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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode, an important episode of That Sounds Fun. Y'all are going to love this. Okay. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today.

Intro: Today on the show we are talking about something that we love to dig into around here — unplugging from all the noise.

My friend, Hannah Brencher is joining us. Her latest book, *The Unplugged Hours*, comes out in September. So we're going to talk about how we do all of this well. We even recorded a little bonus conversation just for Single Purpose League to talk about the nuances of being single, but also needing to disconnect and unplug and how to feel safe and secure when we're doing that. Y'all are going to love this one.

Hannah is a writer, a TED Talk speaker, and an entrepreneur. She founded The World Needs More Love Letters, which is a global community dedicated to sending letter bundles to those who need encouragement.

She and her husband and daughter live in Atlanta. I'm so glad she's here with us today. There are a lot of resources Hannah has created to help us have more balance around our lives with our phones. We'll link to all of those in the show notes below.

Here is my conversation with my friend, Hannah Brencher.

[00:01:18] <music>

Annie: Hannah Brencher, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Hannah: Thank you. I'm so excited to be here.

Annie: I'm so glad you're here. You drove up from Atlanta. You're a part of Passion City.

Hannah: I am, yeah.

Annie: All these people that I like, so love. We share everybody.

Hannah: Which is good.

Annie: I know.

Hannah: They're good people.

Annie: It's great. What part of town, you don't have to give us your address, what part of town do you live in in Atlanta?

Hannah: I live in Decatur.

Annie: Oh, yeah.

Hannah: I'm right near East Atlanta.

Annie: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Hannah: I like to stay close.

Annie: I love Decatur. The Biscuit Place. Biscuit.-

Hannah: Gosh, I don't know.

Annie: There's a great biscuit place in Decatur. I'll figure it out for you. I will tell you. People are yelling back at us already. I can hear them as they're listening to this.

Hannah: Okay. Yeah. We got to know.

Annie: Y'all know this.

Hannah: I had to give up gluten years ago.

Annie: So am I. It won't really help. Me neither. I'm very gluten-free.

Hannah: Okay. Well, then you need to go to Hell Yeah Gluten Free.

Annie: Oh, I don't know it. In Decatur?

Hannah: There's multiple locations. One just opened up in Decatur.

Annie: Okay.

Hannah: And you can get anything you love gluten-free.

Annie: It is so much easier to be fill-in-the-blank free now than it has ever been in the world. Because I'm like, especially... Well, you know, you used to live in New York. Especially in New York. Any food I want I can get a gluten-free version of it or a dairy-free version of it. It is such a gift.

Hannah: It is. It's a good time to be gluten-free.

Annie: The only thing you can't do is like white bread. White bread seems to be the thing that has eluded all of us in the gluten-free world. But other than that, I kind of get it.

Hannah: Yeah.

Annie: Okay. I'm going to ask you our first question and we're going to talk about it. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun and we are in our 10th year, tell me what sounds fun to you, Hannah.

Hannah: Okay. I was just confessing to you that I have struggled with this question all morning because I think I'm not a fun person. But I think I am. But I'm not.

Annie: Okay. What makes you think you're not a fun person?

Hannah: Because when I think about what sounds fun to me, I'm like, okay, maybe like curl up and read a good book. But I feel like I should be adventurous and be like, I'm ziplining, but that's not happening.

Annie: This is a central problem with fun is that people judge their fun against what they think other people think is fun. And so every mom says, "I'm not the fun mom, except the ones who are the adventure moms."

Hannah: Yeah. Right.

Annie: The Enneagram sevens people always assume they're fun. My encouragement to you is if your fun is fun to you, it is fun.

Hannah: It's fun. Okay.

Annie: And there are more people who agree with your fun than you realize. But everyone seems to remove themselves and really judge their fun because it doesn't look like a zipline.

Hannah: Okay. Well, it's not a zipline then. I would say fun for me is, gosh, a quiet early morning with some coffee, a good book. Maybe later a true crime documentary.

Annie: Okay.

Hannah: That's it.

Annie: That is fun.

Hannah: That's fun.

Annie: That's fun to you sis. That works for me. That is a very fair answer. We talk to people a lot about not judging their fun because it actually spirals into judging yourself for a lot of things.

Hannah: Ooh, that'll preach.

Annie: Right. Fun is such a great door to a lot of things. One of the things is it tells you if you don't think you're fun, you might not think you're smart. You might not think you're pretty. You might not think all these things that outside forces have told you this is the standard and you aren't hitting it.

Hannah: Wow.

Annie: And it's not true.

Hannah: Okay. I can go home now.

Annie: Right. I mean, listen, I know as soon as you started saying, I'm not sure I'm a fun person. I'm like, Ooh, I love this. I love it. Because everybody is the fun mom that their kid needs.

Hannah: Yeah.

Annie: Like every one of you is the fun mom your kid needs.

Hannah: It's so true. And she loves me for the things I find to be fun.

Annie: Exactly right.

Hannah: She wants to sit next to me and read.

Annie: She's not on Instagram. She doesn't see what other moms are doing. I mean, the majority of kids think their mom is fun until they are told differently.

Hannah: That's beautiful.

Annie: And often it's the mom who says it before anybody else says it.

Hannah: Okay, well, I'm fun.

Annie: Yeah, you're fun.

Hannah: Novalee, if you're listening, I'm fun.

Annie: Yeah, you're a fun mom. Okay, I have been dying to have you on the show. How many books have you released now?

Hannah: This is my fourth.

Annie: That's what I thought. I thought you had a couple. Go through the other three for us.

Hannah: The first one was *If You Find This Letter*, and then *Come Matter Here* and then *Fighting Forward*, and now *The Unplugged Hours*.

Annie: Okay. I mean, I was saying this to you a minute ago. I think this is the book we all like... This is the concept we are all feeling somewhere in our guts. Because in the book you say that as you did your unplugged hours, which is literally unplugged from your phone, from socials, from technology, you started to realize you are becoming the woman you missed being before.

Hannah: Yes.

Annie: Will you talk about that? Because I had a profound moment with that line in the book when I read it.

Hannah: I'll start crying immediately. But that's fine. Because that was actually one of the parts of it was that I used to be the person that could feel everything so deeply. And then the more I had tech in my life, the less I could feel anything at all.

