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

Before we dive into this conversation that you are going to love, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors, AG1. Friends don't miss this. [AG1](#) is currently running a special Black Friday offer for all of November. If you don't already know and love it, AG1 is a daily health drink packed with nutrients to help alleviate bloating, support sustained energy, and whole-body health. I love drinking AG1 first thing in the morning. I just add it to really cold water, throw in a little frozen lemon juice too, and I am good to go.

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**Intro:** Today on the show, I get to talk with my friend Strahan Coleman. He's a teacher at Practicing the Way, founder of the ministry Commoners Communion, and he's an award-winning musician. He lives in New Zealand with his wife and three young boys, which means when we talked on a Tuesday, it was Wednesday for him. He's in the future.

His latest book, *Thirsting*, is what we're going to get to talk about today. It is so good, you guys. Strahan poetically explores how to rediscover and fulfill our deepest desire through communion with God. We love talking about prayer around here, and this is a deep dive into it. So here's my conversation with Strahan Coleman.

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**Annie:** Strahan, welcome to That Sounds Fine. Thank you for doing this today.

**Strahan:** Pleasure. Kia ora, Annie. It's such a great opportunity to hang out with you and spend some time.

**Annie:** I know. Listen, let's talk about John Mark Comer. Love the guy.

**Strahan:** He's a good guy, isn't he? He's a good guy.

**Annie:** He's great. I was in LA a couple of weeks ago and drove up to eat dinner with him and his family, and he lives at the top of a hill that is so winding that I got there, I said, Only you would live at this. It's like a labyrinth to get to your home. Only you, dude. I just can't imagine another person.

**Strahan:** I feel like that kind of fits his teachy, introverted, kind of like sit in a room praying and thinking about the world sort of vibe. He's got himself a good spot.

**Annie:** That's exactly right. Okay, so tell us your role at Practicing the Way.

**Strahan:** So I am sort of one part kind of prayer curator. I help them with the prayer elements of their social media and their staff retreat days and things. One part hosting the John Mark Comer Teaching Podcast, which is a really beautiful space for just dissecting his brain and learning from his incredible thought processes. And then just kind of bits and bobs, little devotionals here and there for them and just supporting them in the work they're doing, which I think is just deeply important and beautiful for our generation.

**Annie:** I love how everyone is using it. I mean, it's just incredible. What a resource it's become for so many churches and faith communities.

**Strahan:** Yeah, it's amazing. I mean, everywhere I go here in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and I was recently just in Australia, and people always come up to me and tell me stories about the way that the work of Practicing the Way is literally transforming their lives. I mean, it's amazing hearing the stories, people just engaging in prayer in whole new ways and spiritual practices in their community. It's pretty amazing to have something that is touching. And they're all from different backgrounds and different spaces. It feels like a "God on the move" moment every time I hear those stories, because they're just so common. It's really cool.

**Annie:** I love it. You talking about flying to Australia, I saw on your Instagram that you flew for the first time in like five years.

**Strahan:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Right. Something you should know about me, I live in two cities. I live in Nashville and I also live in New York. And so I fly, and then I fly a lot for my job. So I am flying all the time. Tell me what you know about God that I don't know from staying in the same place for five years.

**Strahan:** Oh, man. Well, it's hard because my staying in the same place was a whole convolution of things. It was the shutting of the border in New Zealand. So our borders in New Zealand closed completely for two years during COVID, and then borders between regions. And then during that time, we moved-

**Annie:** Even between regions, like not even just New Zealand, but borders between what we would have as states were closed?

**Strahan:** Yeah, yeah. We actually moved out of the main city of 1.8 million people, Auckland city, down to a small town of 1,800. And then the borders closed, and then the regions closed. So I was kind of cut off from friends and family, and I was a touring musician at the time. So I was closed off from my travel to the States for all the touring I was doing there.

So my case of not flying was quite extreme because I moved to a small town where there was very little to do, and then the borders closed, and then I got really sick for a couple of years. I kind of have a cabin out the back of my house, and my house is on a beach. There's a little cabin that sits there. And I just spent three years basically in a cabin in prayer and kind of recovering physically.

For me, it was like, I think the lack of travel and the lack of cultural engagement and all of that, it really forces you to face your inner life, your soul, the good, the bad, and the ugly, all the things that you've allowed to kind of keep under there because of all the stimulation of a city and the excitement of travel and meeting people and being with people. It all just comes up in solitude and reclusiveness.

I felt like it was pretty much like four years of intense, one part confrontation by God, and then one part incredible liberation as I kind of allowed Him deeper into those places that I hadn't known and confronted. So I don't think I'd realized that until I got on a plane again. It was, Oh, this is awesome. All the excitement and the fun. That was probably my biggest lesson over that time.

**Annie:** How did your trust in God grow when your career stops, when your health changes, and so much of your... I mean, even your provision was traveling as an artist and you couldn't do that for a long time. I'm asking because I'm teaching tonight to our college ministry here about the dissonance of what the Bible says about God versus our experience of Him sometimes.

We call God provider, and yet how did you learn to trust Him when your ability to provide for yourself was taken away?

**Strahan:** Yeah, man, cognitive dissonance, such a real and true part of... If you're going to be a Christian for longer than a few minutes, you're going to experience this feeling, aren't we, of like what I believe about God and who I know Him to be completely confronting my actual experience of that.

I think for me, fortunately, I'm a bit of a pro at that. I've had quite a few experiences in my life. Ten years ago, I was first confronted with chronic illness and I lost my voice in touring life. And I think processed a lot of that. This time for me it was like round two of serious illness.

