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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to the That Sounds Fun podcast. I'm your host Annie F. Downs, and I'm so happy to be here with you today. Happy New Year. I hope you had a chance to listen to our Epiphany episode from Monday, where we got to tell you more about some special things happening this year, including our seasons series here on That Sounds Fun. And today Pastor Mike Kelsey is here to help us answer the question, how do I define winter in my life?

We have a TSF seasons guidebook available for you over at AnnieFDowns.com/seasons that will lead you through this entire year as well. When you purchase it, you'll get a download of all the questions and prompts for the winter season, and then we'll email the content for each new season as it begins. You're buying the whole year at one time. So again, you find that at AnnieFDowns.com/seasons.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I got to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors, [AG1](#). Which habits did you decide to leave behind in 2024? And which ones are you trying to improve on this year? If you're trying to kick off your day on a healthier note, AG1 has been a longtime partner and a favorite of mine.

I just add one scoop to really cold water and I throw in some frozen lemon juice or hydration multiplier. It truly helps me feel more clear-headed and ready for the day. Plus, I love that I'm getting all the vitamins and minerals I need as the day begins.

So this new year, try AG1 for yourself. It's the perfect time to start a new healthy habit. AG1 is offering new subscribers a free \$76 gift when you sign up. You'll get a welcome kit, a bottle of D3 K2, and five free travel packs in your first box. So make sure you check that out. DrinkAG1.com/SoundsFun is how my friends get this offer. That's DrinkAG1.com/SoundsFun. Start your new year off on a healthier note.

Intro: Today on the show, we kick off an incredible year with one of our favorite pastors around here, Mike Kelsey. As we were planning for the year on the podcast, we knew we wanted a pastor to help us set up each new season and to give us a spiritual look at what all that means. So what an actual gift that Pastor Mike is going to be here at the start of every season this year to help us really figure all of this out.

Today, we're going to talk about seasons in general and why they matter, kind of an overview, and then we're going to talk about how we define winter in our own lives. I cannot wait to see what God wants to teach each of us through this season.

This is a note-taking episode for sure, because you know Pastor Mike is always bringing us some truth. If you're in your TSF seasons guidebook, you're going to be taking notes on page 10.

So here's my conversation kicking off, That Sounds Fun: The Seasons, talking about winter with Pastor Mike Kelsey.

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Annie: I mean, welcome back to the podcast, Mike. Thank you for doing this.

Mike: Thanks for having me back.

Annie: Oh, of course. This is technically Episode number 11 for you of That Sounds Fun. How are you still saying yes to this?

Mike: That doesn't even make sense. 11. That's crazy. That's irresponsible of you and your entire team.

Annie: Not at all. Okay, we're going to dive in here. But first, give us an update. How are things in... what is it? DMV?

Mike: Yeah, in the DMV. That's DC, Maryland, and Virginia for those of you that don't know. Things are great. Me, Ashley, the kids are great. The church, McLean Bible Church, is great. I get to lead and serve alongside your Georgia friend, David Platt. And now we're doing good, man.

Annie: I'm really glad. Ashley's company looks like it's doing really well, too. Will you tell everybody about that?

Mike: Yeah. Tove Home. And it's been a dream of hers for a really long time. In fact, Annie, I gave you a shout out for the anniversary of the show and said that one of the things you do is you call dreams out of people. And this is one of her dreams. She's been trying to pursue it and finally decided to stop trying and just do it. And so yeah, she's been doing great.

Annie: I lit one of her candles. I don't even like candles. Everybody's going to think I'm lying.

Mike: We know. Oh, we know. We know.

Annie: I lit one this weekend and I was like, "This smells so lovely" I was trying to be Christmassy. I was trying to be in the mood, trying to get the house in a Christmas mode. Christmas is about the only time I let candles exist in my home.

Okay, Mike. So most people listening kind of know where we're going this year, but I want to give everybody kind of an overarching, if they haven't heard the Epiphany episode. We are going to focus this whole year on seasons, winter, spring, summer, and fall. And you have very kindly agreed to join us every season and kind of chop it up at the start of the season and help us get kind of a spiritual basis around this particular season.

So before we do winter, which is going to be the job today, can we back up a little bit? Will you talk about like, are seasons important to pay attention to spiritually? I mean, obviously, I think yes. But tell me why you think seasons are important to pay attention to in our spiritual lives.

Mike: Well, first of all, when you asked me to do this, I said to my wife, I was like, "Why? Why did she ask me?" But I'm glad you did because I've been in this season of learning all this stuff. And I am not a naturally self-aware person. I was just telling Ash, I have one season is grind season. That's it. You stick your head down and you keep going.

I guess I put it this way. I think we're in a kind of a technological age. And I think in that type of society, we're so far removed from the reality of how dependent we are on nature that we don't get it. And so if you have like an agricultural society or whatever, they know we're so dependent on seasons. I think that's a part of it.

There's a really good book. I don't know if you read it before, Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak*.

Annie: I haven't, but I haven't ever finished it.

Mike: It's so good. The last chapter, I think it's the last chapter of the book, is on seasons. And it's so good. And listen to what he said. He said, "The master metaphor of our era does not come from agriculture. It comes from manufacturing. We do not believe that we grow our lives. We believe that we make them." He says, we live in a culture that insists against all evidence that we can make whatever life we want, whenever we want it. And then he said, "Deeper still, we run headlong into our own egos, which want desperately to believe," and here it is, "that we are always in charge."

All he's saying is, when you live so distant from the reality of how dependent we are on nature, we really think we are in control. And so I think understanding how

seasons operate in nature and in our spiritual lives, it just helps us remember, we can do a lot, but ultimately, we are not the ones that are in control. It just helps us kind of set our expectations. I think one of the things I've learned is that embracing the season that you're in is really submitting to God and is really positioning you to receive what God wants for you in that season.