Annie: Wow.

Hannah: And it was an unexpected side effect of *The Unplugged Hours*. I think when I started unplugging, I was like, "I want to reclaim some time. Maybe I'll get more focus. I'll be more present with my family." But the more that I did it, the more I realized I was getting back to the person who was there before all that noise got in. And what was kind of sad was that I didn't even realize that I had lost her.

Annie: Oh, interesting.

Hannah: So for me, like, you know, 10, 12 years ago, when I got onto the internet, I was way more creative. I was more wonder-filled. I wrote fiction. I didn't write non-fiction.

Annie: You wrote novels.

Hannah: I wrote novels.

Annie: You said you wrote a novel a year.

Hannah: Yes.

Annie: Every November, NaNoWriMo. Is that what you're doing?

Hannah: I was like nine.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Hannah: I spent all year writing the novel. Then my mom would take me to get it printed, bound up, and I would give it to all of my family members for Christmas.

Annie: Wow.

Hannah: And it was like my yearlong project.

Annie: That's crazy.

Hannah: But the moment I started blogging, I stopped doing fiction because it was less about imagination and more about what's happening in daily life. And that can be beautiful, but that can also become performative so quickly.

So, yeah, like I can look now and be like, Wow, I feel more myself today than I have felt in the last decade. I didn't even know I was looking to get that back. But if you ask me how, I'm like, it's definitely from unplugging that I've gotten back to what matters to me.

And that's because there were a lot of hurdles along the way where I believed, "Oh, that should matter to me, so I'm going to chase that thing. Oh, I'm going to do that thing. Oh, they like when I do that thing, I'll do that thing." And more and more you lose the sound of your own voice inside of you.

Annie: Oh, interesting.

Hannah: So, yeah.

Annie: When I read that part of the book, I remembered being... When I taught school, I used to teach elementary school. I taught two years in Jackson County. I lived in

Georgia. I grew up in Georgia. Two years in Jackson County, three years in Woodstock, Georgia.

I remember the day I waited for was the day that Real Simple came in the mail, the magazine. Because that was what I would... I was waiting to read Real Simple. And I would save it. I'd read it as I was going to bed. And I thought, I miss her. So it started me on this path of like, what did I do after work?

Hannah: Right.

Annie: What did I do after... If I had no Instagram to look at, would I just go to bed? What did I do? So I've been really thinking back to pre... I started blogging in like 06, 05, 06, something like that.

Hannah: You were right at the beginning.

Annie: And so I was thinking about... Again, it was also 20 years ago. But you've really had me assessing who would I find? Because there's ways I don't want to be her again.

Hannah: Yeah, totally.

Annie: I'm 20 years more mature. But there are also ways that I'm like, Oh, man, what did I do? What did I love? What was it? How did we...? It's messed with me a little bit.

Hannah: Oh, well, I'm happy to have that happen because I know on the other side of that is some of the parts that you actually didn't intend to lose that you can get back.

Annie: Yeah. How deep do we need to think about this? I'm thinking about the mom who's listening to this while she's doing the laundry. Because I don't want people to stop using technology because that's how they're hearing us.

Hannah: No. And I think that that's kind of become... for me when I started unplugging. I wanted to know, can we strike a balance? Because I do love to chat.

Annie: That's the question.

Hannah: I love the fact that at the end of the day or in the morning my daughter can have a FaceTime breakfast date with my mom who's a thousand miles away.

Annie: I FaceTime my nephew every single morning while I'm doing my makeup.

Hannah: And we love tech for that. Honestly, I love being able to get on social media and see people from college and see people and like what they're doing and getting to connect in that way. So when I started unplugging, it wasn't like I wanted to throw out tech because I was like, This is where my job happens. This is where a lot of our jobs happen. We have to be on email. We have to be, to some extent, plugged in. So the question was really, can we strike that balance?

I feel like now on the other side of like thousands of unplugged hours later, I'm like, yeah, I think we can. Like I don't look at tech anymore and feel exhausted by it. And if and when I do, that's just a signal to myself, Okay, rein it in better boundaries for this season that you're in.

But I can honestly say I get on a social media and I actually enjoy it now, which for a long time I wasn't. I wasn't enjoying it.

Annie: Now we're doing descriptive, not prescriptive. So I want to ask you some direct questions. But I also want our friends listening to hear me say that doesn't mean Hannah's life is your life or Annie's life is your life.

Hannah: Absolutely.

Annie: But I would like to hear when you say "get on social media", what does that look like for you? Do you check it at the same time every day? What does it look like?

Hannah: It changes in different seasons, like whether I'm going to have to be more plugged in or not. But I feel like the core of it is doing the actual unplugging in different parts of my day. That's what refuels me to then be able to step onto these apps and not have them take from me.

And the bigger thing for me, rather, what time of the day is it is, am I stepping onto this app on purpose? Am I stepping in intentionally? Am I here to engage with people? Because I don't want to just sit there and scroll mindlessly. I want to use social media for what it's for, to be social and it's media.

So days where I'm not feeling it, those are the days where I'm like, I should not get on these apps, you know, or I got to turn the phone off completely. But the goal is really, Okay, can I show up and in my sphere, encourage people to keep going and use this as a medium and an avenue to do that? But not be like a lurker in the background and also not stay on the app so long that it's going to start taking from me.

It used to be that I was on them all day, every day. And if I'm in the checkout line, I'm on social media, I'm over here checking emails, even though I don't have any

intention of responding to that person right now. And what I started to key into was like, if I was face to face with these people, this is not how I would ever treat them. This is not how I would ever want to interact with them. And so can I add more humanity into the way that I use social media?

that changes for every person. But for me, I'm like, I think I can show up here and still be deeply intentional and then get off the app and go about the rest of my day.

Annie: Shauna Niequist taught us a couple of years ago, I think on the show, maybe in real life, but I think on the show, about the power of having a book on your phone all the time, a Kindle book on your phone, because then she's like, when my inclination is to pick up my phone, the phone is not the problem. You can pick up the phone in the checkout line. But what are you doing?

Hannah: What are you doing?