And I think the question for me was more, God, I thought you'd healed me. And I thought you had... I thought my story was I got sick and I lost everything. And then I got better, and then it was given back. And I'm not ready...

**Annie:** Like Job. Like, here we go again. We got all the things more and more after the first loss. Yeah. Wow.

**Strahan:** Yeah. You know, because we have these ideas of that's how life with God works. You know, we go through stuff, but then we get a good story, and then the rest of our life goes on. So for me, it was like, well, I'm reentering the story that I thought was behind me. God, what does this mean? How do I go through this again faithfully? It was really challenging. Even now, I still can't sing without pain after about three years. It's been three years since I've been able to sing, which is my great love.

But I think for me, the process became... Look, the deepest prayer of my heart, what I genuinely long for is just to know and walk with God. I think that's true for so many of us. There are other things we long for and desire, but the deepest part of me is, God, I want to know you. And I think in having this stuff removed and losing that provision and going through all this doubt and uncertainty again, I think I felt like God was moving into my life and saying, I'm going to give you a profound opportunity to trust and to know me at a deeper level. It's going to feel like uncertainty and fear and anxiety and pain but if you stay with me, I'm going to take you deeper. I'm going to reveal myself to you.

And I think it was that switch for me of seeing it as an absence of something to an increased presence of God that helped me then look for Him and search for Him in the midst of all of that trial. And that was probably the biggest lesson this time. And it for me was, okay, this time I'm looking for God. Where is He? What is He doing? How can I go deeper?

**Annie:** Dude, you have never seen me have panic feelings like if I wake up with a scratchy voice. Because I'm like, You mean I talk for my job? And if I don't... I can't imagine

losing your ability to sing when that's what you're passionate about and how you have partnered with God to do what you feel called to on the planet.

So for the people listening that have experienced a version of that, how do you survive that? So someone's in the middle of it right now. How do you survive that, Strahan?

**Strahan:** Look, I think it's a lot like grief. When I talk about music with my friends, they're like, how do you manage that? I mean, I started writing music when I was seven. I mean, it's all I've ever dreamed of my whole life. I mean, I started writing song sheets and things when I was eight. By the time I was nine, I was singing for the prime minister at primary school solos. I was the lead soloist all through high school. And by the time I was 19, I was playing in front of 20,000 people in music bands. And then gave my life to Jesus. I led worship and that was amazing. Then I traveled the world all through my 20s and 30s.

So, for me, it's like music and singing isn't something I do. It's who I am. It's just all I've ever known. I never imagined a version of my life that wasn't doing that until I met the Lord, you know, until I passed on. So for me, I think it really is like a grief. It's like losing someone. And when my friends say, how do you deal with it? I say, honestly, it's like I've lost my best friend. Like I lost someone who is crucial to my life.

And so I think in that way, there's like a grief that always stays there, right? There's nothing that can give that back and bring that back. And yet at the same time, it's given me a profound opportunity to kind of loosen my identity from it, to kind of step back and say, who am I purely in God? Who am I with Him? And how do I find this level of satisfaction and identity in Him? Which sounds really cliché and trite, but it's actually really hard.

I mean, I feel like we say this stuff all the time, like, Oh, you're all I need God. And you know, God's the object of my desire, and I'll give you my life. But it's actually practically day by day when we're living in that kind of loss or grief or tension. There has to be a practice of that. It has to be worked into our minds and our nervous systems.

I think it really overwhelmed me for a while. And at some point I turned and said, Okay, this could be a profound opportunity to reach and latch on to something even greater, this deeper experience of love and who I am. So yeah, always that residing grief and always that residing optimism and hope as well.

**Annie:** In *Thirsting*, your new book, I'll read the subtitle, *Quenching Our Soul's Deepest Desire*, you talk really honestly about like, "I spent days watching Netflix. In my

pain, I just decided I would sit in the chair and I would just watch Netflix over and over again." That is so encouraging to hear a very respected pastoral spiritual leader prayer voice be like, yeah, and there were also days where the best I could offer was watching Netflix. Will you tell that story? There's a story you tell in the book about the day that you felt like God intercepted you on your way to Netflix. Will you tell that story?

**Strahan:** Yeah. I was. I should say I was really, really sick. At that point, they started running tests on my body. So I was taking sort of drugs in that that were making me nearly catatonic week on week, month on month. You know, I went three months, four months, five months, just sitting in a chair. And I was going mad with boredom. I mean, just could not leave the chair, couldn't do anything.

Then I'm having these feelings of like, "God, I don't know what to do with my life. I've got all this desire. I want to get out there. I want to play music, I want to be with people, I want to play with my kids, and I'm trapped in this space. I talk about in the book this oscillation between wanting to shut that down and say, maybe it's better that I don't want that stuff. Maybe I should just push it down. But that just leads to numbness and depression and sorrow.

And then the other way is like, I'm just going to find stuff to satisfy myself. I'm going to have another roast or whatever or I'm going to watch more Netflix. So I kind of got into this space for a couple of weeks of just watching so much streaming and TV shows.

There was one night where I was sitting there and I went to kind of reach for my laptop at seven o'clock at night or something. And I'm just going to watch a couple of hours of a show or something, go to bed. And just as I sort of picked up the laptop, I felt God saying to me, "Strahan, don't do it. Just give me a few minutes of your time. Take this kind of..." you know, I didn't really have the language for it as pain in that moment, but "take this pain and come sit with me in it". Honestly, I was really exhausted. I don't want to make it sound like I was really spiritual and levitating my way into prayer. This was more kind of desperation.