Annie: I am about to be so annoyed at myself if I've planned an entire year about not being in control. That is so annoying, dude.

Mike: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. We're like five minutes in and I'm already just blowing up your spot. Listen-

Annie: I didn't agree to that.

Mike: Hey. But that's what I've been learning. I think I just go, go, go, go, go. And I've been over these last several years... and we can get into it over the course of our time together, man. God has just been breaking me down in so many difficult but beautiful ways. And I think the core essence of it is just realizing that I'm not ultimately in control.

And when you realize that, and instead of responding to that with anxiety, you respond to that with submission, faith, belief that God has something for you in the season that you're in, you can embrace the wholeness of what God has for you instead of resisting it and resenting it.

Annie: Right. Which could be a tattoo on my body. I'm so often resisting and resenting the season I'm in.

Mike: Yeah.

Annie: Can we be in multiple seasons at once? Can we be in one season physically, one season relationally, one season vocationally, one season spiritually? Do we need to kind of parse our life out a little bit?

Mike: I think so. And I think that's part of the complexity of life. That's what makes it so difficult, I think, sometimes to realize what season we're in. Because you could be killing it at work, but then when you get off work and you go home, it feels like you stepped into an entirely different climate. You know what I mean?

Annie: Wow, Mike.

Mike: Or your family could be amazing right now, but you're so up in the air you don't know what you want to do with the rest of your life. And you look at all your

friends and they're so fulfilled and they're killing it in their careers. So yeah, I think you can be in different seasons at the very same time. But that's part of why we're talking about this is to grow and being able to discern where am I at? And that's not just a broad stroke. It's like, where am I at in these particular areas, so I know how to move and operate in those different areas of my life.

Annie: How many different areas would you tell us to think about? Like, what would you consider... if we're sitting down with our TSF seasons guidebook, if we're like working on this, if we are in our journal going, okay, let me try to identify the seasons I'm in, what are the different categories we should think about?

Mike: I mean, gosh, there's so many. I think the three that stand out the most to me, I would say vocational. I think there's a lot of us wrestling through, what am I supposed to do? I would say relational. And that's just all-encompassing. I mean, there's so many different relationships and dimensions of those relationships. And then I would say spiritual.

I mean, we could keep going in so many other areas, but just pastorally as I sit with people and as I think about my own life, those are three that tend to, I think, rise to the surface. And I think the physical is wrapped up in all of that, right? Because we could be exhausted and we could be dealing with, you know, all kinds of issues, pain, health issues, but a lot of times I find that that's tied to so many other areas in our life.

Annie: Let's talk about control some more, because I'm sitting here thinking, I know how to identify where I am seasonally relationally. That feels pretty easy when I'm dating, when I'm in my friendships, that kind of stuff. It feels pretty easy vocationally. And we can talk about some of that. Spiritually, when you said it, I thought to myself, "I can make it whatever season I want spiritually, if I work hard enough." That is what I just thought in my head, Mike Kelsey. That's not true.

Mike: Well, here's the thing. And you know this, I know this. You think that-

Annie: I do.

Mike: ...until you can't think that anymore.

Annie: Until it's a dark night of the soul and the Lord ain't answering.

Mike: If you live long enough, if you try to grow in your faith long enough, you just realize it's not always a one-to-one from effort to your experience of God and fulfillment and all that. Sometimes it feels like a lot of input. You're doing the

things and it's just like, wait, I'm not getting the return, the joy, the pleasure, the closeness and intimacy with God.

That's why I come back to the control thing. There is something God wants to teach us in how nature operates, and it maps onto our lives in so many different ways.

Annie: I mean, you're giving us a quote that I hope everybody writes down in their guidebook, in their journal, in their notes app. When the effort doesn't match the outcome, you need to ask what season. Because there are also times, Mike, where my effort is so much lower than the outcome. The outcome blows my mind. And that also should tell me we're season-switching.

Mike: Yeah, it's a fact. Also, it's just true physically. Like I'm 42 years old, dawg. The stuff I do physically does not have the same outcome. I wish it did. I wish it did. I think spiritually, I think that's honestly one of the... I think that's one of the hardest things for people to grapple with in their spiritual life is when you hit a wall, and you just feel like there's nothing growing out of the ground. Like, I'm doing all the things. I'm reading the books, I'm reading through the Gospels, I'm doing all this stuff and I just don't feel close to God. I just don't feel... That can be hard.

And it's just hard. Period. It's helpful, though, when you realize that doesn't mean you're on the wrong track or there's something wrong with you. That's just a part of the rhythm of life in a fallen world.

Annie: Right. Right. So friends, listen, I would encourage you what I'm going to do today too, is kind of sit down and look at that vocational, relational, spiritual, and kind of label, do I think I'm winter, spring, summer, fall right now? Because in the world we're in... well, in our hemisphere, we're in the winter. So we're going to focus on winter first. But in each of those three areas, it would take us a couple of minutes to go, man, it looks like nothing's growing, or I cannot keep up with all that God is doing. This is harvest time. This is the fall. I'm doing something. And kind of have a knowledge today of where you are in those three main areas.

Because I think you're right, Pastor Mike, like when I know what season I'm in, I have a lot more patience and grace and contentment to go like, Oh, this is just the winter. Like this is just the winter.

Mike: Yeah, man.

Annie: So what are a couple of things...? What's coming to my mind is we need to make sure we're not in sin. How do we make sure that there isn't something... that it is seasonal, and that it isn't something blocking what God might have for us?

Mike: And it can be. Well, let me say this first, and we'll get into summer and all that over the course of the year. It is helpful. I'm kind of talking about it from the perspective of a season that's challenging. I think for a lot of people, though, sometimes it can be hard for us to give ourselves permission to enjoy a good season.