Annie: And so I try to keep a fiction and a nonfiction all the time on my phone that are just my like waiting books so that there is... One of them is practicing the presence of God, which you talk about in this book. But it is... I am not great at this. This is very hard for me.

One of the reasons I really want to quit the internet and I just haven't yet, but I'm really considering it. Sorry, everyone listening, but I cannot get a healthy, enjoyable balance with this thing.

Hannah: Yeah.

Annie: But it is also my job.

Hannah: Honestly, I think it's different for every person. You have to assess what you need for yourself.

Annie: Right.

Hannah: Because I didn't know, but I remember being like, You know what, I used to love this and I used to love blogging and it was really fun for me. And I reached a point, I think it was like maybe a couple hundred hours into the unplugged year that I was like, Okay, we need to figure this out. Because if this is not fun anymore, I am not doing this. Because this is not some like... this is not my... Well, it is in a sense a job. But it was something where I was like, I need to figure this out because I used to love this thing and now I don't.

What I started doing was I started hacking my creative process and I started carving out more space to write and create, which is the thing that I love. And then out of the overflow of that space, I started to share and it stopped taking from me. Because what I realized I was doing was I was either getting on the app for no purpose at all or I was getting on the app trying to figure out what to post. And that was just draining.

So now I'm like, oh, Okay, well, what I loved about being somebody who creates content is the actual creation space. And I've reclaimed that in my life where I can have that space and then, oh, I feel I want to share from this.

Annie: When you say the app, do you mean Instagram?

Hannah: I think it's mainly Instagram, I would say, is like the culprit. But we are seeing, especially with the research, a lot of people are spending time on Instagram and TikTok. TikTok is even worse for your brain. Like we are forgetting how to be able to ingest information and digest information because our brains were not created to take in this much content at this fast of a rate.

I think it doesn't really matter what the portal is or the medium is so much as it's like, oh, okay, like this is not how we need to be spending our time.

Annie: We have a TikTok for Annie F. Downs. When we were thinking about doing it, I thought, Okay, let me put on my phone and just watch somebody. Let me even see what people are making. I mean, I had nights where I would watch for hours. And then I came back to work and I was like, I'm sorry, I have to delete this app. There is not... With Instagram I think there is a healthy path, I can't find it. With TikTok, for me, there is no healthy path.

Hannah: Yeah.

Annie: Because I'm not creating, I'm only taking. So it has been a really interesting difference to go, Okay, for me, that particular app, there is no path for me.

Hannah: Absolutely. Yeah.

Annie: No matter what professionally is I'm told, no matter... that app is not for me. That can be for Annie F. Downs for @AnnieFDowns. That is not for Annie to have on her phone.

Hannah: Absolutely. And that's the boundary right there. I think each person listening is like, the boundary may be different for you than it is for me than it is for Annie. I create these lists. They're called my what's not working.

Annie: Oh, I have it on my notes. You wrote about in the book. I think it's fascinating.

Hannah: If I'm feeling stressed, I'm feeling overwhelmed, I'm feeling fatigued, whatever it is, you know, you get that sense in you that you're like something is off and something needs to shift fast. And I will pause, power down and I will create my "what's not working" list.

Then with each thing that I've written down, I try to ask myself, Okay, is there something small that I can do right now or in the next few days that's going to look like shifting back in a better direction. But I have always seen if something's not working, it usually means I am too plugged in. And that's not necessarily... like for me, it would be like, oh, well, I'm checking email at night when I'm not responding to email. So then I'm anxious over things I know I need to do, but I'm not in the space to do them right now. And that's taking me away from my husband. It's taking me away from my kid. It's taking me away from my friends.

But yeah, those lists will always be like, oh, well, that's interesting. I need to drink more water or I'm always snapping at my kids. And it's because I'm scrolling, seeing something I don't like, and then projecting it onto everybody else. So it's kind of like an inner inventory. But I've had to learn to parent myself better, you know?

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

Hannah: Because like I look at my daughter and I'm like, Okay, she needs rhythms and routines. She would ideally love to eat Jenny's ice cream every night for dinner and watch shows. That's what she wants to do. Exactly. I'm like, me too, girl. But I have to steer her in the right direction.

But what I don't understand, like, kids or no kids is why we're not like, I need to implement that kind of self-discipline for myself. I need to say, Okay, what does Hannah need and how do we get that to her? And do we respect her enough to do that for her?

Annie: Well, I can tell you why. I can tell you why as a single woman and when I'm thinking about my single friends, but also some of my mom friends, is ice cream and TV and Instagram make us feel not lonely. They are coping techniques.

Hannah: Yeah, totally.

Annie: It is very hard to parent yourself and discipline yourself when you are hurting. So how do we identify if our relationship with the apps on our phone is an unhealthy

coping technique or if this is okay? How do we determine if it's healthy or unhealthy today?

Hannah: The way that I kind of frame it is like I like to do check-ins with myself. Years ago, before I started unplugging, my checking in was getting on social media. And I was like, "You've had a long day. You want to do some self-care is what I would say." And I thought that scrolling was self-care.

At the same time, I'm also like, I wanted to write this book in a way that there is no shame, only grace, because this is a hard topic. It's a hard topic. And it's not our fault that we have become this addicted. Like we've had something working against us for more than the last decade.

But for me, I had to come to grips with the fact that I was like, Okay, I am scrolling and it's not helping me. It's making me feel worse. Is there another way that I can check in with myself? And that doesn't mean that I don't scroll from time to time or that I get it perfectly.

One of the things I started doing this summer particularly is I took my Bible and I put it on the countertop, which is a spot that I frequent throughout the day. I challenged myself to say, before you pick up your phone, can you just check in right here? And it has been the most life-giving routine that I never anticipated. I would just open it up and I would pray, God, like show me something I haven't seen before.

I'm not doing anything in-depth. I'm not doing like an exegetical study, but I read a line or two. I'd scribble a little note and then I'd go on with the rest of my day. Or I would pick up my phone for whatever I need.

So that's what I mean by that balance is like you're not always going to get it right. And I understand that the tools we want them because we don't want to cope. And I'm not telling anybody, hey, go cold turkey, turn off the phone, and figure out what's going on.

Annie: Right, right, right.