**Annie:** Sure.

**Strahan:** But I decided to just kind of sit there with my arms open on my knees. And I just said, "God, would you just fill the space? I am so overwhelmed. I'm so disappointed. I have so much ache in me for a non-sick life. And it has been so many years of this. I just need you." And for about, I don't know, maybe 45 minutes, maybe an hour, I just kind of sat there and tried to allow the spirit to just flood in on my worry and my anxiety and my disappointment and my need for meaning and satisfaction in life. It was a roller coaster. It was like one moment I

felt the peace and tranquility of God, and then next my pain resurfaced, and then there was peace and rest and trust, and then it was wrestling and telling God how I felt.

But what sort of transpired over that time was I got to the end and I had this new vision for what it means to really carry my deepest pain and my deepest longing to God. And maybe a recognition that God actually wants to carry that with me, that it's not just about me saying, take it away, or God's not distant and He's not detached and sort of non-emotional. That He's actually saying to me, "Strahan, I want to come in and enter this space with you, and I want to sit with you in this grief, and I want to kind of co-experience your life, and I want you to experience my joy and peace, even amidst the darkness."

So it set me off on this new path of discovering what it means to allow God to meet me in some of the deeper places that I hadn't yet opened up to Him. And so it was quite a massive turning point for me in my life.

[00:16:32] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Thrive Causemetics](#). Y'all know I love some fun lipsticks and some fun lip balms, so I need you to know about Thrive Causemetics Sheer Strength Hydrating Lip Tint. It's a super lightweight and easy-to-apply lip tint that lasts up to six hours. Y'all know that matters to me. Plus, it's really easy to apply. You don't even need to pull out a mirror. It's balmy and not sticky, so it starts hydrating your lips really quickly. And over time, it gives you visibly softer and smoother lips, which is so helpful in these colder months. We got to keep those lips hydrated, you guys.

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Now, remember, that link and pretty much every other link you would ever hope for are in the show notes below, or we'll just send them straight to you every Friday in the AFD Week in Review, which we hope is the best email you get all week. So, make sure you check those out and sign up to get that email below.

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**Sponsor:** Y'all know we love resources that help kick off our time with God in the morning. And when I find something I love, I want you to know about it too. Have you heard of the [Glorify app](https://Glorify.com)? Okay, Glorify is the number one Christian daily devotional app.

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Okay, now back to our conversation with Strahan.

[00:21:09] <music>

**Annie:** It was a very easy yes when they said that you might want to be on the podcast because I was like, could I please... What a dream. Because I know your work. But also our friends listening, we love talking about prayer because everyone wants... I think every person of faith and even I think a lot of people who are still figuring out where they are with the faith, they want to believe there is a connection that we can have that is outside of ourselves. That is with a divine power that actually has some control where we feel like we don't.

And one of the things you talk about in the book that I see really shaping my prayer life is the dark ocean. Will you kind of explain, if you can, the concept of the dark ocean, which everyone's going to laugh because we actually talk a lot around here about how I hate the ocean. It's just terrifying. As you said in the book, we know nothing. We know absolutely nothing about the ocean. But you talk about our faith life and actually just our connectivity with God as a dark ocean that I would love for you to expound upon for us.

**Strahan:** Well, maybe it's because I've had these experiences of... you know, the experience that is described is an experience of both joy and pain and darkness. So as I kind of went through this experience of opening up deeper and deeper to God, I realized that... I don't think we have much of a language anymore for the soul in our culture. We are very strong materialists. In other words, we really kind of just believe in the meat and potatoes of the physical world. It's like I have atoms, I got bones.

I've got a friend right now who has just... he's not a Christian and he's just started doing these weekends where they do ice baths and take psychedelics. He's kind of in these conversations with me being like, I think I have a consciousness. But for him, it's like the first time in his life he's ever considered there may be more to him than just flesh and bone.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Strahan:** We live in a culture that very much denies, I think, the deep beauty of who we are as human beings. I live by the beach, so I'm very aware of the ocean. You can kind of engage with the ocean in any way. You can sort of wander into the waves and play a little bit. You can go deeper and try and surf.

But the deeper you go into the ocean, the more mysterious it gets. There's a sense in which it also becomes harder to go down there, that there's greater pressure, that there's greater sort of intensity and darkness. As I kind of went through the space of opening up to God, I felt the same. I felt like actually to draw near to God and to kind of allow Him into the deeper parts of me, it gets harder and harder because there's all kinds of stuff down there, longings, hopes, and dreams that are vulnerable, but there's also shame and there's guilt. And then there's the fear of rejection. For me, like the deep fear of loneliness, of am I alone? Are you really with me down here?

So I found this dark ocean, a beautiful image of, you know, if we can imagine ourselves moving from the surface water, which is great, and it's sort of easier, but then diving deep, taking some deep breaths and going down, down into the water, being enveloped by the water. And that kind of became an image for me of prayer, of what it means to go deeper into God, and also just to realize the depth and complexity and beauty of our own souls.

I think without an appreciation of the human soul, we will struggle to appreciate what communion really is. There's this beautiful scripture in Revelation 3:20, where Jesus says to the church of all people, Behold, I stand at the door and knock, and anyone who opens the door, I will come in with them, and I'll eat with them.

For me, there was the sense of, man, there are doors in me that are keeping God out. And what He wants is actually just to come in and dine with me. But if I'm not aware and appreciative of this dark ocean, of this deep place within me to give access to God to, I might miss out on this beautiful meal with God, who just wants to reside in my deepest places.

**Annie:** I'm just going to list for you the things that messed me up as I read your book, and you can just fix them as we go, okay?

