

Annie: Being inside a little more in the winter does inspire me to actually cook what I already have on hand in my kitchen, hand to God, and bless the Lord for [Thrive Market](#). Because of them, I get to have all my favorite snacks and essentials delivered. You got to keep that banza pasta and Rao's tomato sauce on hand, you guys, so you're always prepared for some warm pasta too.

But all of Thrive Market's products are 100% non-GMO and free from over a thousand harmful ingredients. Head to thrivemarket.com/thatsoundsfun. My friends get 30% off their first order plus a free \$60 gift. That's thrivemarket.com/thatsoundsfun.

[00:00:37] <music>

Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun: The Seasons. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today. It is a very special day on That Sounds Fun. It's also a special day over on the MiniBFF podcast. There is our final episode of this little series we've been doing. Today's episode is about heaven. I think you're going to love it. You can find it linked in the show notes and you can also subscribe to the MiniBFF podcast wherever you're listening to this one.

Intro: Today on the show, I get to introduce you to one of my sisters, Tatum Green, and we're also joined by David Thomas, who you know and love from Daystar Counseling and the Raising Boys and Girls Podcast.

Together today, we get to share with you some deeper parts of the story of my nephew TJ and why we wanted to put this brand-new book, *Where Did TJ Go?*, into your hands starting tomorrow. We keep saying this is the book that we wish no one needed, but so many families do.

And that was our reality as a family in the summer of 2022 when we realized we couldn't find the right book to read to my other nephew Sam about losing his baby brother. We absolutely have the hope of heaven. It's why you need to listen to today's MiniBFF podcast too.

But grief and loss can make it feel like it is always winter and that it is never going to end. So if you're taking notes in your TSF Seasons Guidebook, we are on page 19 and we've given you space today to process as you listen. And parents, while *Where Did TJ Go?* is specifically a book written for my MiniBFFs, today's conversation I would suggest you listen to first before you listen with your littles.

Today is a great day to order your copy of *Where Did TJ Go?* If your family has experienced any kind of loss, I think it will be a book that you can have conversations around that you can walk through together. If you haven't, today might be a good day to order a copy of *Where Did TJ Go?* to put it on your shelf, to put it away until someone you know and love may need it. We are really honored to serve any family that this book would be able to help. And it releases tomorrow.

We know that we can't speak to every single family who has experienced loss, but there are a lot of your friends who have. So if you get a chance today or tomorrow on your social media to share about *Where Did TJ Go?*, there might be a family out there that's looking for a book just like this, and I just am not friends with them yet, but you are. And so if you wouldn't mind telling your friends and family about *Where Did TJ Go?* to make sure every family who needs to read this and needs the help of heaven realizes that this book is out now. So that would mean a lot to us.

I hope you enjoy this conversation as you get to meet my sister Tatum and hear from our dear friend, David Thomas.

[00:03:47] <music>

Annie: Well, David Thomas, we're going on the podcast and we're already crying. What do we do?

David: I'm so honored to be with the two of you today.

Tatum: And you're getting the fresh version, you know, like round one.

Annie: Yeah, Tatum, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Tatum: Thank you.

Annie: Dear everyone, here's my sister. Sounds just like me.

Tatum: Sounds just like you.

Annie: Yeah. It's one of the funny things is that I'm like, I wonder if people are gonna have a hard time because they're used to my voice, but here is another human on the planet that sounds just like me.

Tatum: Version B.

Annie: That's exactly right. Okay, David Thomas, thank you for making time again. This is your fourth episode of That Sounds Fun. What an honor.

David: Can't believe that.

Annie: I know.

David: Do I get a robe like SNL at some point?

Annie: Well, here's what happens. Look behind you. The Hall of Fun is right there. And that's when you hit number five. So your next one-

Tatum: You're so close.

David: I've got to be on my best behavior today so I get invited back.

Annie: ...you'll join Santa, you'll join Dave Barnes, you'll join Jamie Crockett, John Mark Comer, Eddie Kaufholz. There's a crowd.