Annie: That's right, Mike.

Mike: That's a whole nother episode. We'll get into that. But I just did want to say that some of us are in... whatever season you like. Because there's people that love winter. I don't know what's wrong with y'all, but-

Annie: Not me. But somebody.

Mike: But some of us have a hard time just being like, It's okay. It's all right to be happy. It's okay to have joy. But yeah, I do think sometimes there are things we need to examine in our own lives and in our own selves, because sometimes we can embrace sin in ways that have just a devastating or it can just be detrimental impact on our lives.

And so I do think that's part of self-awareness. It's part of just slowing down long enough to just say, man, am I locked in? Is there something I'm embracing that's unhealthy? And we're talking about sin. It doesn't have to be sin in the ways that we think about it. I think about Hebrews 12 too. It talks about-

Annie: Me too. That's what I was just thinking about. Go, go, go.

Mike: Let's go. We already in. We already locked in. We already in.

Annie: That's it.

Mike: We already knew this was going to happen, right?

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

Mike: It talks about the sin that so easily entangles, but then it talks about the weight that just hinders us. And that's the stuff that's not necessarily sin, but it's a hindrance for you. And so all of us, I mean, we have to just be honest with ourselves, allow other people to be honest with us and just embrace the reality that there are some things that can weigh us down, that can actually make it harder for us to live the life God wants us to live.

And it might not be that for somebody else. It might be too much Netflix for them and that might not be the issue for us. It might be too much work for us, but

somebody else might be in their grind season and it might be okay for them. So yeah, there are things and it's an invitation for us to slow down and evaluate our own lives.

Annie: Yes. That is so good. I have recently had my eyes open to that particular scripture where Pastor John Tyson was talking about like what are the things that are in your life that aren't sin that are just unwise? Like what's in your life that's just unwise, that's just not great for you? Like I don't think any food is bad food, but Taco Bell isn't my best choice every single night, right?

Mike: It's not a good look in general.

Annie: That's right. So it's not a sin to go to Taco Bell by any stretch, but it can become a thing that hinders and makes me ask a lot more questions I need to ask about why I'm choosing what I'm choosing. That was so helpful to me to be taught by you and Pastor Tyson that there is this other category that is not sin. You don't necessarily need to repent, you just need to be smarter.

Mike: And listen.

Annie: Just get yourself out of a mess because that stuff will lead to sin eventually.

Mike: It will. One of the things that makes it so hard to even figure out what those things are is because a lot of times, again, there are things that are just normal and can be healthy for other people. And so we're just going with the flow doing everybody else's doing, but not taking the time to actually check in with ourselves, How is this actually affecting me? Is this making me more anxious? Is this making me more prone to melancholy and sadness? Is this making me more lustful and materialistic or whatever? So we just have to be honest with ourselves.

Annie: Before we jump into winter, how would you have us like... I mean, this is our whole year on the podcast. How would you have us kind of spiritually prepare and spiritually think going into a year where we're going to deep dive these seasons?

Mike: Man, I think the word that comes to my mind, this is a word I'm trying to lean into, is just "space". You got to create some space to be able to let some things rise to the surface. It's almost if you got like a glass of water and it has a bunch of, I don't know, it's just stuff in it, sand, whatever it is, right? If it's constantly moving, right, it's not clear. And it's when it's still and it settles and now there's a clarity that emerges. And that's what space does for us.

So I would encourage everybody as you think about this coming year and think about just growing and just discernment, you got to just create some space to be

able to let some things rise to the surface, to discern what God is saying. And that doesn't have to just be space alone. That could be space with some people that you trust and that know you well. But man, we can't just have zero margin and expect to really be able to lock in.

You know, I've changed this one rhythm of my life, Mike, where my Saturday morning Sabbath, I usually Sabbath on Saturdays when I'm not traveling. And I will start, I'll walk to the nearest coffee shop, whether I'm in New York or Nashville, I have a coffee shop I walk to and I sit and watch the John Eldredge podcast. And I don't listen to it while I'm doing something else. I don't have it going while I'm folding my laundry and I don't do it at 1.5 speed. I make myself sit and be pastored for 45 minutes once a week.

Mike: That sounds like torture.

Annie: Right. It is. It's so hard to sit there and not put it at 1.5. But it is the practice of making space that I've needed to do to go like, Hey, Annie, just let it be slow. Just let this one thing in your life be slow and see how it changes you. And it deeply changes me.

Mike: It really does, man. And I'll just encourage you. Listen, I'm trying to learn this myself. I can be so afraid of that type of pace.

Annie: I know, man.

Mike: Because a lot of times I'm afraid of what's there. Down at that gear, what's there? Who am I at that point? I don't have the props emotionally with all the busyness and activity. But I just have found that I am missing out and I'm missing so many things in my life by not creating that space. And so, yeah, I just think as we launch into all this, we got to just take the plunge, man, and just create some space to be able to slow down, hear what's happening inside ourselves, hear what the Lord is trying to say to us, because He's trying to get our attention and wants to show us some things and wants to give us some things, you know, if we'll make the space to receive it.

Annie: That's good.

[00:21:29] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friend, just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [DailyLook](#). Okay, if you're updating your wardrobe this year, you have got to try DailyLook. They are the number one highest-rated premium personal styling service for women. With DailyLook, you get your own dedicated

personal stylist to curate a box of clothes based on your body shape, your preferences, your lifestyle. Listen, this is not an algorithm. These are real personal stylists. You get the same stylist every time. Shout out to my girl Esmeralda. And you get to try on up to 12 premium pieces per box in comfort of your home, saving you time and stress.

