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Annie: Hi friends, welcome to another episode, another year of the That Sounds Fun podcast. I'm your host, Annie F. Downs, and I'm so happy to be with you today. My favorite episode of the year.

Y'all know I love a meeting. Whereas most people say "that meeting could have been an email", I tend toward "that email could have been a meeting". So this is the one time a year I feel like we get to have a meeting, which brings my soul joy.

Epiphany is when I get to stop the show for a minute. And instead of you listening to an episode of TSF, you are listening to what is going on behind the scenes, the plans, the people, the direction. It's also a day I always want to see and celebrate, pause and think. And invite you to do the same thing.

Epiphany wasn't my favorite day on the Christian calendar until it was and until it changed everything. That was in 2017. I wrote about it in one of my books, Remember God. I'd like to read you that story now. If you have your book, feel free to join me on page 191.

"Friday morning in Edinburgh, I got on a train to England. I was visiting two cities in two days before returning on Sunday to fly back to America on Monday. I arrived in Durham, England in the early afternoon of January 6th, and Caroline and Nathan were waiting there for me at the train station.

I was beyond excited to get to spend 24 hours with them on this holiday, dear friends from Nashville who now live in Durham. It was around lunchtime, so we dropped my things off at their house and grabbed a late meal, immediately diving into all the talk from home and catching up on our lives. Something so special to me about friends who can be apart from each other for months or years at a time and still pick right up where they left off. This family is like that for me.

In just a few minutes, their kids and I were pals and Nathan and Caroline and I were talking faster than we could listen. Nathan knows how I love history and all things British, really, so we toured Durham Castle first thing. Their daughter, Clara Ann, was three. Ben was barely one. And those two jokers hung with us the entire time. Never once did they complain or pitch a fit.

The Castle people are smart. They're accustomed to tiny kids being forced to do tours such as this. So around every corner and in every room was a small stuffed lion that Clara had to find. I was impressed not only that the docents had thought of this, but how fast Clara found each lion. She beat me almost every time. Every time.

We finished the Castle tour and walked down the sidewalk maybe 30 yards or so to Durham Cathedral. It was only three in the afternoon by then, but in January in England, the sun had already started to let us know it was done for the day. The sky was turning deeper grays and purples as a crowd of us entered the building. Nathan began to tell me the history of the place, pointing out details of the decor.

In one of the back rooms, a woman wearing a robe walked up to us. Her name tag read Marion, and she jumped right into our conversation, offering us more information and really chatting it up with Nathan. Before we were done with the afternoon, Marion had taken us around the cathedral and even into a room that visitors don't usually see.

She showed us the courtyard used as the setting for Harry Potter's Hogwarts school and brought us back inside. Darkness had fallen. Nathan offered for Caroline and I to stay for Evensong, a nightly service they do at the cathedral. We said goodbye to him and the kids and took a seat in the choir loft. Remember me saying a cathedral is laid out like a cross? Picture the four sections of the cross. We were sitting in the top. I was super giddy.

The chairs we sat in were those regal looking wooden ones with ornate designs to your left and right, even above your head, as if you sat down in your own little wooden cave. Other people were also taking their seats for Evensong, but being a Friday night, the crowd was scarce, maybe ten in attendance, five or six on the same side as Caroline and I, five or six in smaller seats across the aisle.

We were all facing each other. Marion then walked down the center, now wearing commoner's clothes, her brown robe draped over her arm. She smiled at us and took a seat across the way.

The choir filled in, about 40 of them, wearing their robes. They sat on both sides of the aisle as well, between us and the main part of the cathedral. The three priests followed after that, each in their ornate and beautiful robes. But the place they spoke from was off to the side from us, so we couldn't see them. 'How different from my church,' I thought. Our church has flashy lights and a band and lots of themed preaching series with fancy backdrops, so this wasn't my normal experience.

This service was traditional and liturgical. Old Testament reading, organ, choir, New Testament reading, organ, choir. Really beautiful. I was trying to pay close attention to the scriptures, trying to see if God was really going to show up in this place. He shows up in cathedrals still, doesn't He?

Old cathedrals sometimes don't feel alive to me anymore. You know, I love walking through and touring them, trying my best to picture a time when it was just the local church, but they mostly feel like a museum to something that doesn't exist anymore. Maybe that's how I felt about God at times too, more historic and memorable than alive. That's the initial vibe I was getting that night at Durham Cathedral. But then something started to stir. I knew it. The Holy Spirit was telling me to lean in, to focus, to pay attention, to choose to connect.

After the Old Testament reading, a man I couldn't see from where I was sitting stood up to pray. We're going to pray for three specific groups today. Okay? 'The first group,' he said, 'are people who use words for their jobs.' My eyes bugged out. I turned to Caroline and whispered, 'Wait, what did he just say?' Her face told me she'd heard the same thing.