David: Oh my goodness.

Annie: I know. It's a fun little group. We are here today because Tame and I have written a new book. Technically all three of us have written this book because you also are a very vital part of this work. So thank you for that, David.

David: Absolutely. I was honored that I would even get to participate in this work.

Annie: That was such a gift.

Tatum: Huge help.

Annie: I think most of my audience knows, but we'll say it again, Tatum, you and your husband Jacob had a baby two years ago, TJ, who lived 56 days. Will you tell a little bit like... kind of back up, tell whatever amount of your story you want to tell, your lost story, just to kind of give people an overview of the last few years.

Tatum: So I think our story is one that unfortunately a lot of people can relate to. We met and got married in 2015. And six months into marriage, we had our first miscarriage. We went on to have three more miscarriages, one of which was later... it was in the second trimester and we got to meet our little girl and say goodbye, which was of course, gut-wrenching. So that's our daughter. Her name is Hope. She was born in 2017.

So after our four miscarriages in the span of less than three years, we had the opportunity to do IVF and sadly, that also failed. So we lost three little baby

embryos in that process too. So by the end of 2019, we'd been married four years and we had seven babies with Jesus.

Then we miraculously, spontaneously got pregnant with Sam, which I was terrified, frankly, the whole time. Actually, there was a point we got genetic testing done, the blood work, and that came back good. A couple weeks later, my OB said, "Everything's good. You're not even high risk. You're good to go." And after that, it was like a huge weight off.

Annie: Were they like, The genetics say this child is miraculous and the best thing that's ever happened to the planet?

Tatum: Yes, exactly. Yeah, totally. But it was wild because all the other losses and even the IVF failure were all flukes. There wasn't an actual cause that could be fixed. It was super challenging to process and a lot of grief. And then Sam, miracle boy, just the greatest joy. I mean, a gift to us, a gift to our whole family. That kid, we really mostly just need to pray that we don't put too much on him because he is like the best.

As soon as he was born, I told Jacob, I was like, "Listen, I want to do everything in my power to give him a sibling. I know that that would take a lot because of what we've been through." Time doesn't help in these situations. I was 38 when Sam was born. Medical people already call that geriatric pregnancies or advanced maternal age.

But miraculously, Sam was 15 months old and we found out we were pregnant. So because of our history, the thing I just kept praying is, "Lord, let us keep this one." And when we were just 12 weeks, we did the genetic testing and found out that TJ was really sick. He had a life-limiting diagnosis and one that there's nothing doctors can do in a wide range of what could happen. Most of the babies with his diagnosis don't even make it to birth. Those that do, most of them pass away within the first few months.

Annie: And even ours. We were kind of prepared with TJ that it was going to be... he wasn't going to leave the hospital.

Tatum: It was really complicated. The anticipatory grief of what we knew was eventually going to happen, but having no clue what the in-between would look like.

Annie: And the praying for a miracle the whole time.

Tatum: And also the tension of holding that, like believing that God could have done anything at any moment. We had the best care in NICU, the best care at Kennestone

Hospital. The NICU team was incredible. And if he hadn't had NICU care, he... I mean, it was what, like 24 hours after he was born that they came in our room and they were like, "Y'all need to eat some breakfast and come. We've had some events overnight. We don't know how much longer TJ has. Call your family, blah, blah, blah." And that was like only 24 hours.

And so if he hadn't had care, he would not have lived more than a few hours. He couldn't breathe. His heart was too weak. There was so many things. But it was so kind of the Lord. He lived for three weeks in NICU and then five weeks in our home on hospice care where we just got to have family around him all the time and Sam got to have a lot of time with him.

It was such a sweet gift that we just wouldn't have gotten if he had stayed in NICU the whole time, which he would have gotten great care there. It would have been great, but it just was a different feel. So that's the story of our kiddos. We look forward to the day when we have a big old party up in heaven.