**Strahan:** Yeah.

**Annie:** So that messed me up. The idea of a dark ocean messed me up, because I feel that. I literally just said to a friend today, "I'm afraid if I pull that one string, I'm not sure what's going to happen to the others." About something in my faith. That is deep ocean stuff to me, right? I'm like, "If I take that breath and go down a little bit deeper, I actually don't know what happens down there." I don't want the safety I feel here to fall apart, and that's what's going to happen, right?

**Strahan:** I think you're not alone in feeling that, Annie. I mean, even today, I wrote this book and I've explored this for four years, but I think that there's a bottomlessness to us. I think that right down there is human vulnerability.

Actually, I've kind of come to this place of wondering whether the reason most of us don't pray is because we're actually afraid of making ourselves vulnerable to God. We're actually afraid of what might happen if we really are honest. Because it's easy to trust, "Oh God, you might forgive me in this kind of surface-level living. But what about down there where there is stuff that I don't even want to admit to myself, that I know that I've buried away from past experience or from things people have said to me or things that I feel about myself." And they sit there. The thing is, they sit there anyway, don't they Annie?

**Annie:** Yeah, right. They're not not there.

**Strahan:** They're not not there. And what happens is they drive our lives unconsciously. I think a lot of us are really afraid to come to God truly and say, "Will you meet with me?" Because I don't know what's going to happen if I allow Him into that space. And I don't know if He'll love me there.

But one of the things I try and do in the book is to say we can only really experience God's love to the depth we let Him in, to the depth we let Him truly see us. This is true of the New Testament. Most of the people who love God, quote-unquote, the most were people who were forgiven the most, who felt who were the most socially ostracized.

And just like those stories, whether it's the tax collectors or the prostitutes, we have these parts of ourselves that ache for extreme love and forgiveness. And we have to find a way to open those up otherwise, we'll never quench ourselves in the love of God. So I'm with you, Annie.

I think it is terrifying because we just live in a world that keeps telling us all the time, You're not enough. You're not safe. You will be rejected if you're really seen. And so it's hard for us to come to God and be seen. So we have to have a grounded idea of His love and His desire for us.

**Annie:** The depth of that... Now, this may have been written a version of this somewhere, and I've just never read it. I've never read a man write about God as her husband, as you did in this book. There've been things females have written... I'm not married yet. So particularly for single women, there's stuff around... And we've talked about it in our singles community and Single Purpose League. We talk about how has God shown up as your husband for you?

But what you do in Hairstrong is different, dude. That's different. I mean, that is like, are you willing to be a different level vulnerable because of how much God is thirsting for you? Honestly, it feels more accessible for me... Is accessible the right word? It's easier for me to be vulnerable with God than it is to feel like he wants me that much.

**Strahan:** Wow.

**Annie:** So will you talk a little bit about God's thirst for us too? I mean, the first third of the book, you're like, do y'all get how He feels about you? And I felt uncomfortable and seen. And it wasn't my vulnerability. It was God's vulnerability toward me that made me uncomfortable.

**Strahan:** Yeah. Yeah. And it's profound, isn't it? I mean, I do. I spend so much time in the book. Because St. Augustine, this kind of famous fourth-century North African Bishop, he was big on the stuff. He made the statement, God thirsts that we would thirst for Him. And I just found that so profoundly confronting and challenging, the idea that God thirsts.

So I began to explore, what does it mean for God to desire? And I think a lot of us will think, oh yeah, God loves me. He kind of made me. He loves me almost like a platonic friend. He sort of has to, I don't know. I might do something wrong, I say Jesus' name and He's kind of like, Oh, now I've got to love ya. I know we don't kind of theologically confess that, but I think functionally, sometimes we believe that God loves us, but that He doesn't like us.

And so I really wanted to explore this idea that God desires us. So I look at the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and how before creation God is just this community of love. It's one thing to think, oh yeah, He's God and He loves each other. But think for a moment that He was never insecure, that in Himself, God has never had to ask the question, am I alone or am I loved or am I wanted? He has only experienced the whole giving of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father, and that this is a perfectly secure community of desire.

So when God created us, he didn't create us because He needed us. He didn't need objects to worship. We don't complete Him in any way. He literally created us because He wanted to. I honestly think that is one of the great mysteries of Scripture is why? Why would a perfectly secure being create us out of desire? So I think then we see the story of Scripture and God is constantly saying, I want you. And then we reject Him and He says, I still want you. So He chases us some more. And then He comes to Israel and there's this passage in Isaiah where God says, "I, your maker, am your husband," which is just the most...

I mean, I'm a married man. So for me it is an outrageous statement to think that God is interested in marrying me and what does that mean for me as a man. But I think at the very least, it means that God pursues me with a passionate yearning and desiring love. And what is the cross except for God saying, this is how far I will go to demonstrate to you that I will do anything to get you back, that I will go to the greatest end to show you that I want you.

And yet I think so many of us look at the cross and we think that's what God had to do, almost begrudgingly, because I'm so bad. But we don't actually see it as God's ultimate expression of yearning love. For me, it changes things because I think when I wake up in the morning, God is actually poised, yearning, longing, saying, Strahan, I cannot wait to spend time with you. He's not sitting there saying, Oh, well, here we go, maybe another day, let's see what happens.

I think recapturing desire and prayer is a really important part of understanding the purpose and intention of humanity. We are made to be loved, to be longed for, and then to reciprocate that with God.

**Annie:** You're the only person that's ever given me a word that is better than quiet time, because I do not like quiet time. As you can imagine, I'm never quiet. That's like not my vibe ever.