The man continued, 'Whether it is in books or on stages, maybe even social media.' I don't know what he said to complete that sentence because by then I was crying. So was Caroline. All of a sudden, I knew God had brought me here on purpose on this night.

I mean, in a service of no more than 50 people, how could this guy have known an speaker and social media lover was one of those people and not a local and American and not a regular, a once-in-a-lifetime visitor? It was too much for me. I leaned my head into my hands as the tears fell. Then the man said he was going to pray.

I immediately started to panic. Do I close my eyes? Do I open my hands and receive what he's praying for me? Do I just listen and try to memorize it? Do I record it on my iPhone so I don't forget what he says? Do I grab my journal from my bag and try to write down every word? All these questions ran through my mind in a split second. The man sitting to the left of Caroline had a video camera going. I remembered we'd mentioned it when we sat down. So I decided if I wanted to copy, I'd be able to get one from him maybe.

But I knew this was a holy moment, a moment meant for me not to be missed. I needed to open my hands, open my heart, open my ears, and just let this man pray for me. 'Oh God, your incarnate son Jesus Christ is the eternal word in whom may be read the good news at the heart of all that you are doing. Grant to all who speak or write what many may hear or read that love of truth which leads to love of God and that love of God which makes communication of thought a good and holy thing through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

Caroline had put her hand on my back and prayed along with me. And when the man we couldn't see said amen, she and I looked at each other, tears streaming

down our faces. 'Caroline,' I said barely above a whisper. 'I know, I know' was all she could say back to me.

He next prayed for peacekeepers. Then for those who'd lost a loved one over the Christmas holidays. Typical categories, not like the first one, which was actually really good for Caroline and me as we definitely needed to give our emotions some time to calm down. The service ended and we both sat there absolutely stunned.

We could not believe such a clear moment had just happened. This whole trip to Scotland and England had been for me an overexpression of God's kindness. Tonight, the prayer at this Evensong service felt completely over the top, more than I could have asked or imagined. I've always loved that verse. I think many of us do. Ephesians 3:20, 'Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us.'

Earlier that week, once the year had officially started in Scotland and in America, God had brought this verse to my mind over and over. For the first time, I looked up the message version. 'God can do anything, you know, far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams. He does it not by pushing us around, but by working within us, His Spirit deeply and gently within us.' Whoa, I've been scribbling those first few words into my journal almost daily since that night at L'Occitane: God can do anything, more than my wildest dreams.

Caroline and I sat there for just a few minutes more, long enough until Marion got up from her seat and walked straight across to us. How was the service? She asked suspiciously and rightly so. Here were these two American women all weepy at the end of a typical service, one they conduct every single night in that cathedral and probably without the emotional meltdown. She wasn't prying. It didn't feel like it. It felt more like she was a mother when checking on us after a storm.

I explained to her who I was and what I did for a job and asked if there was any way to get a recording of that prayer the man I couldn't see had prayed. She smiled. Would you just like to come meet the Archdeacon of Durham Cathedral? 'Yes. Yes, ma'am. Yes, that's exactly what I would like to do, please and thank you.' Meanwhile, my mind was screaming, 'What is going on here?' I was about to meet the man who holds a position in the Church of England that's existed since approximately 1080 AD. Not the same dude, but the same job, just to make that clear.

Caroline and I followed Marion to the three men standing in a row at the altar, each of them wearing a uniquely designed robe. The Archdeacon's was a mix of gold and browns, whites and blues. 'Archdeacon Jagger, I'd like to introduce you to Annie,' Marion said. He and I shook hands and then tears came to my eyes as I

started to speak to him. I swallowed them back, quickly wiping away the ones already dripping down my cheeks. 'Hello,' I said quietly, 'my name is Annie and you couldn't have known this, but I'm an author and...' Before I could finish his eyes instantly widened and with the seriousness that comes from seeing a long lost friend, he gripped my hand tighter. 'It's you,' he said. I could hear Caroline crying. 'It's you,' he said again. I couldn't stop crying.

I knew tonight was the night I was supposed to pray that, I've known it for weeks. What kindness in his eyes and to think that God had been talking to him about me! 'It's you,' he'd said. God's kindness everywhere. His kindness was following me everywhere.

Bursting into their home, I yelled to Nathan, 'You are never going to believe what happened.' 'Well, I can't wait to hear,' he said, 'because today is epiphany. So I've been here praying that God would give you an epiphany.' Caroline and I were both blown away. We couldn't hardly form words.

Today is epiphany. Of course it is. Of course it is. January 6th, the day we remember those sojourners finally made their way to Jesus in Bethlehem. And while it may not have all made sense to them in the moment, epiphany was the day their journey took on meaning. It was all too much for me.