Annie: I would FaceTime a lot of nights with TJ because I was up here part-time, there part-time. And the weekend where he was kind of getting sicker, we had a nurse friend, our friend Meredith, a lot of people listening know that Meredith Turing, I think you know Meredith too. Meredith had very kindly flown down a couple of times, did overnights. Because once TJ was at Tatum's house, you had to have 24-hour care.

Tatum: Which was me and Jacob.

Annie: Yeah. For a while.

Tatum: For a while. Annie worked so hard to make sure that it wasn't only me and Jacob. She made so many calls and worked so hard to make sure we had extra care coming in to help us.

Annie: Once I realized it was just them, I was like, "The what?" I was like, "I'll be down there in a minute." I got in the car and got some phone numbers and we got some nurses in there, but then also Meredith. But when she called me, this is my favorite story of TJ getting to be home for a while, when she called me and said, "Hey, you need to come down this weekend. I think this is probably the last few days of his life." When we were FaceTiming, I was like, "TJ, our whole family is coming Saturday. We're going to have a barbecue. We're going to have steak. It's going to be awesome. You got to stick around. All these cousins are coming." And sure enough, he did. He just did exactly what I told him to do.

Tatum: Listen, that boy had more fight in his little tiny four-pound self than... I mean, even our friends who are cardiac ICU nurses, they still talk about like, it was the amount of health issues he had stacked against him and his tenacity. I mean, that's why we named him Timothy Jacob. My husband's name is Jacob. But we also named him after the Jacob in the Bible who was so tenacious, like wrestled with the Lord. That was why we named him that. We wanted him to fight in such a way that like Timothy, even though he was young, he led others and glorified the Lord. And we wanted his tenacity to reflect that. So yeah, that boy, he held on so long.

Annie: Yeah. He was a fighter.

David: And he lived into his name.

Tatum: He sure did, man. It's really cool to see that. He's so did.

David: It's beautiful.

Annie: David, there are so many families listening who have been through miscarriages, who have been through a loss of a baby in a bunch of different ways. One of the things we experienced that is not unique, but it was unique to us was parenting other kids. I mean, we had Sam, we had our nephew, Green. I mean, there are a lot of other kids in the story, too.

And before TJ died, it was kind of this like, how do we do this in the middle? For Tatum's whole pregnancy, when people were saying how excited they were for her and when's the baby coming and all that, I mean, that is a weird other thing when you know the baby's sick, but the person at CVS doesn't know the baby's sick. What are some like...

Tatum: Or your nurses at your OB office don't know the baby's sick. It was really traumatic every time because they didn't. So like, Congratulations. I'm like-

Annie: Read the chart.

Tatum: Yeah, exactly. Finally, at the end, I was like, "Can you just put a note on my chart? Can you put a flag right there? Because this is getting very old. I have to explain to the nurse that my baby is sick and dying every time I come in here."

Annie: So what are some best practices at that point, David? What happens before the baby, maybe before the miscarriage, maybe before the diagnosis comes to fruition, before the sibling dies? What are some... What do we do in that window?

David: Well, I would first say, if you were talking about all the kids who were a part of this story, including your amazing son. What a gift to have had that many intentional adults surrounding him. The research has long told us that if kids have at least one safe adult, just one. So if they have more than one, that's just extra and icing on the cake. But just one safe adult, they can navigate any transition, any tragedy, any loss. And so the fact that these kids were so surrounded, what an incredible gift!

And we talk a lot about following kids' lead when it comes to navigating loss, when it comes to making sense of hard things. We believe that kids have this internal barometer where they ask the questions that they are ready to have answered. And that's key. Because sometimes they won't ask the question because I think they have this knowing, like, I can't really work with that answer right now.

Annie: I mean, me too.

David: I'm not going to ask it. Absolutely. And so it makes sense. It's fascinating how much evidence I've seen of that in my work. Even kids who would say later down the road, like, "I knew, but I just wasn't ready to talk about it yet." And so if we follow their lead, then I think they'll lead us to the things they're ready to hear and receive.

Annie: Even in the middle of things. Yeah.

David: I agree.