So whether you need something effortlessly chic for a party or just a cozy outfit for your everyday routine, DailyLook has got you covered. It's time to get your own personal stylist with DailyLook. Head to DailyLook.com and take your style quiz. And then my friends get to use the code THATSOUNDSFUN and you'll get 50% off your first order. Again, that's DailyLook.com for 50% off. Make sure you use our promo code THATSOUNDSFUN so they know we sent you. One last time, that's DailyLook.com and the promo code is THATSOUNDSFUN.

And I have another incredible partner I get to tell you about Thrive Causemetics. Okay, there's a Thrive Causemetics product I think you will love, and it's one of those that can work for any look you are going for, natural, a little elevated, full glam. It's their brilliant eye brightener. So it's this eyeshadow highlighter stick made to brighten and open your eyes, basically giving you an instant eye lift.

You apply it to the inner corner of your eyes to look rested and effortless. And you can use it as an eyeshadow for the perfect daytime glow or use the metallic shades for an easy smokey eye. It's a foolproof formula that makes it extremely easy to apply and blend. And it comes in 27 shades, you guys, 27. Go pick out the one that works best for you.

Plus for every product purchased, Thrive Causemetics donates products and funds to help communities thrive. Thrive Causemetics is luxury beauty that gives back. Right now my friends can get an exclusive 20% off your first order at ThriveCausemetics.com/TSF. That's ThriveCausemetics.com/TSF for 20% off your first order.

Sponsor: I am so hoping some of you got a [Helix mattress](https://Helixmattress.com) for Christmas because I need you to experience the level of deep sleep that comes with their mattresses. I love mine. I love mine so much. Y'all have heard me say it. I sleep so hard on that thing. So I'm out here making sure everyone knows they need a Helix mattress. Also, their dream pillows are amazing too.

The mattress I had before this one was old and I really needed an upgrade. And I'm telling you, the first week I got my Helix mattress I overslept every day. And their sleep study stats show us I'm not the one sleeping better. Helix measured the sleep performance of participants after switching from their old mattress to a Helix mattress like me, and they found 82% saw an increase in their deep sleep cycle.

Yes. And participants on average achieved 39 more minutes of overall sleep per night or in the morning, as was my case.

Get up to 25% off and two free pillows with a mattress purchase. My friends can go to HelixSleep.com/ThatSoundsFun, that's HelixSleep.com/ThatSoundsFun, and you'll get 25% off and two free pillows with a mattress purchase.

Okay, now back to our winter conversation with Pastor Mike.

[00:25:15] <music>

Annie: Okay, Pastor Mike, let's jump into winter.

Mike: Let's do it.

Annie: So the reason we're starting with winter is because we're in the Northern hemisphere. We're in North America. So to our Australian friends, we will get to summer very soon.

Mike: We'll get there, man.

Annie: We're gonna set you up. We're setting you up. I would love for you to start... This is going to be our first question about the seasons in every episode, but what is winter? Like, what is the winter?

Mike: I mean, winter is kind of a weird, beautiful season. But winter is this season where things go dormant. Like here in the DMV area, you know, the leaves are gone. You know what I mean? Things seem kind of shriveled up. The cold is kind of settling in. So winter really in nature is... it's a barren time, but it's also actually a time of renewal because so many things are happening beneath the surface. Stuff that has been planted, seeds sown in the fall kind of seem dormant, right? But it's actually a season of preparation for all the things that are going to come to life in the spring. And so, yeah, man, a lot of us don't like winter but we kind of learned to embrace it.

Annie: Our mutual friend, Joe Saxton, said to me one time, there's no bad weather, just bad clothes. She was like, "There's no bad weather-

Mike: Wait. Where's she from? She's from a cold area.

Annie: That's right. Minnesota.

Mike: There we go. People from Minnesota talk like that. The rest of us are just like, Nah, dawg. That's not true.

Annie: That's right. I'm like, "No, it is too cold. What is it? Why don't we like it? I don't like it either. I just don't like being stuck inside and I don't like how dark it is in Nashville. I mean, right now the sun is setting at 4:15. It is awful.

Mike: And it's dark when you wake up.

Annie: Yes. I mean, when I used to teach school, I walked in the building in the dark and I walked out of the building in the dark.

Mike: Yeah, man. I mean, what you just said, I think we like to be outside. We like to go out. And I know some of the extroverts are like, "I don't. I love... just give me winter, a fire, and a chair. You know what I mean? That's how my wife actually is. She's like, "I'm good."

But for a lot of us, man, there just seems to be more ways to enjoy life and other seasons. It's like things are shut down. You can't do that. A walk in the park is like, I can do that for five minutes, you know? So a lot of us don't like it until we start to see some of the things that are beautiful about it.

Annie: A couple of months ago, we were celebrating one employee moving on to a different job. Super celebrating a launching, an absolute growth for that employee. And that afternoon, another employee tells me they're also launching. And we hang up the second call and my COO actually comes in the office and I am sobbing.

Mike: Yeah, man.

Annie: I mean, I'm teary telling you about it. And I said, What is happening? What is happening? There wasn't a reason. And it was this moment where I was like, we are in the winter. We are in the winter. Things are not growing. Things are leaving. Things are dying. This is very scary vocationally.

So will you talk a little bit... like I knew immediately. I jokingly said, I think the Lord has jumped the shark because like He could not be more clear that we're shifting into a winter season for a part of this, my vocation. How are some other ways we can identify if we're in winter?

Mike: Well, we joked about it because it's hard. Because some people love winter, right?

Annie: Right.

Mike: But here's how I would have you think about it. Just ask this question. How do you feel about your life right now?

Annie: Wow.