A deep, profound, empty space in me had been filled. Not by a man, not by the list, not by my own successes or thoughts or failures, but by an epiphany of God's kindness, by the reality of it. He'd met me in a cathedral. So I'd always remember that prayer at the cathedral from the Archdeacon Ian Jagger. It is framed in my office. I read it and think about it a lot. He emailed it to me later.

'Grant to all who speak or write what many may hear or read that love of truth which leads to love of God and that love of God, which makes communication of thought a good and holy thing through Jesus Christ, our Lord. What many may hear or read.'

This year, in this epiphany episode, I want to share with you two things. What many may hear and what many may read. Let's start with what many may hear. The That Sounds Fun podcast in 2025. You may have already heard about our plans for this year, but it's like nothing we have ever done.

We have never themed as hard as we are about to theme. Ever since that episode with Banning Liebscher in January of 2024, which Spotify Wrapped for creators, told us was listened to 999% more times than any other episode, which is an insane stat. And Spotify isn't our largest platform, so it doesn't tell the whole story. But

nonetheless, fascinating. What it told me and told our team is that there was more here to be discussed. And we feel it too.

So welcome to That Sounds Fun: The Seasons. We are going to deep dive through winter, spring, summer, and fall every Monday for this entire year. We're going to answer a specific question in every episode. You'll know what the question is and who the guest is by the title of the episode.

I'm not the boss of you, but I hope you will take this year seriously and commit to listen on Mondays the whole way through. That's why we built the TSF Seasons Guidebook to walk you through the layers of what we could learn, starting with the podcast episodes, but then going even deeper in your own study and self-reflection. The TSF Seasons Guidebook can be found at anniefdowns.com/seasons.

We won't have a podcast episode every Thursday, but let me tell you what you can expect. At the start of each season, so four times this year, one of your and my favorites, Pastor Mike Kelsey, will be joining me to introduce that season and talk about the spiritual implications of that season. That will be the first Thursday of each season, so you will hear the winter episode with Pastor Mike this week on Thursday.

There will also be an essay from me once a month. I really enjoy writing and sharing those with you, the AFD and NYC episodes specifically that were shared over the last 18 months or so. But because these monthly essays won't necessarily be focused on New York City, though you know some of them will, because I will keep being a dual citizen between Nashville and New York in 2025, we will be calling them Always Annie episodes. Because for better or worse, no matter what city I'm in, plane, train, tour bus, or car, I am technically always Annie.

Once a month, we will also continue to hear from our good pal, Eddie Kaufholz. We realized in 2024, as we recapped the 10 years of the show and shared that with you each month, that as 2024 went on, we kind of just ended up doing the show we love to do: Annie and Eddie Keep Talking. So we are bringing that show back this year once a month on a Thursday, but instead of it being on its own podcast feed, we will release it here on That Sounds Fun.

And it will be like old times. We'll both have lists, probably seven minutes of serious. And who even knows what we will talk about? Not us. But the promise is that we will keep talking.

Some other things that many may hear. The Let's Read the Gospels podcast is back. So you can listen to three chapters a day of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John any day

this year. You can find that podcast feed wherever you are listening to this one. It's simply called Let's Read the Gospels.

Single Purpose League keeps growing as we begin our second year, and we will continue to have podcast episodes specifically for that community. The next few weeks with SPL includes our first birthday celebration and a huge announcement they are going to lose their minds over. If you are single today, you are welcome to join us. Just head to singlepurposeleague.com.

And yes, we do have something for our littlest ears with plans to continue the mini BFF podcast throughout 2025 as well.

Before I move on to what many may read, I want to say thank you for being here, being a part of the friend group that is the That Sounds Fun podcast audience. Our team loves making these shows for you. Johnny, Jenna, Ashley, Lillian, Becca, Taylorann, Katie, myself, the TSF network team, we genuinely love doing this. And we are excited about where we feel God leading us to lead you in 2025.

We're excited to keep adding some of our favorite guests to the Hall of Fun and bridging y'all to new guests and resources that will encourage and equip you for every season.

And I get to say this every year, and that alone is not lost on me, but thank you for your kindness to the guests that join us. It's literally what you are known for in the conversations people have about TSF behind my back. And then someone tells me about it later. How supportive and kind our friends are, how you blow up people's DMs, how you leave comments of encouragement, how you show up for concerts and buy books and stream music and see movies. You are generous in so many ways.

And I know you don't always agree with everything a guest says in the studio or what they have said in the past. Or there are times when you don't agree with something a guest does or says after they have been on the show. I get that. I've felt some of that too.

But what is consistent is even in your disagreement, I have rarely seen our listener friends being the ones who are in the mob of unkindness towards a guest. That means a lot to me. Because that same slow to speak, slow to anger vibe that you extend to our guests, you extend to me.