Hannah: But check in with yourself. Check in with yourself, whether that's for five minutes, whether that's for 10 minutes to say, am I okay? Is there something that I need right now that I'm trying to fill a hole for?

[00:21:17] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [KiwiCo](#). Listen, I know when your kids are back in school, it means all the weekend birthday parties. And you know what makes a super fun birthday gift? KiwiCo.

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Remember that link and every other link you could ever hope for are in the show notes below, or we will send it straight to your inbox on Friday's AFD Week in Review email. You hear me say this a lot, but the places that are getting the best of our energy right now are right here on the podcast and that Friday email. So you want to make sure you are getting it.

Now back to our conversation with Hannah.

[00:23:09] <music>

Annie: The idea of the what's not working lists, I love. Now for a peek behind the curtain, everyone listening, we're recording this the day before our biggest weekend, probably of my career and of our team's life with the Ryman. So this is not the weekend I get to do this.

But I've been thinking, Okay, next weekend on my Sabbath, I want to make a list of what is not working. So my brain said, because I'm an Enneagram 7, because I tend

to save a lot of my pain and grief for my Saturday mornings, that's how I've balanced my life and how I make myself feel some of the feelings I don't love. I also put things like "what's not working" lists on Saturdays. How often do you do that list? Is this a daily thing we should actually do or is this a quarterly thing?

Hannah: No. I mean, well, it could be quarterly. I would say daily would be hard. But I personally do it when I hit a point of just overwhelm and I know it. Like I can feel it. And I'm like, hold up, something's not working, you know?

Annie: Got it. Okay.

Hannah: Usually I feel like it happens a lot, like in my work days. Like I'm not focused, I'm scattered, I'm kind of all over the place and nothing is getting done and I can't focus. That's when I will stop. I will shut off. I will probably go and take a walk around the block if I'm able to, but like I'll get out of my head and do something physical first and then come back to the list.

That list can sit on your desk for the next quarter or the next month because chances are you can't overhaul it today. The overhauls within discipline, they don't really work. But like I try to look at it... you know, I posted something last night about putting my vitamins on auto ship. And I was like, I did this for future me. You know?

I try to frame it that way of like, when this feels hard, can I do it for future me? And asking yourself, Okay, future me is going to love that we did this or future me is going to love that tonight. Before we watch that show, read a chapter of a book because we said for so long we wanted to read more books.

So while I understand we want these tools because like we feel like we're hurting, at the same time, there's a reality moment where I think we have to realize we're actually hurting ourselves more, you know? And it's like you've said for so long you want to read books, you want to write cards-

Annie: Go to bed early.

Hannah: Go to bed early, have a nighttime routine. And then you get to the end of the day, you've got no willpower left in the tank. It's no wonder that you're like, you know what? I'm just going to watch Traitors and eat my jennies.

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

Hannah: Sometimes though, watching Traitors and eating jennies, that's the thing that is taking care of you. But having a time and place for it rather than this is every single

night and then every single night I go to bed mad that I didn't pick the rhythms I actually wanted.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. John Eldredge teaches that what you do between five and ten on Tuesday night determines what you're doing between five and ten on a Wednesday morning. Like how you treat your evening is going to determine whether you are able to be who you want to be the next morning.

Hannah: Absolutely.

Annie: It's the other reason that I'm into puzzles and cross stitching is because I found myself double screening all the time, watching a show, and scrolling on Instagram. And I was like, I've got to start doing something else with my hands if I'm going to sit here. Or now that my treadmill now has TV on it, thank you, Peloton, for updating that. So now I can also walk if I'd rather walk while I'm watching a show. But the double screening, I do it all... I mean, I'm talking like I'm working on a puzzle every day. I'm not. I'm double-screening all the time. But I have tools now that I didn't have when that happened.

Hannah: Yeah. And that's where I think grace for all of it. Because honestly, there's a chapter in the book called *We Try Again*.

Annie: Yeah. So good.

Hannah: Because I'm just like, yeah, like if I had a friend come to me and she's like, Okay, so what about the days where it just doesn't work and we're on our phone all day? And I'm like, "We try again." And as long as we are willing to try again, we can't fail. I'm not saying throw the phone in the woods or go off the grid. I'm saying like, can you reclaim 15 minutes to feel more like yourself? Because then you will have fuel in the tank to do some other things, you know?

We need that for everyone. We need that for you to show up to your job, for you to show up to your kids, for you to show up to the people that you're serving or the ministry that you're working in. It's like these are little ways to actually fill your tank up so that you have more to operate from.

Annie: You do a beautiful job in the book. Full stop. That's a full sentence. You do a beautiful job in the book. But you also do a beautiful job talking to content creators about the power of walking away from the internet. That you do not have to be creating seven days a week, 24 hours a day in order to be a successful content creator.

So will you talk to the people for a minute who are maybe in the seat like you and I, where part of our job is interacting with people? But there's also people who are proper like to know, making a ton of money, and think, I can't take a day off every week because our family is surviving off of me showing the clothes I just bought at Walmart.

Hannah: Absolutely. And I get that and I feel that. I'm in that. But I was burning out. I mean, I was exhausted. I would see a rhythm like Sabbath... I mean, I used to practice Sabbath, and then COVID hit and I was like, "I can't practice Sabbath."

Annie: Oh, my gosh. This chapter in the book is fantastic where you talked about how COVID... the guy who in the middle of the night would say, "Stop scrolling from like 11 to 2 a.m." I missed all that during COVID. I think it's so fascinating that COVID stole Sabbath from you when we actually were home more.

Hannah: Yeah. When everything shut down, I was nine months pregnant and they took the birthing parents out of the... they took the birthing partner out of the whatever room it is that you give birth in in New York City. So my doctor was-

Annie: Y'all lived in New York at the time? Oh, y'all weren't already in Atlanta?

Hannah: No, we lived in Atlanta. But I went immediately to my doctor because I knew people that-

Annie: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Okay. Okay.

Hannah: I knew people that were leaving New York to go give birth other places. And my doctor was like, "Hey, this week it can happen, but I can't tell you what's going to happen next week."

Annie: Wow.