Mike: How do you feel about your life right now? If it's a struggle in some major area of your life, you're probably in a winter season in some way. Let me give you just some words that might help identify if you're in a winter season. Dormant. We already talked about that. Winter. Just in nature, right? A lot of seas are buried underground. It doesn't appear that there's a lot happening above the surface. And so winter seasons usually feel like waiting. You know what I mean? It can feel like loss, and it can feel like waiting. You're waiting for change to come in some area of your life.

Another word, difficult. It just feels like stuff takes more work. That's one of the reasons I don't like winter. I know in Nashville y'all be getting surprise snow. But here, we get snow, and it's just like, it takes more work to just get out the house.

Annie: Yeah, yeah.

Mike: You know what I'm saying? Parker Palmer, in that book I told you about, he says nature feels like our enemy in winter. You know what I mean? And like summertime, beach weather, nature feels like your friend. Let's go ocean, let's go sunshine.

Annie: Like, we can go outside at any point. I can go outside at any point.

Mike: Any point. And in winter, it's just everything seems more difficult. And so it might feel more difficult for you to wake up in the morning. It might feel more difficult for you to have the energy that you are known to have, you know? It just feels like everything is more difficult.

"Dark" is another word. You talked about that, right, it's darker, earlier. It just feels dark. It's hard to discern and to see. It just feels like there's just not a lot of light at the end of the tunnel. Those are some words that describe winter. Dormant, difficult, dark.

If those describe your life or describe an area of your life that is like on the surface, like you feel it, you actually experience some of those things, then you're probably in or coming into a winter season.

Annie: It was so interesting because all of this was kind of happening summertime. And I had some other areas of my life that were very wintry in the summer. And it's so

funny to be outside sweating, but to be like, but actually my life is in winter. Actually, everything is underground. Actually, if you look at the terrain, it looks like a desert.

Mike: Yeah, man, yeah.

Annie: I think that is so interesting when our... it's much more helpful when our actual lives match the season that's going on outside.

Mike: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Annie: But that was not my story.

Mike: Yeah, yeah, man. You know Jess and Jordan, right?

Annie: Yeah,

Mike: You had them on the show. I was just at an event. They were sharing their stories. So I told you about this We Go On tour. My good friend John O and some folks doing this tour. And the whole tour-

Annie: Say the name of the tour again. We Go On?

Mike: We Go On.

Annie: Okay, we'll link to it.

Mike: And it's just wegoontour.com. But the whole tour is this creative, fun, engaging, really journey through grief. They were just in DC, I told my brother, "You should come to this." He looked it up, he was like, "Dawg, you want me to go to a show about grief?" But it's such an engaging, fun show. So anyway, Jess and Jordan are a part of this show and they're sharing their story, being widowed in their 20s.

And Jordan is sharing his story of losing his wife to cancer. While he's talking, Jess is sitting there and I noticed, on stage, I noticed she's starting to cry. And John, who's kind of hosting, he stops and says, "Jess, I see you crying as Jordan is sharing his story." A lot of people look at y'all and it's like, well, y'all had the ribbon on the end of the story. Y'all, they were both widowed in their 20s, they meet each other, they fall in love. It's this incredible story. They got this-

Annie: Cute kids.

Mike: And one of the things that she said on that panel is she's like, Yeah, but a lot of people think joy chases grief away. And she was like, but grief and joy coexist. You know? And it's like, like you said, you can be in two seasons at once. She's like, yeah, "I love Jordan. It is this amazing story. We found each other. We're in love. We've been married now all these years. And yet," she said, there's not a week that goes by that she doesn't talk about her late husband, Jaron, he doesn't talk about his late wife, Danielle.

And she's sitting on stage crying as he's sharing the story. So I just thought to me, that was such a great snapshot of the reality that grief and joy coexist. A lot of things in our life can be going well and yet really in our hearts, it's a winter season, it's still just playing hard, you know?

Annie: Were you friends with Jordan and Jessica when they were married to their first spouses too?

Mike: I didn't know Jordan, but me and Jess and Ashley, we've been like such close friends since college. So I knew Jaron, Ash sang at their wedding and sang at Jaron's funeral. So yeah, we've known them for a really long time and got to know Jordan once they started dating.

Annie: Their story is amazing. And I'll tell you the way people talk about Renaissance Church in Harlem, it's beautiful. The way people in New York talk about it, it's awesome.

Mike: It's my church away from my church.

Annie: That's it, yeah. That's beautiful, the work they do. When you're talking about that, Mike, I'm thinking about how when there is death, when there's depression, those feel automatic winter. Like it's like you're automatic launched into winter. When a death happens in your family, in your life, when depression creeps up as it can for all of us, it's suddenly you're launched into winter. Can we get ourselves out? Is this just a survive and thrive until you're done? Or can we do something to get out of winter?

Mike: Well, I think we can definitely do some things. I don't know if I would say get out of winter. And I'll say this too, there are some things that just throw us into winter, like a loss or whatever. I think one of the things that's challenging, they talk about this in the We Go On tour. It was helpful for me to hear this. They talk about the difference between kind of the typical kinds of grief that we talk about on more acute grief and ambiguous grief.

So there are these ways that we can have these winter season and we don't even know why.

Annie: Yes.

Mike: It's like, nobody died or... we don't even know why.

Annie: Right.

Mike: We just can't seem to pick ourselves up. I feel like those can be some of the hardest winter seasons when we're like, Everything seems up and to the right and everybody from the outside looking in, you don't see any evidences of it, but internally it's just hard.

But to answer your question, I wouldn't say we can get ourselves out. That's partly why I started where I did about control, because if we see it that way, like, oh, I can just do this, A plus B equals C equals I'm out of winter. I just make a left turn. I go up this hill and I'm out of winter. If we think it operates like that, man, it just sends us deeper, I think, into the darkness.

I think winter can be a season that honestly we can't fully control. What I think we can grow in even in those winter seasons is beginning to realize, Oh, it's not just cold, it's snow outside. It's not just dark, but there's peppermint mocha lattes. You know what I'm saying?