And I'm thankful because I know you don't always agree with me either. I am learning and growing a lot right now. You're seeing that. And I'm totally human. You see that too. Thank you for learning and growing alongside me and allowing

me to make mistakes and missteps and misspeaks, and in general, allowing me to be an evolving human who is growing and changing. So that's what many may hear.

And now for what many may read. I haven't gotten to tell you anything about this yet, but today is the day. Two and a half years ago, my nephew, TJ died after only 56 days here with us on earth. Diagnosed with a life limiting genetic disorder at 12 weeks, we knew his whole little life, that his whole life would be little. You may have heard me talk about my other nephew, Sam. I'm mostly obsessed with him. And when TJ was soon to be born, we were looking for resources to help Sam process the most likely death of his little brother.

Of course, we believed and hoped for a different miracle, but we wanted to prepare for what doctors believed would happen. I called lots of my friends looking for a book to read to Sam or any kind of resource that told the truth of the situation, but also shared the hope of heaven and the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I called families I knew had been through similar loss and pain. I called counselors and pastors. While there were a few recommendations here and there, there was not a solid answer, a book that could help Sam the way we wanted to help him. So I wrote it.

Along with my sister Tatum, who has spent the last year helping me make the book right from the mom's point of view, we have written, *Where Did Tj Go?: A Book for Kids on Grief and Loss*. I wrote it first for little Sammy, who needed a story about the death of his brother on earth and then the life of his brother in heaven. There is good news even in sad stories and kids are not too young to learn this and we are not too seasoned, too jaded, too old to remember this truth too.

It's a picture book for families that need to process grief with their kids, parents who need language to start conversations, and kids who need pictures and words about Jesus and heaven and hope amidst the death of a sibling or a cousin, a neighbor or a friend.

David Thomas, who you know from *Raising Boys and Girls* podcast and who is a hugely respected family therapist, has actually written a letter in the back of *Where Did TJ Go?* To help grownups reading the book have some next steps and resources as their kids process loss and grief. Such an honor and such a gift to have his help in this book.

It's a beautiful book illustrated by Jennie Poh, who has illustrated all my other children's books. She was a godsend, deeply investing in our story to make sure she drew the scenes and my nephews with the most care.

Where Did TJ Go? releases on Tuesday, February 18th, but it is available for pre-order now. There are no like pre-order bonuses or anything like you often see with the launch of a new book, but we do have one thing I'd love to do for you. If you have lost a baby in your family, we have book plates I can sign and send to you that say In Loving Memory Of.

A few months ago on Infant Loss Awareness Day, I posted a comment box in my Instagram stories inviting my follower friends to share the name of their infant in their family that has died. Hundreds and hundreds of names were posted. I knew exactly then that this was how I wanted to personalize these books, if that is what you want, of course.

Tatum and I keep saying that we wish nobody needed this book, but we hope it will help any family that does. We see this book as one that will serve your family if you need it, or one you will buy to put in the church library or school library, or one that you grab a few copies of to hang on to for when a friend of yours faces the unimaginable loss of their baby.

My sister and I, her husband, Jacob, and of course, Sammy, and our whole family, really, are honored to share TJ with the world in this way. We thank God for him and for this book about him that will bless and help so many siblings like Sam and families like ours.

You can request a book plate at wheredidtjgo.com and you can order your copies of the book wherever you love to buy books. Again, it will release on February 18th, 2025, but you can go ahead and order, share with your friends. Let's make sure every family that could possibly need this book receives it. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to nonprofit organizations that stepped into Tatum and Jacob's lives during that most devastating year.

Grant to all who speak or write that love of truth which leads to love of God and that love of God which makes communication of thought a good and holy thing through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now it is time to talk about winter. It is the season we are in if you're in the Northern Hemisphere. If you're not, well, we're just gonna prep you for what's to come all year long. Make sure you've got your TSF Seasons Guidebook printed and ready to go before Thursday when Pastor Mike Kelsey really kicks off the winter season for us.

We are ready for all that God has for us to share this year. What we believe many will hear and many will read. There are lots of unanswered questions too, but I keep going back to Psalm 16:7, I will bless the Lord who guides me. He will guide

you in 2025. He will guide us in 2025. He will guide me in 2025. He will absolutely be faithful to us this year, no matter what is to come. Winter, spring, summer, and fall.

So I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Happy Epiphany. May we find Jesus this year, just like the wise men found Jesus on this day. And may we all lay gifts before him today. Our hopes and dreams, our talents and plans, our very lives. And happy winter. We are going to learn how to thrive in this season.

I'll see you back here on Thursday with our good friend and one of our favorite pastors, Mike Kelsey. Y'all have a great week.