Hannah: So we're living with the anxiety of like, what is this going to be like? I've never given birth before. I don't know what's happening. The world is shutting down around me. I would stay up at night doom scrolling because I thought if I could just get more information, maybe I'd feel okay then.

So when it came to Sabbath, I was like, Well, no, I need to be on my phone because this is the only way... this is my lifeline. This is my coping mechanism.

Annie: That's exactly right.

Hannah: I always say I think like a lot of us we packed a bag in COVID, but then we never fully unpacked it. I can't even tell you. My husband is probably so annoyed by the amount of times I said this throughout the pandemic. But I was like, "We're not going to have a family meeting, are we like? We're not. There's not going to be any big collective family meeting where we say, "Hey, how are you post-COVID? I don't mean like our family. I mean, like all of us, we need a family meeting. And I was like, That's what I was afraid of, is that we would slowly go back to regular life. But we would go back with so much baggage that we don't know what to do with.

And that was the tipping point, I think, for a lot of us was like COVID made it so that we needed our phones. That became a necessity. And now we're back to whatever the new normal is and we're still so connected, but we're so tired because we didn't debrief and we didn't pick up healthier habits for ourselves.

Annie: I've written 11 books. I have not written a chapter book since COVID.

Hannah: Wow.

Annie: I wrote all the books I've written by 2020. We've had kids' books, kids' books come out and devotionals but I have not written a chapter book since COVID.

Hannah: That's wild.

Annie: I know. And I'm on deadline now, so it's going to happen. But I am finding it so much harder than it ever was before. And I think it is a lot of what you're saying of the immediacy of the internet and how it is. There is always more content. There's always more things made. There's always something to look at is making it harder for me to write a book.

Hannah: Totally. I mean, I wrote that book completely on yellow notepads.

Annie: Really? You hand-wrote your book?

Hannah: I hand-wrote the book.

Annie: Hannah!

Hannah: But that was... okay, the first time that first book I ever wrote when I got the book deal in 2015 and I wrote that whole book on yellow notepad.

Annie: You're a crazy person. What?

- Hannah:** I love a good yellow notepad. But that was one of the things that I completely got away from. The second book, typed, the third book, typed.
- Annie:** Hannah, you handwrite books. You're actually not crazy. You're brilliant. You're actually brilliant. You're the best of us.
- Annie:** I'm telling you, there is a different process that happens when you hand-write like. Yeah, it would take for actual ever. I mean, this is 70,000 words, 60,000 words that you hand-wrote.
- Hannah:** Yeah.
- Annie:** My stomach hurts.
- Hannah:** And there's no efficiency to it. I have a filing cabinet in my office just full of yellow notepads. I don't know.
- Annie:** And then you just typed it up?
- Hannah:** I would treat the yellow notepad as the first draft. And then I would go to the computer later in the morning and I would start, Oh, I didn't like that sentence or I would take that away or... And it redeemed the process for me. It really did.
- I think the other thing that I did that kind of helped me come back to life is I didn't share any of the process with anybody. I did it for myself. And that's why it's like I can look at the book and be like, Wow, that's a good book, and I'm proud of it. And I don't know when's the last time I could say that of my work because I got so used to needing other people to tell me it's good.
- Annie:** Oh, interesting. Getting the likes. Getting the comments.
- Hannah:** Yeah. Or like when you're in that process and you're like, I'll just share this and I'll just share this or I'll get feedback as I go. I mean, I created it completely unplugged and I had to learn to say it's enough and it's good enough because you have partnered with God to create this.
- Annie:** I'm blown away that that's how you wrote this book. My question for our friends listening, *The Unplugged Hours*... Also, I want everybody to know the book comes out in a couple of weeks, but there's resources already available. You can go ahead and preorder and get a bunch of stuff so we can start having this conversation right now in our own heads and with our people. You give a chart of how to log a thousand unplugged hours. This is all free on your website. I've downloaded it to do it as well. A hundred unplugged hours in a month, a thousand in a year. And then

you did a summer one as well. But how unplugged is unplugged? Does your phone have to be off? What are you calling unplugged?

Hannah: I always tell people you have to define what your unplugged hour means to you. For me, typically, I like for my phone to be off or at least away. So when I can't turn it off because somebody might need to reach me, I had to stop saying, Okay, the excuse is somebody needs me, so I have to be plugged in. I got a little tin box from Ikea and I throw my phone.

Annie: I love the tin box. And you close it up.

Hannah: Close it up. That's it. And there's so much like tech that's coming to the forefront now that's helping us create these parameters-

Annie: Which also should tell us everything. That the forerunners in tech companies are now creating ways for us to not interact with our technology.

Hannah: Yes, totally. This is something that's evolved over time, but I think so much more than just like, Okay, what are the rules and regulations of an unplugged hour? I think what matters more is where are you placing your attention. That's the big thing. Because me and my husband we do something called Pizza Fridays where we will make a pizza or order a pizza — we started to invite friends to it — and then we pick a movie and we watch a movie. To me, that's unplugged.

We can be watching a movie. But if we're watching it together and we're not double screening, we are enjoying a movie together. So I would say, don't be so hard on yourself of what's unplugged or what's not unplugged, but figure out the things that are stealing away your attention and then try to come up with some remedies to get back your attention.

And that's why if you download the trackers, each little bubble is a representation of an hour you claim back. You can be meticulous and track everything you claimed your time back for or some hours are just going to be hours. And I think that that's been a really valuable lesson for me is that it's like not everything has to mean something.

Annie: Say it. You wrote about that beautifully in the book of like everything is not... you don't have to do productivity all the time. Because I'll tell you what, when I put my phone down at home, I think, Okay, what can I get done? Which closet can I clean out? So suddenly I move from doing to doing.

Hannah: Yep, exactly. And that's where I'm like, Okay, can I pick up a book? But then do I have to tell everybody I'm reading this book and will I only feel good if people

know that I'm reading a book? It's like all of this stuff I didn't even realize was wired so deep in me because we're so... we like to share everything, you know?

I remember it hit me. I like gave this talk at a gym on presence and they needed examples of what presence was. And I was like, Oh, so this is where we're at. This is our baseline is that we don't even know. Like this generation coming up will never have a solid example of what real presence looks like.

