it look like to love him when he's my friend's annoying husband? I don't feel any conviction.

**Rich:** That's exactly right. If we can get away from categorizing people in that way, it seems... I love the point you're making, that we don't have to actually do what Jesus tells us to do. And now that you say it, like three names came to mind right now. I was like, who's like... so thank you, Annie. I really appreciate it.

**Annie:** Some friends married to people that might be enemies after all.

**Rich:** I have work to do now. I didn't come here to get work done.

**Annie:** Listen, I knew when I was sitting down with you that you were going to do work on me after reading the book. I knew. One more question about Matthew 25 as I'm prepping my sermon. Because you just mentioned narrow and wide as well. Sheep and goats. The problem is they look a lot alike. They all stand in front of Jesus. I'm concerned for myself. I'm concerned that I don't want it to be like, part one is, do you believe that Jesus is who He says He is? Yay, you're here. Now, are you a sheep or a goat? And the goats get... It's like chutes and ladders. We made the right choice on a ladder, we got to Jesus, and then I was a goat and I got chuted. That's not how it goes.

**Rich:** That's not how it goes. The way I try to hold on to, it's kind of that age-old question of, you know, Save, not save, eternal security, whatever. The way I try to think about it is the love of God, the grace of God far exceeds anything we can imagine. So let's just start there, number one.

There's something in the book of Philippians that says to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. It doesn't say work for your salvation. It says work it out. I think that's like, how do I hold the tension of God loves me with an everlasting love and there's nothing I can do to earn the love of God. That's the lead to a kind of holy working out that I want to take seriously the alignment of my life with Jesus. So it's not always as black and white as it seems, but for me at least, that's how I hold together that tension of not living in fear and at the same time recognizing there is a holy sense of urgency that's to mark my life.

**Annie:** It seems to be your way of teaching with the narrow path. And what I've heard on Resilient Pastor is you kind of go like, Hey, there's something to wrestle out here. There is right and wrong. We're not saying there's not absolute truth, but there is more to wrestle here than face value. And Jesus is the King of Kings, but also he is the King of like, Hey, here's face value, and then about just [inaudible 00:52:07]. We don't want you to kill anybody. And also-

- Rich:** And also.
- Annie:** ...how are you thinking about the guy who's driving your cab? Because there's a murder option there too.
- Rich:** Yeah, exactly. So Jesus came to fulfill the law, the intent of the law, which is not just simply on the surface. Let's not do that. But beneath the surface. And I think you're getting at that exactly right. That's what He's trying to do in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Annie:** Listen, it's summer, we're supposed to be going easy, and you're out here releasing books that are making us work at it.
- Rich:** I know. This feels like, what, a September release as opposed to a July release.
- Annie:** We'll now be releasing this right before the election. We'll be saving it. Well, I can't wait for people to read this book. Thank you so much for writing it. The work you do around the Gospels is just such a gift. I mean, there's so many of us who have not been to seminary yet and are studying Scripture a lot because we love it. But having pastors like you who teach the deeper is like fake seminary for me, or mini seminary for me, or whatever it is. 'm really thankful.
- Rich:** Oh, thank you.
- Annie:** The last question we always ask. I was supposed to ask it first, but I forgot. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, Rich, tell me what y'all do for fun. What sounds fun to you?
- Rich:** Oh my goodness, okay. So let me think about one thing I've done and one thing that I'd like to do.
- Annie:** Okay.
- Rich:** I think one of the most fun moments in my life was watching Avengers Endgame with about 400 teenagers in the theater.
- Annie:** Who like knew the story enough.
- Rich:** They knew the story.
- Annie:** A lot of screaming.



**Rich:** Every movie I watch, I want to watch it with 400 teenagers now because the crying, the screaming, the jumping out of my seat, so that's like really fun for me.

**Annie:** The videos of that.

**Rich:** The videos of that.

**Annie:** Of the people who were opening night.

**Rich:** Yes, yes.

**Annie:** I bet I watched 50 of them.

**Rich:** I cry every time. I get chills every time.

**Annie:** Love it.

**Rich:** And along those lines, what sounds like fun, I got into, like two years ago, YouTube reaction videos. So I'll watch a show and then watch the reaction to it. I want to get all of my favorite YouTube reactors in my house and go room to room for five minutes.