But you all throughout the book talk about communion, that it's your daily communion with God. Because I think, Strahan, growing up in faith, the idea of God waiting on you when you wake up always felt pressure-y to me. Like God's ready to talk to you as soon as you're ready and your mom is ready to talk to you as soon as you're ready and your little brother's ready for you to play outside as soon as you're ready. And it's just like, okay, everyone needs me to do something. I will be available when I'm available.

You're helping me switch. I would have never confessed that narrative 48 hours ago because I didn't have language for it. But then through your book, I was like, Oh, I have not felt like it was a loving waiting on me. I felt like it's a pressure-y waiting on me. But if He's pursuing us, it's not a pressure-y waiting on me.

**Strahan:** No, it's not. It's so funny because we're so quick to say we're all made in the image of God. And yet we don't really take cues from one another as to what God might be like. I mean, God is not the needy lover who's depending on us and needs us for self-fulfillment, who's kind of can we spend time together? Can we spend time together? Can we talk? He's not like that.

He's the secure lover that just wakes up and loves being in our presence and wants to have a morning coffee and wants to be on the commute with us to work. That's

communion. Communion isn't so much this passing of ideas and thoughts and words between us and God. Communion is being in God. Prayer is just being in God. And that's a different disposition because it's kind of saying, I'm going to wake up in the acknowledgment and the stillness of God's love, and that's enough. He just longs for me to live in the world as if it's the womb of Him, the womb of His love and His compassion and His life.

I think my deep desire with prayer is to help people see that, yes, we share words with God 100%, but the foundation is actually this living in this almost like womb of His love and presence and compassion, that communion is about beingness. And I think this is why really good friendships or marriage are great illustrations, because marriage isn't about just constantly talking to each other all the time.

I remember when I went out for dinner with my wife before we got married, and there was this older couple sitting at the restaurant. It was a Thai restaurant. Thai food's amazing. They weren't talking to each other the whole night. And Katie and I were like, "Man, let's never be like that. Let's never be so bored with each other we never talk."

But now I'm 16 years married and my wife and I will go out and we say less than we ever have, and yet we feel more connected than we ever have. And I realized what was happening is that couple had learned to be in each other's presence in such a way that their love was louder than their words. That's what a life of prayer is. It's not the pressure to speak with God. It's not the pressure to perform. It's the invitation to exist in His love and let everything flow from there. And what a beautiful invitation to what it means to be a human being.

**Annie:** You do beautiful work. I like that you save this toward the end of the book, the fruitfulness versus productivity. You like snuck it in at the end. You're like, you know what your real problem is? Control. Dear everyone, your real problem is control.

So even as you're describing this, I'm thinking through the idea of connectedness with God and actually communing with God cannot move at the same pace as the rest of the world that I operate in. That is productivity, but not fruitfulness. Will you help us slow down a little bit? Will you kind of talk about that, like, how we operate at the speed of a garden?

**Strahan:** This is probably the benefit of being stuck in a cabin on your own for four or five years is you kind of get to test these theories of productivity because it's very hard to live a quote-unquote productive life when you have chronic sickness because you just can't do the things that other people can do. And yet I went through this experience of discovering a new fruitfulness of my life.

So we think in terms of productivity, we're post-industrialized people. We grew up in a world where there are lights, luminescent lights, and factories and machines that can produce nonstop if we want them to.

**Annie:** Literally nonstop.

**Strahan:** Yeah, literally nonstop. And the internet never turns off. There are always stock markets. There are always things going on in the world. And I don't think we've realized the degree to which this has culturally formed us and actually internalized itself as a spirituality because we think in terms of on-off switches, factories, production lines, and constant access and globalization.

So it's very possible for us when we think about a life in the kingdom of heaven that we think, I need to be productive, that there needs to be a constant stream of output, a constant giftedness, I'm constantly doing things, and that maybe that's what God wants from me and that's how I please God.

But if you think about Jesus' teaching, and actually, if you think about the world as God made it, it's actually predicated on agriculture. Agriculture is nothing like a factory. I mean, you've got summer, autumn, spring, winter. You think about the life cycle of, say, a tree. It produces fruit. That fruit falls to the ground. It seeds the soil. And then that seed is under the soil in total darkness for a long period of time as it's watered and germinated by the nutrients of the soil, and then it sprouts up.

But from the moment it sprouts up to the time it becomes a fruit tree, goodness me, it could be generations. And then even once it becomes a fruit tree, it's got to produce fruit. And then that first fruit's never really the best. It kind of got to die and then trim and groom, and then eventually... I mean, that process, if we're talking about being fruitful, that is a long, slow process of lots of winters and lots of pruning.

In the book, I try and say, we're actually called not to be productive. That's actually not the New Testament call. There's nothing wrong with productivity, but it's not the central New Testament call. We're not called to have the products of the Holy Spirit, but the fruits of the Spirit. I think we have to shift our paradigm from, I got to keep doing things for God to I have to abide in God. I have to be like soil that receives His seeds, receives His water, the seasons of the kingdom, and then bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. That process is very much out of my control. It requires a lot of being watered by God, but it also requires going through times of fruitfulness and peeling back.

But I think when we think in terms of fruitfulness and not productivity, it's quite liberating, Annie. It's like, oh, my goodness, I'm not like a factory that has to perform for God all the time. Actually, the way to truly be fruitful or, quote, unquote, productive in a biblical sense is actually to primarily live a life of prayer from which all flows from the love of God. That sounds like a gospel to me. That sounds like a gospel to the post-industrialized age. And I think that's the gospel we need to remind ourselves in these moments.