There was somebody that was like, I think I know what this means because I will be somewhere and I'll be in the moment and loving the moment. But then I will want to pick my phone up to document it, to tell people that I was here and the moment goes away. And I'm like, yes, absolutely.

That's what I had to learn was like, can I stand inside of a moment and not have everybody know that it happened and is it still enough for me? And if it's not, something has to change because I can't live this way.

Annie: Yeah. Right. I take a month off every year off the internet in the summer during the Sabbath. And what I noticed in June this year, two things. A lot of things. But the two of the important things to tell you, one is I took way less pictures, which I thought was really interesting. I was like, Wait, why are you not taking? I was just at things instead of documenting them.

So I was like, well, if you're going to actually have a life where you do a lot less internet, you need to come to a balance of like still photographing. Like you still need memories, Annie. So I took less pictures.

I'll tell you a negative thing that I would love for you to speak into. I missed social events in New York because they were shared on Instagram. And then my friends were like, "Hey, why weren't you at that barbecue?" And I was like, "Oh, I didn't know." And then I would put it on Instagram. What do I do?

Hannah: That's the hard part. That's the hard part is that we share online and that's how you get the information. So if you go offline completely, you do miss things. You miss babies being born. You miss a lot of things. And to that, I wish I had a solution. I've just had to say, Okay, how would I want other people to show up for me? And I'm just going to try my best to be that, you know?

Annie: That's good.

Hannah: I would say this whole book is inspired by my mom. It is. If you met her, she would literally be having a blast. She'd be right here. She'd be playing a kazoo for you or something. And she's so present. And it's crazy because I'm like, I spent so many

years trying to get her to get a cell phone. And I don't know why I was telling her to get a cell phone. She still has an answering machine at home. It's in Spanish. She's not Spanish.

Annie: Oh, I love it.

Hannah: She pulled out her little dictionary and recorded a message. It's so funny because anybody you talk to, they're like my mom. Like she's such a magical human being. She's in her 70s, but everybody wants her to babysit their kids because she's the one that's present with the kids.

Annie: Wow.

Hannah: There was this moment that was like a life shifting for me a few years ago where I was with my daughter in Connecticut visiting my mom. It was her birthday. That day people kept coming to the door. They kept coming to the door with gifts for her. Somebody had made a cake for her and a homemade whipped cream. Somebody went to Whole Foods, got all of her favorite snacks. A neighbor came from across the street.

And I was like, "What is going on?" And my mom was like, "This is just what we do." And I'm like, "No, no, no, this is not what we do. We Venmo a cup of coffee to somebody. We Doordash a meal." But I think post-COVID, we're not showing up at the door.

And I remember being like, "I don't care if I never do an hour of work again in my life if I don't start doing this right here. This is what matters to me." I went home and I started a tradition that I... I typically do it with my daughter. But every week we are carving out space to be available to bless somebody.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Hannah: So we either go to the store and we make a care package or, you know, the yellow notepads that was inspired by my friend Misty, who we were sitting planning for a conference for the Passion Conference. She's writing on a yellow notepad and I was like, "I used to do that and I loved it." And that's what made me go get them. But one day we just went to the store, stocked up on yellow notepads, showed up at her work to give them to her. So we carve space each week to show up at the door if we can and say, "Hey, we're with you. We see you. I'm with you."

I don't know if that really answered the question.

Annie: No, that's great.

Hannah: But realizing, okay, if I have an announcement to make, I'm going to do my best to share it in the way that I think is the best way to share it. I could send this as a text. But could I also write a letter and put it in the mail? So figuring out how to be intentional in that way. But I wish I could tell you, hey, you're not going to miss the secret show next weekend.

Annie: But you do.

Hannah: But you do. You do.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. It was a really unique experience this summer, because every other summer it takes me two or three days to not check my phone, to not like open my phone and be like, Oh, what are you doing, Annie? You don't even have Instagram right now. I have like a withdrawal for a little bit.

Hannah: Totally.

Annie: And then I come back and I'm always like, "I don't know if I will..." And then I get back in the rhythm. This year, I had zero withdrawal. I was like, get out of here. I didn't miss it for a second. I did not come back until the first podcast released that I had agreed to share about when I was back at work.

Hannah: You didn't miss it.

Annie: I didn't miss it at all. Except I was sorry that I missed events. I listened to eight audiobooks in June. I listened to one in July. I mean, it's just like my life tells me everything I need to know about how much *The Unplugged Hours* make me who I want to be. I just don't always have the self-control to do it.

Hannah: And I think, too... because I think for me, because like I still show up online, but I've stopped posting in the moment. If I think something's awesome, I can take a picture of it and not post it immediately. I actually got a little point-and-shoot camera.

Annie: Oh, yeah.

Hannah: Which has given me so much joy.

Annie: You wrote about that, that you started investing in things that were outside of your phone.

Hannah: And now I show up at like people's birthday parties and this and that and I take photos. And they're awesome photos. Like that was a piece of me that I had lost. When I was in high school, pre-documentation days, I'd be the one with the digital camera, taking pictures of all our friends. And the reason that anybody has any Facebook profile pictures is because of me, you know?

But then it became the thing that's on your phone. And we all know you take a picture. You're not just going to take a picture. You're going to like check a banking app. You're going to check an email. You're just going to go from thing to thing to thing. And so, yeah, documentation now, I feel like it's more joy-filled because I can still document, but I can still be in the moment, you know?

Annie: Wow.

[00:43:33] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Our Place](#). Have you all seen Our Place's cookware? Okay, not only is it cute, but it is non-toxic, which I love.

Our Place is a mission-driven and female-founded brand that makes beautiful kitchen products that are healthy and sustainable. Their products are made without PFAS and Teflon. Most of today's non-stick pans contain PFAS, also known as Forever Chemicals, which are under increasing global scrutiny for their impact on the environment and our health.

Our producer, Johnny, was the one who was first raving about their products. And he is right. There are so many fun colors to choose from so many different products. And they're super versatile. Our Place is also changing the game by offering non-toxic appliances to y'all. Just go to the website and look at the Wonder Oven. It's adorable. It's a six-in-one air fryer toaster oven, but it is so cute. I want the blue one so bad.