Annie: Yes, there's beauty in it.

Mike: It's beauty in it. It's beginning to see, okay, there's more to the story than what I immediately see and I immediately feel. There really is some beauty and some joy embedded into this season that God has for me. I think it's the journey of learning how to do that.

Ashley's dad was a psychologist and she was going through the darkest time in her life and certainly in our relationship. We had Jackson, our third child. It was her second time going through postpartum depression, but it was five months into having a baby. She didn't know it was postpartum.

And Annie, I'm talking like the scariest moments in my life. Scariest moments in my life. It was such a low, dark place. It was scary. And I remember I didn't know what to do. In my mind, I'm thinking, Let me do this, this, this, and this to pull her out of this.

And I remember her dad just coming over one day and he just took her to Starbucks. She needed some sunshine. She needed to get out of the house. She needed to remember that life was more than what she was feeling cooped up in the house.

And so there are some things we can do. And I think some of that is doing the things that we know bring us joy. And then some of that I think is really leaning in. And I know your listeners are at different places in their spiritual lives, but I say, Man, if you have a relationship with God, this is the time to lean in and to realize that He's a very present help in time of trouble and that He has the ability, I love this, He has the ability to put more joy in your heart in a season like this than other people have in times of harvest, you know? And so we lean in and we wait on Him.

Annie: I'm thinking a lot about that verse that says, without faith it's impossible to please God. That verse in the very best way kind of haunts me because you just think like, Oh, it's actually impossible to please God if I don't believe. And faith is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you don't see. So if we put together what scripture teaches us, it is impossible to please God unless you believe that He can do something you can't see.

So when I'm thinking about winter too, Mike, I'm thinking about this is the season where we get to practice the most faith. We see the least in this season. In spring, summer, and fall, we can see what God's doing and there's something for us to do with it. But in the winter, we just have to sit in our homes and go, Underground He's doing something.

Mike: Yep, yep. Yeah, absolutely. You mentioned Joe in Minnesota. And people talk about this when you go to these crazy cold areas, they'll say the winters will drive you crazy until you learn to get out into them. Right?

Annie: Yeah, wow, yep.

Mike: And I think the same thing is true with those winters of our souls and the seasons of life that we find ourselves in. Part of the faith, I think, is... because a lot of times I think we hear that and we think, well, faith just means, all right, I have faith that God can do this and God will get me out of it. And there is faith in that.

From what I found in my own life, the faith that's harder to express is the faith to lean into and be honest about what I'm actually feeling. And everybody's different. My whole thing is, I just wanna ignore. And honestly, 9 times out of 10, I'm not even aware of it, right? And if I am aware of it, I'm like, I don't even wanna open that up because I don't even know who that person is inside there. So let me just keep going.

And so I think getting out into it and just leaning into it and being honest and just saying, this is where I am and inviting God. Instead of being like, I gotta try to get out there to you, inviting God into those dark places in our lives and then letting Him be with us and sit with us and then teach us how to begin to thrive and move in all the things that He has for us.

So it doesn't come from just trying to suppress it or ignore it or talk yourself out of it. I think it comes from embracing it, being honest about where you are. And it doesn't mean you just stay there and you wallow in it. But it has to start with you being honest with yourself, with God, with other people about where you are because that lets the light in. You know what I mean?

Annie: Right. So on a Friday morning, what does that look like? Does that change our quiet time? Are we making an appointment with a counselor? Are we calling somebody? Like, what does it actually look like to embrace winter in our spiritual lives or in our... yeah, in our spiritual lives?

Mike: Practically I do think sometimes you gotta change your quiet times. I think one of the things I find... Ashley talks about this. In fact, she's teaching on this tomorrow night because she's sharing her story. And one thing she says is in that season, she just kept trying to do the same routine, which can be helpful, but she would feel this guilt because she wasn't getting out of it the same thing she was getting out of it in a previous season.

So sometimes you gotta shift. Sometimes that time of God just looks like journaling. And it's what we see in the Psalms when they talk about pour your heart out to God. That's not just poetic language. That's like, "God, let me tell you." You know what I'm saying? And just pouring your heart out to God.

So sometimes it's just journaling. I find that helpful just writing out "this is how I feel". And part of that is meeting with somebody. And I think thankfully we talk about that more freely now, but meeting with a therapist, meeting with a counselor, meeting with a pastor, and just saying, "I need some help." I think that's what it could look like on a Friday, finally picking up the phone or sending that email to schedule that appointment and stop trying to ignore it and just tell yourself, it'll just go away. You might need some real help.

Sometimes it's calling a friend. And what I find is sometimes we will call the friend, but we let that friend see enough where we don't have to be embarrassed. You know what I mean? Like I'm cool with letting you know I'm in a tough season. I'm not cool with letting you know how toxic my thoughts are right now. Like if you really knew the things I'm thinking about late at night when I'm by myself,

there would be so much change. So I think that's a part of it too, is who is there in your life that you can just say, hey, I'm gonna take a risk here.

Ashley had to do that with me to be like, hey, I need to share with you some of the thoughts that I'm having that are scaring me. And I haven't wanted to share them with you because I don't want to scare you or low key what she was really saying without saying was, I just don't want you to judge me for those thoughts. And so some of it is just that type of radical honesty too.

Annie: It's both things, right? It's not putting your head down and going, I can make it to spring. I can make it spring. I don't have to feel any of this. Spring will come. Because here's what we know. The earth models what happens in the spiritual. Spring is going to come. If you love winter, it is going to end. If you hate winter, it's going to end. Spring is going to come. Whatever season you're in, you don't live there. And so if we put our head down and don't feel anything, we don't grow and we don't change.