Annie: Wow.

David: And, you know, that remembering for us as grownups that they're always taking cues from us. So that means a lot of things for us as grownups. It means, am I doing my work so that I can...? We talk about grieving with emotion with kids, but not on them. So I'm working through my stuff so that I can be sad with them. But I've got another context where I'm working through that sadness. So they're not responsible for carrying all that.

Annie: Yeah, that's so good.

David: And that's key. So I can look at them in the eyes and say, "I feel really scared right now. I feel really sad right now," but they aren't getting the freshest version of that. And there's another safe place where I'm working through some of the intensity of that so that I can be present with them and their emotion.

Annie: That's really helpful because there's probably an inclination... There's an inclination of me as an aunt and as an Annie to all these MiniBFFs, crazy Annie, as the Barnes

kids call me, to be able to talk about pain and sadness from a very fine spot. Yeah, that was really sad.

But even when TJ was dying, Zanna was asking me a lot of questions. The kids here knew, and they were asking me a lot of questions. And I couldn't be this very healthy... Well, I am healthy. But I couldn't do this very emotionless responses even to these kids who love my family and just were checking on how's TJ doing and how's Sam's doing.

So that's a great balance to like... I was giving Annie Barnes my deepest sadness. I was giving Zanna Barnes my balanced sadness, hopefully.

David: Great way to say it.

Annie: As best I could. As best I could.

David: Yes. And you're knowing within that that it's okay for me to be sad with them. Because I think to everything you said, Annie, we sometimes do hold ourselves responsible. Like I need to have worked all that through so that when I'm talking with them I can talk about it in another tense. No, you don't.

Like we're preparing them when we have those conversations for what all three of us know will be their losses throughout life. Like this is a part of life this side of heaven. So there's preparation in this, if we can do it in those ways.

Annie: Talk a little bit to the parents who've had miscarriages or loss before birth or at stillbirth that I think sometimes there's a "I should get over this quicker. I should be fine. It was only second trimester. It was only first trimester. It was only 12 weeks. That's not how it goes when it's a human.

David: No. And we are never benefiting ourselves or others when we compare grief or when we categorize grief or when we believe that it's linear or that it has a timeline.

Tatum: Man, could it though?

Annie: Right. Could we change it and make it linear? From left to right?

Tatum: Checklist. Understanding what's coming in the future.

David: Yes.

Tatum: Oh man.

David: Indeed. You know, one thing as we talk about this, that we can learn from kids that they do in a remarkable way that we tend to lose as adults is we talk about this equation of grief and play that kids instinctively move in and out of. Like they know how long I can talk about something and I can't talk about that anymore. And they'll often give very clear cues.

Like I've had plenty of kids in my office or parents report kids will put their hands over their ears, like, "Can we be done talking right now?"

Annie: Wow.

David: Or "I don't need to talk anymore." Or they'll get up mid-conversation. And you all, there's something healthy about that. We can swim too long in the deep end of the pool as adults. And kids instinctively know, like I've been underwater long enough and I need to come up for air. And they'll move into play as a way really of caring for themselves and healing themselves and restoring themselves that we could really learn from.

So that equation of grief and play is a great thing to take from kids. And if we're following their lead, they're going to so often give us very obvious cues of, okay, this is when we need to finish out the conversation for right now and then we'll move back into it at some point.

Annie: In the midst of TJ's life, I had a trip to Scotland planned and I was like, "I am not going to go to Scotland to see my friends." And Tatum and Jacob were like, "Yes, you are. Go. You've already had this plan. He's here. He's fine. You know, you can go."

The visual I used, particularly in 2022 when there was multiple things at once, TJ being the most significant thing was I felt like a whale that had to come up and blow out my blowhole. Like I had to. I could not. I'm an integrative seven. I'm not built to be down there very long anyway. But I mean, I had to come up for air.

And I think I went to Disney with the Barnes too. I went to Disney for two days with the Barnes in the middle of TJ's life. Thank you for letting me do that, Tatum.