**Annie:** And just let them react to your life?

**Rich:** I'm a seven in Enneagram, so I'm all over the place here.

**Annie:** Me too.

**Rich:** So I just want to be all over the place there with some of my favorite reactors. That sounds like fun to me.

**Annie:** Okay, so reactors do things... like they'll watch an episode of TV and then they'll-

**Rich:** Star Wars or whatever it is.

**Annie:** Got it.

**Rich:** And now they are crying at the scenes you're crying at. So it's just like, you see me, they see me, they're laughing at the scenes I'm laughing at.

**Annie:** Do you know why you love that? It's because that's literally what you did in *The Narrow Path* is you react for us to the thing we're all watching. So you're like, I'll be a reactor to scripture.

**Rich:** There you go.

**Annie:** "I'll do it."

**Rich:** I wasn't thinking about that.

**Annie:** You did.

**Rich:** But thank you, I'm a reactor now.

**Annie:** Exactly what you did. Okay, before we go, you're a seven. What number does your wife most identify with?

**Rich:** Eight. So my wife is eight-seven. I'm a seven-eight.

**Annie:** I'm not married yet, but I am looking for... I think an eight-nine. I would, I mean, we'd bulldoze some people. There'd be some hurt feelings. We would have a ball.

**Rich:** Yeah. My wife's thing is lead or get out of the way. At some point, someone's leading. I'll tell you that.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right. And my eight, I think this is probably true for you too, my eight wing is very strong. And sometimes if someone just looked at my behaviors, they'd be like, she's probably an eight. That's fun. But I know my core is, is anybody going to take care of me? My core is like, I don't want to hurt. So I know my motivation. I know my motivation. But man, I love an eight.

We just had a conversation with our singles community. We have a singles community called Single Purpose League. There's about 2,000 of them in there that want to talk about what's my purpose while I'm single and what's my single purpose on the planet, no matter my marital status. So we just had a conversation with them about like, who can you partner with and who works and who doesn't work? Suzanne Sebille is like, they all work if you're trying to be healthy. I was like, I don't know. I've tried a few. Maybe that's me. Maybe I need to get on the narrow path, but...

**Rich:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Annie:** Okay, a seven and an eight.

**Rich:** Seven and eight. It's worked out for us. We'll be married 19 years in January.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Rich:** It's not always easy, but it's worked out.

**Annie:** I'm sure not, but man, how fun. Y'all have the most fun. Y'all lead the fun.

**Rich:** We have a lot of fun.

**Annie:** I bet. I believe it. Thanks for doing this today.

**Rich:** Thanks for having me.

**Annie:** I really appreciate it.

[00:56:25] <music>

**Outro:** I mean, you guys, isn't he awesome! What a brilliant man. And I loved this book. I mean, we are Gospel-talking people. So make sure you get your Copy of *The Narrow Path*, go follow Rich on social media, tell him thanks so much for being on the show.

And if you like this episode, I think you're also going to love Episode 886 with Darren Mulligan. Oh, that one. People do not quit talking to me about that one. Or 854 with John Mark Comer, one of our all-time favorites. Those are linked for you in the show notes below.

You may have noticed this on the app you're listening to, but now, when you finish an episode of That Sounds Fun, it will shoot you to a different show that you did not agree to listen to because that is how the algorithm is working. So if you want to keep listening to That Sounds Fun, make sure you click on one of those links in the show notes below so you can hear some of these other incredible episodes.

If you have any questions from this episode, just drop them in the Q&A box on your Spotify app, if you're a Spotify listener like me, or send them to us on Instagram @ThatSoundsFunPodcast. We'll try to answer them there.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. Anywhere you need me, that is how you can find me.

I think that's it for me today, friends. So go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you, and I'll do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is getting my

nails done because they are long like claws and it is time. I cannot type. I keep typing the wrong things because I'm not typing well.

So y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday with your favorite and our favorite Eddie Kaufholz as we recap 2019 and mostly talk about the Olympics. Okay, okay, we'll see y'all then.