Find out why Our Place has been mentioned in The New York Times Bon Appetit by your friend AFD and more. Go to [FromOurPlace.com](#) and enter our code TSF, like That Sounds Fun, at checkout and you'll receive 10% off sitewide. That's [FromOurPlace.com](#) and the code is TSF. Our Place offers a 100-day trial with free shipping and returns.

And now back to finish up this conversation with Hannah.

[00:45:01] <music>

Annie: We got a couple of minutes left. Talk about multitasking. Because that multitasking is the opposite of what women are told we are most effective at.

Hannah: Right, right.

Annie: I mean, the superpower of women is multitasking. So why multitasking?

Hannah: You know, it's so funny. I literally had a meeting with my functional medicine doctor yesterday, and she's like going through my level. She's like, you're stressed. I'm like, I know I'm stressed. I'm launching a book and it's stressful, you know? And she's like, "Okay, post-launch, we'll do this. We'll do that." And then she just said to me, she goes, "You can only juggle one ball at a time." And I was like, "No one's ever said that to me because that's not the message or the memo we get as women." It is you can juggle all the balls at all the times. You can wear all the hats.

Annie: And the more the more we celebrate you.

Hannah: Yes. That was so profound to me that I'm still chewing on it. I'm like one ball at a time. What would that even look like? But that is, in essence, multitasking, you know, is that in order to focus, I've tried to... I do a lot of time blocks in my work. I've read the data to be like, Okay, if I'm going to be watching a show while doing this, I'm not stewarding this as well as I want to be, you know?

So I kind of look at it through a lens of stewardship, because otherwise, it's like, well, what's the harm of watching a Hallmark movie while I'm doing this? And sometimes that's great. And you should do it. Like Christmas in July Hallmark. I had to say, Okay, if I want to do all things to the glory of God, what does this look like in this one task?

Usually, it's a single-minded focus. And I feel like that's where in my quiet times God has brought me back to again and again and again. It's like I'm not asking you to take on the whole day. I'm not asking you to take on the whole week. One hour. What are we going to do in this next hour?

An hour is your currency. And it's a currency within the unplugged hours, but at the same time, it's like, Okay, well, if I am going to be showing up to respond to emails, I want to do that intentionally because there's another human on the other side of it.

Same thing if I am going to get on social media, I try to go in and respond to comments because that was a human that left me a comment.

Annie: Yes, yes.

Hannah: So it's releasing ourselves, I think, from all of these performative metrics that have come from the phones, because for me, I think what I thought I was doing was getting away from tech. But what started to fall off of me was this need to do it all, was this need to produce at all times that I realized this is not actually good currency for me.

Peace is a much better currency. And if this is not giving me peace, things need to shift. And that doesn't mean-

Annie: Peace is a much better currency.

Hannah: Yeah. It doesn't mean that like, you know, in a few weeks from now you're going to have to look back and be like, Here's another what's not working list. You know, it's again and again and again. But the piece that I have found has come from, Okay, I could do a few things at once, but what would it look like to just be in this one moment and then the next and then the next?

You know, when I'm unplugged, I'll just open up my little moleskin, I'll write down the tasks and then I'll just move from one to the other, to the other. And it's like you actually end up getting so much more done. The goal is not productivity, but you get so much more done because you're not trying to put your attention in all these different directions. It's like, oh, this is what it's like to focus.

Annie: Yeah.

Hannah: Oh, my gosh.

Annie: You may have done this, but I'm sure you've heard this, too. There's a lot of authors who when we are on book deadlines mute every other author because if you are watching someone else release or watching someone else write 10,000 words today or whatever, it just increases your "I can't keep up nest".

And so one of the things I notice every year during my Sabbath month when I'm not on social media is I am so satisfied with my life.

Hannah: Right.

Annie: Because I have no idea what everybody else is doing. I have no idea what they're getting. I have no idea what they're buying. I have no idea who's engaged or pregnant or whatever or had a baby. And I have no idea how much people are accomplishing and the new opportunities they are announcing.

Hannah: Yeah. Yeah.

Annie: And so I am just so happy with the life I have. I think what you're saying is such a gift. The peace, the currency is such a gift to me.

Hannah: And it's a different pace. Like, you know, it's a different pace than what we're used to. But at the same time, I'm like, Okay, but that pace was thrust upon us with the age of the internet. It's not going to stop. It's going to get faster. I think we're hopeful that we're going to go live in a commune. I'm not sure. But I'm like, no, no, no, no, no. Now we just have robots in it. It's going to get worse.

Annie: Right. Right.

Hannah: And so that's where I have to set the pace, you know? And it's not the pace that I ran at for years.

Annie: That's right.

Hannah: And it's not the benchmarks that I was striving for for years. Because Newsflash, it never filled me. I always wanted more. I feel like now, especially when I go to power down, I have like this breath of release where I'm like, it's all right here. It's all right here.

And I get that. I get the comparison and I struggle with that.

Annie: You write about it beautifully. Yeah.

Hannah: But I think, too, that's something that I realized the phone was taking from me when I was too plugged in. It's like, but in any other sphere, if I wasn't overloaded and burned out, I would want to cheer that person on. And so can I do that? Can I send them a text? Can I send them... I send voice memos all the time it probably creeps people out. But I want to be the person that shows up and cheers you on because at my core, I love you. I may be struggling with comparison, but that's not your fault.

Annie: Yeah, that's it. That's why I don't unfollow any of my friends when they're... I just meet them. It's not about them. I want them to win. It's about me not being able to keep up with all the feelings around it.

Hannah: Totally.

Annie: Dude, this is so important. This is so important. What you and I are going to do here in a second is have a little bit of a side conversation for our Single Purpose

League friends, because there are some unique parts of this for people who do not have a partner at home. When they unplug, it isn't my whole life is here.

Hannah: Yeah. Totally.

Annie: So let's have that for Single Purpose League. But I would love for you to kind of like finish us... You talk in... Let me see if I can just read your quote to yourself. Do you like Enneagram?

Hannah: I do. I'm a 4.

Annie: You have sweetness. Thank you for being a four. Aren't we glad you exist?

Hannah: Thanks for being a seven.

Annie: As a seven.