**Annie:** Strahan, my problem is, is that I very often really enjoy the running fast partnership of working with God. I find a lot of-

**Strahan:** It's good.

**Annie:** Right, sure, sure, sure. But the problem is I find a lot of like maybe my highest enjoyment is when we are doing, not when we are being. Because I'm not doing without Him. I've done enough counseling and done enough work on my Enneagram 7 self that I'm not an escape artist anymore. I'm not like running and doing outside of Him. But now I've somehow managed to weave a life where I do the running and doing on a path that God is with me on. But I don't enjoy the being as much as I enjoy when we're doing things. That's bad.

**Strahan:** I can relate. I live most of my life that way. To be honest, it's not discipline or piety that changed my life. It was just sickness. Do you know what I mean? I was forced into what... you know, my language moving from a working relationship with God into a friendship. And so I've got massive sympathy. And I think our culture forms us that way.

But I think too, when we stop, I think if we live a life that's so busy that we never stop, then when a stoppage comes, like a grief or a loss or a sickness or a vocational shift or something, we will have to face the deficit. But I think as well, I don't know that in our church communities, we've really given a vision for what drinking deeply and living a life in God, how beautiful it really is.

You know, it's sort of like if you live eating McDonald's all the time and doing no exercise, you just only know what you know. And then someone comes along and says, do you know you can have deep sleep and not have migraines every day and feel good about yourself and have clarity of mind? And you're like, I didn't know that. And so you slowly do the work of eating well and exercising, and then suddenly you're like, I want this because this is way better.

I feel like in the church, we have to restore a passionate, beautiful vision for what communion with God is. For like, hey, what if you just woke up every morning and you didn't feel alone? What if actually it was effortless to feel joy and delight in



your life? What if you longed for God so much that you would give up anything just to spend an hour with Him, and at the end of that hour, you just felt like a completely new human being. And what if all these other things you long for?

So I think it's partly this lack of vision for communion because we've only really taught prayer as a place of work as well, which is how I used to experience it. You know, you say, go and pray. Most people think intercession, petition, asking God for stuff, really performing for God. My goal of my life is to change the definition of prayer. And that's why I use the word communion so that people go, I want this. Because the more we want it, the more natural it will be to give up that which keeps us busy from it. I have so much sympathy, Annie. And you're so right. I don't think you and I are the only ones that have probably wrestled with that sort of working element with God.

**Annie:** It's why reading books is good for our souls is because when I read you giving me language around... like you put language to things I didn't have a language for that gave me a way to right-size this with the Lord. And if I'm not reading other people's stuff or getting some of these other resources, then I'm missing out on that language.

[00:44:16] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [the Go Bible](#). Okay. If you listen to season five of our MiniBFF podcast, then you know, we love the Go Bible around here. We got to read a lot of stories from it during the latest season.

So if you're looking for a Bible for your kids or your grandkids, your nieces or nephews and want to find one, they'll actually love reading, it is the Go Bible. It's packed with more than 600 focused and fun features, such as a full-color interior, kid-friendly, detailed maps, and tales of transformed people from the Bible. That's what we got to read on the MiniBFF podcast.

It is perfect for ages 7 to 12. And because of the added features, it really helps your kids grow closer to Jesus and understand and apply God's word. The Go Bible even encourages kids to think more deeply about the Bible and to understand how it fits into their everyday lives. So go grab one for the MiniBFF in your life. The Go Bible is available wherever Bibles are sold online, as well as [KidsGoBible.com](#) or at your favorite local bookstore.

**Sponsor:** You know, I've been on a bit of a hair journey lately and went for a fun fall, dark brown hair color, but I never actually have to worry about the health of my hair

because [Prose](#) custom care has been a game changer for me. I love it so much I keep it in both my Nashville and my New York apartments.

Since 2017, Prose has transformed traditional hair and skincare with a made-to-order custom model. They combine the expertise of their team of in-house cosmetic chemists with an advanced AI algorithm that personalizes your formula based on 80 plus unique factors, so you're truly getting a custom-made-for-you product.

Prose also offers custom skincare. So go give that a try too, because with the Prose promise, if you don't love your first order, it is on them. So there's never been a better time to switch to custom. Prose is so confident that they will bring out your best hair that they're offering an exclusive trial offer of 50% off your first hair care subscription order at [Prose.com/ThatSoundsFun](https://Prose.com/ThatSoundsFun). So take your free consultation, get your one-of-a-kind formula, and see the difference that custom hair care can make at half the price, you guys. 50% off at [Prose.com/ThatSoundsFun](https://Prose.com/ThatSoundsFun).

**Kait:** Are you single and navigating the complex world of dating as a Christian? Well, I want you to know you're not alone. I'm Kait.

**JJ:** And I'm JJ.

**Kait:** And together we host The Heart of Dating podcast.

**JJ:** We're here to unmask the ambiguity of dating and help you build a healthy approach to find your person.

**Kait:** Each episode we tackle tough questions and provide real, relatable advice you won't find anywhere else. And guess what? We hold nothing back.

**JJ:** Yeah, that's right. From heartbreak to hope to real-life stories from our listeners, we literally cover it all, bringing you wisdom and insights, and sometimes laughter that everyone needs to thrive in any relationship.

**Kait:** Whether you're single or you're in a relationship, you'll find community and support within The Heart of Dating podcast.

**JJ:** So we're inviting you to join the conversation that's changing the ways that Christians date.

**Kait:** Literally, if you want to make dating better, come join us. Let's do this together.

**JJ:** You can subscribe on your favorite podcast platform or...

**Kait:** Find us on Instagram or on YouTube, Heart of Dating. And you can visit our website to learn more at [heartofdating.com](http://heartofdating.com).