Tatum: Oh my gosh. The amount of support that you and the rest of our family and Jacob's family... like there is no thank you to us for anything. Man, we were so well cared for by you and by the rest of our family and Jacob's family. It was such a gift. So anytime you went, I was just glad for you to get a place to breathe.

[00:20:42] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Hiya Health](#). I just had some Hiya Health vitamins sent over to my nephew, Sammy, because we have lots of imaginary business we are working on. Listen, we have got an end we run, we've got a skating park we run in our minds and we've got a lot of work to do. I just need him to stay as healthy as possible so we can keep working hard, you know?

We are big fans of Hiya's chewable vitamins because they're seriously the best. No sugar, no gummy junk, just filled with essential vitamins that my MiniBFFs need.

And now Hiya Health offers a kid's daily greens plus superfoods drink too. It's a chocolate flavored greens powder designed specifically for kids that is 55 plus whole food ingredients in it. I mean, who doesn't want a chocolate-flavored drink that is actually good for you? Can we get one of those for adults? Gosh.

We've worked out a special deal for my friends with Hiya. You guys get 50% off your first order. So to claim this deal, you just go to [HiyaHealth.com/ThatSoundsFun](#). That's [HiyaHealth.com/ThatSoundsFun](#), and get your kids the full body nourishment they need to grow into healthy adults.

Sponsor: And another incredible partner I get to tell you about. This episode is sponsored by [BetterHelp](#). When we talk about identifying green, yellow, and red flags, when we're meeting new people, especially in like a dating scenario, it is a major green flag when somebody is already in counseling.

We're all trying to be more emotionally healthy, right? I have gained so much from counseling. Y'all hear me refer to things I've learned from my counselor all the time. And I think there's something that we can all learn from it, especially in seasons of long winters of grief, like we're talking about today.

One easy way to try counseling is BetterHelp. It is done fully online, so it makes therapy affordable and convenient. Plus, you get access to a diverse network of more than 30,000 credential therapists with a wide range of specialties. And you can easily switch therapists anytime at no additional cost.

Discover your relationship green flags with BetterHelp. Visit [Betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun](#) today. And you'll get 10% off your first month. That's [betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun](#).

Sponsor: You guys often ask about what devotionals or apps I use to kick off my time with God in the morning. And I want you to know about the [Glorify app](#). I think you're really going to love this one. Just this week, they've started the daily experience

with quotes from some of my favorites, like Bob Goff, you know, we love him around here and Andrew Murray, oh, y'all, I love his writing.

When you open the app each day, it'll guide you through. You start with a quote to read, and then it takes you to the scripture passage for the day, then a short devotional. You choose to listen to it or read it. So you just really get to choose your own adventure.

They also have extra resources each day that you can engage with. There's a song of the day, if you love to kick your day off with worship, there's a daily walk with God experience. It's like a guided prayer. It is really cool. And there's a guided meditation as well.

So visit [Glorify-app.com/thatsoundsfun](https://glorify-app.com/thatsoundsfun). And my friends can download the Glorify app for free. That's [Glorify-app.com/thatsoundsfun](https://glorify-app.com/thatsoundsfun) to download the glorify app for free. [Glorify-app.com/thatsoundsfun](https://glorify-app.com/thatsoundsfun).

Okay, now back to our conversation with Tatum and David.

[00:24:06] <music>

Tatum: Can I ask you a question on the same train of what we're going? There were some days where talking about your grief and stewarding your kids' grief and loving them well in that and letting them see you sad. What would you say to the, especially the moms who, you know, the grief looks a little different for moms and dads who are just really not okay?

And one of the big challenges on top of that is feeling guilty that you're not being a good mom in that moment and that you're not even like... like how can you attune to their grief when you're so deep in yours? So can you talk to the moms in that phase of it? That it's really taken all they've got just to show up and feed their kid that day. How do they parent in that? And how do they talk to themselves in that season? Knowing it is a season. Like I'm so grateful it is a season, but it's so hard to feel like.