Hannah: That sounds fun.

Annie: My tattoo... I have a couple of tattoos and one of mine says "savor this". And I am actively trying to do that. I love FaceTiming with my nephew in the morning because someday he'll be 11 and he will not want to watch me do my makeup in the morning while he eats his breakfast. But right now he's four and he loves it. So I'm trying really hard to savor all these things.

You write a lot about savoring and our ability to savor increases in our unplugged hours. Will you talk about that for just a second?

Hannah: Yeah. Gosh, it's big because I think for a long time I didn't know that I wasn't savoring. We don't talk about savoring I feel like. Maybe in bits and pieces or like at a women's conference. But like-

Annie: Right. It's the title of a women's conference

Hannah: Yeah. But, you know, I was always struck by that part in the Bible where Elizabeth finds out that she's pregnant and then she goes away for five months with God to savor what He had done. And I was like, "When's the last time I savored anything?" I announced it the second it's happened, you know.

So savoring, I would say, was a slow burn, like a slow discipline that comes with time. And the more that you unplug or the more that you learn to just be present right where you are in that moment, good, bad, holy, hard, that's where you learn the posture of savoring.

And it doesn't have to be extensive. You don't have to do a gratitude journal, though that's great. It's like taking those mental photographs of like, I want to remember this and I remember that. I want to remember that this feeling was good enough and that it needed me. And it doesn't mean that it was perfect, but I was here. And that is everything. It's like you've experienced it. It's like this is everything right here.

I didn't know that I could actually operate the majority of my life in and from that space. But yeah, going back to the things that we miss, I think, too, we have to... it comes at the cost of it. You do miss out on things. But that meant you were somewhere else doing something probably with people you loved or something that you enjoyed.

And so we have to become okay with missing those things because that's the thing of the internet. They want you to be all the places all at once, never miss anything. But in the effort of never missing out, I fear we miss out on a lot.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah, I think you're right. Oh, Hannah, this is so beautiful. Oh, it's so important. It's so important. That's why I'm like, we have to get this episode out to people.

In the meantime, they can preorder *The Unplugged Hours* before it releases September 17th. What is available right now? If they're like me and like... I mean, I have the unfair advantage that I got to read the book. But if they're like me and they want to start implementing, what happens if you preorder? How do we get these worksheets?

Hannah: If you preorder, you will get the first 40 pages of the book.

Annie: Oh, great.

But if you just go on to the website and it's on the book page and on my website at large, you can download the trackers and get started now. So don't wait for the book to come out. Start practicing unplugging now and see the benefits for yourself.

Because I've said from the beginning, if you read three pages of the book, that's okay, so long as you use the tracker in the book or the trackers that you get offline and you experience this for yourself. Because it truly is... It's a gift that I wish I could give to everyone because I've seen it to fruition and I'm like, oh, yes, there's something to these unplugged hours. It's a gift.

Annie: This is the perfect time, too, because September is when a lot of people are getting back in rhythms. They're getting into healthy rhythms they want. We're redoing a

month of Let's Read the Gospel, so that's available every day. There is this chance to... people are hearing this on Monday, August 26. So spend this week thinking about it. And then really, what are some rhythms you want for September? And start them on September 1. Hannah's book will meet you right in the middle. And then we'll see. You can only know if unplugged hours matter if you do them. And just see what happens by October 1st.

Hannah: And you will see it. I promise you will see it. I mean, I've had so many friends resistant to doing it. I think it's perfectly encapsulated by my friend Ansley, who was like, "I just did my first unplugged hour." And she said, "I feel more like myself than I have felt in years."

Annie: Wow.

Hannah: And I'm like, I can't give you that. But there's power in this and God is going to meet you in those hours. I just want to cheer you on.

Annie: Amen. Thank you, friend. Thanks for doing this.

Hannah: Absolutely.

[00:56:37] <music>

Outro: Oh, friends, isn't she awesome? I feel more normal hearing her talk. I feel like we have tools that we need.

I cannot wait for y'all to read this book. Now, it doesn't come out for a little bit. Like it's a couple of weeks. So go ahead and preorder it while you are waiting for it to arrive. Remember, you can read the first 40 pages, I think she said, of *The Unplugged Hours*. And there's also all the resources on her website that you can go ahead and have. So go ahead and order the book.

We put the link in the show notes and you can go ahead and grab all the resources that she already has available for you on her website.

Make sure you're following Hannah on social media. Tell her thanks for being on the show and thank you for her wisdom.

And if you enjoyed this episode, and you, like me, are trying to figure out, how do we have healthy rhythms with our phones and with social media, I think you're also going to really enjoy Episode 861 with Darren Whitehead and Episode 393 with Andy Crouch.

And just a reminder to our Single Purpose League friends, there is an entire conversation for you over there about how this is nuanced for us in our singleness. If you haven't joined Single Purpose League, today is a great day to do that. It is SinglePurposeLeague.com.

Starting on Sunday, September 1st, remember, we are going through Let's Read the Gospels again. We're going to go through the Guided Journal and on the podcast. We also have a Facebook group you can join so you can share with each other what stuck out to you each day. It is a great way for the accountability you need to finish all 30 days.

So grab your Guided Journal wherever you love to buy books. Head to the link in the show notes to sign up for the group. Remember, we get started reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, John on Sunday. We're actually going to do it the other way, though. We're going to read John, Luke, Mark, and then Matthew starting on Sunday.

If you have any questions from this episode today, yeah, me too, let's get a Q&A box going. You can do that in Spotify if you're a Spotify listener or send them to us on Instagram @ThatSoundsFunPodcast. We'll try to answer those for you.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Less and less, though. Less and less as we're getting these boundaries up. Right? I have to write a book. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. Anywhere you may need me, that is how you can find me, sort of.

I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me, man, I'm not kidding you, I'm so thrilled that we are starting. Let's read the Gospels again. Make sure you're subscribed to that podcast feed and join us.

Whether you've done it before, whether this is your first month ever reading through the Gospel account of Jesus's life, this is the month for you. I'm so excited. Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday with your favorite and mine as we recap, drum roll, please, or some sort of scary music in the background. We're recapping 2020 with Eddie Kaufholz. We'll see y'all Thursday.