**Annie:** And now back to finish up our conversation with Strahan.

[00:47:49] <music>

**Annie:** Commoners Communion. Will you tell people about Commoners Communion? Because your other things besides *Thirsting* and your first book is *Beholding*. So will you tell about Commoners Communion and then we're going to talk about the Beholding Prayer podcast because you've nailed it with that. But tell me about Commoners Communion.

**Strahan:** So years ago was about 2015, 2016 when I first started a pretty serious wrestle with chronic illness. I was in bed, you know, 70% of the time for two or three years and couldn't play with my kids, lost my job, went through massive crisis. And that's when I started to move kind of from a working relationship with God to a friendship.

At the time, because I couldn't sing and write songs, which was my way of communing with God, I just started writing poetry and prayers, which was very unnatural for me at first. Then I started kind of just blogging and podcasting and basically saying, like, how do we reckon... exactly what you're talking about with your students tonight, Annie. How do we reckon with God in this cognitive dissonance? Because you have to move from understanding to experience.

And I realized that in the West, we're largely formed to understand God and think our way to Him, but not to experience Him to when nothing makes sense. So I just kind of started sharing openly and vulnerably, not as someone who had answers, but like, this is what I'm discovering in God, this deeper place of knowingness, of quiet, of depth in my suffering. And it caught on.

And I call it Commoners Communion because I wanted it to kind of intimate to people that all of us can have this very ordinary, common, integrated life with God. Honestly, it connected with a lot of people. And it became something that I was able to share more and more, and then connected with John Mark Comer in the Bridgetown podcast, you know, during the 2020 years, the Bridgetown Daily.

That led to doing prayer schools. So I started kind of online prayer schools where I'd say, if you want to explore prayer, come and hang out. And man, I can't tell you the hunger out there for people to say, what is prayer? How do I do this? Then I

released some prayer books. It's just really become a ministry for me to share openly what I've learned and to say, "Hey, what does it look like for us to be a people of communion again in our generation?" That's Commoners Communion.

**Annie:** An Instagram account is a good place to start. It's a beautiful offering. I mean, you even give us like, inhale this, exhale that, like giving us some real leadership. The podcast I have been looking for is a podcast that helps me pray. So I use John Eldredge's Pause app all the time, because he walks you through three-minute, five-minute, 10-minute prayers. And then your podcast, Beholding Prayer podcast, I mean, that is what... It is just prayers, 10-minute prayers, right, that you have written for us.

**Strahan:** The Beholding Prayer podcast, I began when I released Beholding as a way of... you know, it's one thing to read a book, it's another thing to actually pray. I think I know in my own experience, it's very easy to read about prayer and then to kind of put the book down and go, I'm going out for coffee because that same confrontation of God, you know, I'm nervous.

So the goal with the podcast was to just gently guide people into what it might mean to experience God and say, Our pain, or I do an episode on, or a prayer session on the Trinity, like to experience the desire of the Trinity. And I do that by helping people just take some deep breaths, become aware of God's presence. And then I basically just prompt people on a meditation or an experience of God and leave space.

It's my way of kind of saying, this is what it can feel like to actually bring this theory into the practice of our minds, our bodies, our nervous systems, and our hearts. Because yeah, I found that over time that just saying, Go and pray or believe this about God or take it to God, it sounds great, but a lot of us go, I don't really know how to do that. So that was the goal behind it, the podcast.

**Annie:** It's great. It's so good. I mean, your podcast, Lectio 365, like some of these things that are offering us an invitation to walk with you through a prayer, and then you can just hit go again and do the same one again and keep on praying. It is such a gift. So thank you so much for that resource. I was like, man, today's episode is going to be so fun because we're giving people eight different things they can have between the book and the podcast and the Instagram account and the community around Commoners Communion. It's such a gift. It's going to make us better at being connected with God, Strahan. I'm so thankful.

**Strahan:** Oh, beautiful. That's amazing to hear that. Thanks, Annie.

**Annie:** Yeah, it's such a gift. Okay, I've got to finish with this. Let me tell you the other thing that stood out to me. I mean, I have a whole page of notes we didn't get to on the book. Just so you know, I've got pages. An early translator of the Bible, you wrote in the book that they said, in the beginning was the conversation versus in the beginning was the word. I don't know that I will ever forget that. Can you talk about that for a second? Because that feels like a great way to go into our week of like, in the beginning was the conversation.

**Strahan:** That comes from the Gospel of John: In the beginning was the word. And it's hard because when we hear the word "word", for us, I generally think of something static. Like a word. But the original word is "logos". And for a long time before it was translated into English or anything else, the logos was translated into Latin. And the Latin word is sero, which is where we get sermon from. That sermon in the original sense is actually a dialogue, a back-and-forth. And if you go deeper down again, that comes from the root word sero, which is a weaving together.

So a sort of 14th-century monk looked into all of this and retranslated "in the beginning was the word" to "in the beginning was the conversation". And I love it for lots of reasons. One, it makes God alive and it hints at the dialogue of love that the Trinity is. But I think too, and I explore this in the book, is like, what does this mean for us?

Because we're told that we are now in Christ, that we're invited in, that we are filled with God. I want to suggest that we have now joined this conversation. And so at all times and in all ways, if we want to say prayer or communion or whatever, we're actually learning to just tune in and listen to this conversation of love and a vitality and peace and hope and joy between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are kind of caught up into the middle of this conversation. And really all communion is, is learning to kind of exhale into that and to say yes and to join in.