Mike: Absolutely.

Annie: But we also can't go get help. I can't say to my therapist, get me out of winter. I can say, what can I do to get to the other side of winter in a way that helps me grow and change and really get the most out of the season? How do we do that, Mike? How do we get the most out of the winter that we're in?

Mike: Well, I keep coming back to honesty. And I think the reason why I keep coming back to it is because I just struggle. I always saw myself as a strong person. And I think I've realized over the last couple of years, it's not that I'm strong, it's that I'm dishonest. Like I just-

Annie: Somebody wrote that down. Somebody just wrote that down in their guidebook.

Mike: I'm not honest with myself. And so I've learned, I don't even know how to be honest with God or other people because all I do is suppress or ignore or try to distract myself from what I'm feeling. That's not strength. That's just living in an illusion that everything is okay. I do think it really starts there. I've been on that journey myself.

But I think it's, like I said, bringing community into that, being honest about those things. And I think it is what you said. It is trusting and believing. And this is so hard I know for somebody to believe. Spring is coming. It really, really, really is coming. And I wish we could manipulate and control what the timing of that is. We can't. But we do know that it is coming. And to just believe that.

But to, yeah, take some steps to do the things that bring us joy, to not neglect those things and just shrink back in isolation and to lean in. But I do think in terms of getting out the good stuff, I think that's where a therapist can help, I think a pastor can help, I think good community can help.

But I would encourage people to literally say... this seems so basic, but Annie, every therapist you go to, they're gonna say the same thing. And I'm not a therapist. But sit down and make a list. Force yourself. Just say, I'm gonna set a timer of five minutes or it might be a timer for 10 minutes. And you know what? I would say this. I would say do two things.

One, set a timer for pouring out and just venting the negative things. Just let yourself feel all of it. But I would also set a timer to force yourself to say, let me list not just all the good things generically. Let me list all of the good things that are a direct result of the season I'm in.

Annie: Wow.

Mike: And that's different.

Annie: That's different.

Mike: What are the good things that I would not-

Annie: It would have never happened.

Mike: It would have never happened. I would not have experienced, I would not be growing in these ways. I would not be aware of these things if it were not for this season. And that does not make the season easier. That does not negate how difficult the season is. But that's just helping you put it in perspective and to realize your pain is not the whole story. The struggle is not the whole story. There really is more to who you are and more going on in your life than just the things that are heavy and hard.

Annie: Yeah. It's such an invitation because when winter ends, it does not come back. You'll get another winter and something else. But this season... I mean, I think about this a lot in my singleness, not being married yet, Mike. And I think a lot, when this ends, I don't ever get this back like this. I may be single again at some point, but I don't ever get it back like this.

I mean, this happens every time, Mike. Every time I start dating somebody, when the butterflies start, I'm like, is my season about to end? And what am I gonna miss? I better double down on what I'm gonna miss before this guy locks it down

because I will not get back what I have with God. I will not get back my calendar. I will not get back... Like there are a lot of compromises a single person makes when they get in a relationship and that will change my season.

Mike: Listen, dawg, I tell people all the time... you know I love Ashley and I love marriage. I do. But it's like going on a road trip when you're in a caravan and you just... people are like, I gotta stop and go to the restroom. You wanna go to Wendy's, they wanna go to Chick-fil-A. It is definitely there are sacrifices that you make. And so there's good and there's hard in every season.

I will just say this, Annie F. Downs, I would personally like to be a part of discerning if you're coming out of that. I know there's some dudes listening that's like, Hey, listen, we need to be the committee.

Annie: I'll get her out.

Mike: We need to be the committee. We need to vet. We need to vet this one.

Annie: Mike, with pleasure, with pleasure. I would let you do that.

[00:49:34] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Our Place](#). Okay, let's talk about it. It's time to swap out the old toxic kitchenware and appliances for Our Place's non-toxic and really cute options.

Our Place is a mission-driven and female-founded brand that makes beautiful kitchen products that are both healthy and sustainable. Most cookware brands out there continue to use forever chemicals, also known as PFAS and Teflon, but Our Place's products are made without the chemicals because no one wants that mixed in with their scrambled eggs.

Their products have the most durable, toxin-free ceramic coatings, ensuring a healthy, safe cooking experience. And they come in so many fun colors. In addition to cookware, forever chemicals are also frequently used in appliances, especially air fryers, pressure cookers, crock pots, and even the rim of blenders. That's why Our Place came out with non-toxic appliances too that are changing the game.

Go to [fromourplace.com](#). And my friends get to use the code TSF at checkout and you'll get 10% off site-wide. I am eyeing that air fryer. That's [FromOurPlace.com](#) and the code is TSF. Like That Sounds Fun. Our Place offers a 100-day trial with free shipping and returns.

Sponsor: Nobody wants to stand in the aisle of the grocery store scanning labels and checking to see if the snack you have your eye on actually has clean ingredients. But [Thrive Market](#) makes it simple to find the best options. They take the guesswork out because all their products are 100% non-GMO and free from over a thousand harmful ingredients.

One of my favorite features is the Healthy Swaps scanner in the Thrive Market app. It is so helpful. You just scan a product you love, like your favorite chips or crackers, and the app shows you cleaner, healthier alternatives. We've made some great swaps. Instead of sugar-packed snacks, I'm sticking up on brands like Simple Mills Crackers, Chomps Beef Sticks, and Lesser Evil Popcorn. The best part, everything gets delivered straight to my door so I don't have to stress about searching grocery aisles or reading tiny ingredient lists.

Ready for a junk-free start to 2025? Head to ThriveMarket.com/ThatSoundsFun. And my friends, get 30% off your first order plus a free \$60 gift. That's ThriveMarket.com/ThatSoundsFun.

Sponsor: Listen, I know y'all love learning about tools that help us spend more time with God, and I want you to know about the [Glorify app](#). If you haven't downloaded it yet, I think you're really gonna love it. It's set up like this. You start your morning by reading the Bible passage of the day, then dive into Glorify's daily devotional, today was on Genesis 28, about our dude Jacob and being awake to God's presence. So good. After the devo, then you can wrap up with an immersive experience called Daily Walk with God. It's like a guided meditation and prayer. It's really helpful, really cool.

Plus, Glorify also has sleep meditations you can use at night to help you wind down and put your mind and heart at ease. There really are so many options to choose from. So right now, Glorify is offering my friends a free 14-day free trial when you visit Glorify-app.com/ThatSoundsFun.

Go right now to download the Glorify app. Again, that's Glorify-app.com/ThatSoundsFun and you'll get to download the Glorify app for free. Glorify-app.com/ThatSoundsFun.

And now back to finish up our winter conversation with Pastor Mike.

[00:53:16] <music>

Annie: I want to read down the questions that we're gonna answer in winter. So each episode coming up for the next three months is gonna answer a winter question

every Monday episode. So I just wanna put these out for people as you and I are wrapping up. So there's a lot we didn't get to, but here's what we're gonna be answering.

How do I define winter in my life?
What do I do when winter is breaking my heart?
What are the blessings of winter?
How do I find cozy moments in this winter?
Where is God in the winter?
What are the seasons inside a season of winter?
Did someone else cause this winter in my life? That's gonna be an interesting episode.
Is it always winter here?
Where can I grieve?
Where is the hope of winter?
How do I pray in the winter?
Why does the winter feel so long?
Is it springtime yet?
And how do I handle the changing of seasons?

So that is our entire winter for the next couple of months on the podcast on Mondays. That's what we're gonna be answering. So we're gonna deep dive each of those questions with the guest that is the right guest to talk about that question.

But I'd love for you to end here, Mike. Will you kind of give us like... give us some encouragement to not give up on winter or how winter can actually be for us.

Mike: Yeah, yeah. Well, I'll say this, number one, we've already said it. Winter is not the rest of your life.

Annie: Yes.

Mike: It's not the rest of your life. And the reason I say that is because whether you believe it or not, you're exploring this or not, here's what I believe in. And I gotta say this as a pastor. There is a God and that God is good. And that means so much more than I have time to unpack.

But one of the things I just wanna emphasize is it's not that he's just good in general. He is, because He is the definition of goodness. But when I say He's good, what I mean is he has his eye on you. That He made you, that He loves you. He knows you in ways that you don't even know yourself.

And so if you desire something on the other side of winter, the God who made you and is sustaining you and has plans for your life, desires that even more. So sometimes it just doesn't come and it doesn't look the way we thought it would come, the way we thought it would look. But winter is not forever.

In fact, I'll just leave you with this. James 1, verse two says this, consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. And here's why. Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And I love this. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

One of the things I love about winter is there is always something happening that we can't see. There's stuff happening underneath the surface that we can't see. There are things that are growing that we can't see yet. And the same thing is happening in your life. So I just encourage you to hang in there and not just hang in there, but lean in and press in to receive everything God wants for you in this season.

Annie: Mike, that is really helpful. The guidance today is so helpful for us because so many of us are living in winter in the world, and then, of the areas of our lives, there's got to be winter somewhere. I mean, it just is the nature of it. So thank you for doing that.

You and I are gonna jump over and do a quick little conversation for our Single Purpose League community about winter. But as we finish up here, would you just pray for us as we go through the winter? We'll see you back here at the start of spring. But will you just pray for us as we go really deep dive into the winters of our life?

Mike: Yeah, absolutely. I love it. Father, we thank you so much for your presence with us in every season. James 1, you are the giver of every good and perfect gift. Lord, there is no shadow of turning or variation with you. God, your goodness is always the same. You are the same in every season. And so Lord, I pray for every person listening, watching, God, that you would continue to reveal yourself to them in ways, Father, that convince their hearts that you are good.

I pray you would give them comfort and encouragement. I pray, Father, that you would give them strength. And Lord, I pray, God, more than anything, Father, that you would grow them during this season. That roots would go deeper so, God, that the harvest that they'll experience would actually be stronger and more vibrant and more beautiful and more enjoyable.

And so, Lord, I pray that you would help them to surrender to what you're doing in this season or the particular area of their life. And God, I pray that they would see your goodness in it. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Annie: Amen. Thank you.

[00:58:46] <music>

Outro: You guys, isn't he the best? Are you excited about this? My mind was blown like four times. It's like, [wowie zowie]. Wowie zowie for real. Hey, make sure you're following Pastor Mike Kelsey on social media. Tell him thanks for being a part of That Sounds Fun: The Seasons this year.

If you haven't already listened to it, I would really suggest you go back and listen to Episode 851 with Pastor Banning Liebscher, where we talked about seasons at the start of last year. It will also help you set a base for what we are doing this year.

Now, are you following That Sounds Fun podcast on Instagram? You really, really want to because we're gonna continue winter conversations every week over there. It'll give you a place to be in community around the podcast conversations that are going on. So make sure you're following That Sounds Fun podcast.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find, even in the winter. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, on TikTok, as long as it exists. Anywhere you need me, that's where you can find me.

I think that's it for me today, friends. Man, am I excited about this year. I'm so honored that you are along for the ride with us.

Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is going on a walk at Radnor. I love Radnor on the winter.

Y'all have a great weekend. We'll see you back here on Monday with my friend Lindsay Sherbondy. You may know her as Lindsay Letters. Her family has an incredible story about an extended winter they have been experiencing. So we're gonna hear straight from her. We're gonna talk about what do we do when winter is breaking your heart. We'll see y'all Monday.