And if that's what prayer is, if that's what communion is actually about, exhaling into the wonderful dialogue of love that is God rather than stirring something up and performing, I feel like that is a gospel of hope and rest for the world we live in. So I loved this interpretation: in the beginning was the conversation.

**Annie:** You're right. It felt very active when I read it. I just thought like, "Oh, that feels like a river. That feels like a movement." Because you're right, in the beginning was the Word, I always picture like a stopped something, a standing still something. Yeah, but not with a conversation.

**Strahan:** And that's maybe the problem with the word "God" is we say the word "God" and we have this such a linear, singular idea about that. Maybe it's some old guy far away off in the cosmos. Maybe it's some vaporous spirit. But we don't often think

of the community of the Trinity when we say the Word God. And the second we do, it becomes such a more exciting endeavor to know Him and to participate in that. And I think that's one of the things that this language of the conversation really opened up for me.

**Annie:** Yeah, it's beautiful. Well, I would love for you in just a second, Strahan, if you don't mind, I would love for you to pray for us. But first we do have a final question I got to ask you, and then we'll close with you praying for us. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun — I hope you were prepped for this — we also need to know what you do for fun. So what sounds fun to you?

**Strahan:** Well, I feel like this is going to sound really lame.

**Annie:** Nope, we don't judge our fun around here, buddy. We don't judge our fun. If it's fun to you, it's fun.

**Strahan:** I feel like this is going to show you how introverted and simple a life I live. But my dream job... there's these mountains called the Pinnacles near where I live, and this steep mountain, like right up over the Coromandel Ranges, full of native forests. And I've never been able to walk them because of my chronic illness. My dream fun thing would be to walk to the top of the mountains, and to sleep under the stars at night, just no light pollution, you can see those bad boys, and then wake up and make myself at dawn an AeroPress coffee, and just sit there and watch the sunrise over the Coromandel Ranges would be my dream. It would be incredible.

**Annie:** Do you hope you get to do it? You think you'll be able to get to do it?

**Strahan:** I'm going to do it, Annie. My dream is to do it this year with my boys. I've actually been a lot healthier this year. So I'm going to just start little walks every day, and I'm going to take my boys up. That's the dream.

**Annie:** Post pictures. You got to show us afterwards. That's awesome.

**Strahan:** I will.

**Annie:** That's awesome. If you don't mind, would you pray for us? Thinking about all of our friends and me who really want to pursue friendship with God in new ways and want to... Like you said at the beginning, the thing you want most is just to know Him. I want that. I want our friends listening to want that. Will you just pray for us today?

**Strahan:** Of course. I'd love to. Let's pray. If you're listening, why don't you just take a couple of deep breaths with us and become aware of God's presence, aware of His

love, of this conversation that has been long before we existed and will be long after our life? We just pray. Father, we love You. We want to love You. We hear the gospel of who You are, and we hear about your nature, and we just say You are beautiful and good and true. So my prayer, Lord, is that in this moment for everybody listening, that your grace would fill their minds, their hearts, that your presence would fill them, that they would feel and know your desire for them, that they would feel that the weight of performing for you, the weight of performing in prayer, the weight of expectation would lift off their shoulders, and a new deep joy would rise up to know you. We don't know how to pray. I don't know how to pray. Teach us how to pray. Good and faithful Father, we love you. We receive you. In Jesus' name, amen.

**Annie:** Amen. Amen. Wonderful, the whole thing. Thank you so much. Thanks for doing this.

**Strahan:** Thank you, Angie. It's been a pleasure. Thank you.

[00:59:36] <music>

**Outro:** You guys, isn't he brilliant? Oh my gosh. I am so grateful for the language, and I'm telling you, this is an excellent read. Grab your copy of *Thirsting*. Now, remember, the podcast is called The Beholding Prayer Podcast. So you can go download that. Subscribe to that. You're going to love it. Go follow Strahan on social media, tell him thanks for being on the show.

And the other account we talked about, The Commoners Communion, is really beautiful. I think you'll love that. We'll link to it in our show notes. And if you enjoyed this episode, I think you'll also enjoy every episode with our friend John Mark Comer, particularly Episode 854.

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

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

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, please do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Today, what sounds fun to me, oh man, Christmas. Movies are kicking up. I know we haven't even gotten to Thanksgiving yet, but we've got our bingo board to share with you. And on Thursday, we've got three of the stars of Great American Family's Little Women.

Well, truthfully, we have four of the stars, because I'm in the conversation too. Y'all know this was... I have a very little part in this movie. Laura Osnes, Jesse Hutch, and Julia Riley are here on Thursday from Little Women's Christmas, and you are going to love the conversation and the movie. That's what sounds fun to me, and we'll see you on Thursday.

[01:01:23] <music>

**Greer:** Hey, I'm Greer, host of the Unfinished Idea Podcast, where listeners and I get to journey together to better understand the neurodiverse world. Together with my husband, we have two boys and two dogs, and raising a child with additional needs. Our day-to-day experience isn't being talked about in everyday life, and I see a gap in those leading people who are neurodivergent. Whether you're a parent, a friend, a teacher, or a neighbor, the neurodivergent world is all around us, so this podcast is for you.

I have conversations over a cup of tea or coffee, helping to bring awareness about how neurodivergent people experience the world, as well as families who are raising children with different needs. This podcast will share practical help, tips, and the joys, struggles, and differences in being neurodivergent or raising a child who is.

Each week, I will spend 30 minutes talking and interviewing others in the neurodiverse space and giving you the opportunity to learn and grow and feel seen and heard by how we interact with each other and the world. Search for the Unfinished Idea in your favorite podcast app and come learn about the neurodivergent world. I'm looking forward to seeing you there.