Annie: Like the acute part of grief is what you're saying.

Tatum: Yeah, the intense acute grief stage. I was thinking about that when I was looking through our questions and just thinking about how it's... I would just love to hear what you say to those parents in that stage.

David: It's such an important question. I'm glad you asked it. I would first say that there will absolutely be times when you're not okay. And to know that and give yourself

permission to not be okay in different moments and to figure out what do I need to do for those moments and seasons for myself and as a parent, as a person and a parent.

But the reality in summary to that being that you are navigating what I call unimaginable loss. Because, you know, I know with great certainty I've lost one parent. I'm going to lose another at some point, but I don't ever anticipate losing my children. So none of us do.

And so to know you won't be okay first. I would say in those days, and it's reflective of even the way you all talked about circling around these kids and each other through this process of having a backup plan in place for those days when I can. And maybe it's just a code word and you text that to your spouse, your friends, some other trusted adult that they then know, okay, I'm coming on the court and you're coming off the court right now and you do whatever you need to do.

Annie: Even if it's an hour. I mean, because sometimes people can't give like... I'm thinking about my parents. There are times where they could maybe help for two or three hours, but they may have something or maybe it may not be able to cancel or... you know?

David: Yes. I had a family I worked with years ago that were navigating a similar chapter in their story. And she had a friend who'd come by at a real regular time every afternoon and get her older child and leave the house for a walk with a dog. And then it was real purposeful for that kid. And she would say, "I need to cry so loud sometime he would a) hear it and b) likely be alarmed by that. So they'd take a great walk every day at that time and it opened up all the space for her-

Annie: That's it. 45 minutes.

David: ...to do whatever she needed to do. Absolutely. And I think within that would be the other thing that I would say is we talk a lot about moving kids toward purpose in their grief and how healing that is. I think it's true for all of us. And so I think anytime we can talk with kids in those moments about the things we're doing, the purposeful things that we're doing that are helping us in some way. So it's not solving at all, but it's like, "Hey, I feel incredibly sad today. More sadness than I felt yesterday or last week. And here's what I'm going to do." That I think gives kids this sense of peace that the grownups around me have a plan in place.

It's fascinating to me how many times I've heard young kids report their parents' plans back to me that I can tell they need to say it out loud. Like, "My mom's going to meet with her counselor on Wednesday."

Annie: Don't you love that?

David: Absolutely.

Annie: Good parenting.

David: I know.

Annie: When the kids are like, "I'm in counseling and so are my parents."

David: There it is. They know with so much certainty these are the things that my parents are doing. Interestingly enough, when that's not happening, I've had kids ask me, would you tell my parent that? Will you tell my mom to go meet with her person? Will you tell my mom and dad they need to meet with their marriage person? You know, I've had kids say that. And it's their knowing, "Okay, something's off and I'm starting to feel responsible for that. And we got to get another person involved."

Tatum: That's so good. One of the things I was thinking as you were saying that is in my Enneagram One, we work in full-time ministry. That's our job, my husband and I. I think that it was tricky for me, and it still is sometimes, to find the balance of, am I doing this right? Am I grieving right? Am I grieving in a way that honors the Lord? Am I grieving in a way that helps Sam see a healthy grief? Am I doing it the right way?

I remember in the early days thinking... I would look at people who had created foundations or whatever, and I would just think, "I can't do that. I can't do that right now. Like, I don't have..." So even the thought, I remember thinking in the early days, I should be doing something to turn this pain into purpose. Obviously now we really, really have in such a way. Like, Annie's generosity, we have done that in such an amazing way. But I was constantly feeling guilty that I wasn't doing that enough at the beginning. But even what you said about just communicating what you are doing. I mean, Sam knows that I go to a counselor and we talk about how-

Annie: And Sam's four, for everybody listening.

Tatum: He's four. He's incredibly smart for a four-year-old.

Annie: Sure.

Tatum: Emotionally mature.

David: And ridiculously handsome. Do you ever start to think about him as an adult man?

Annie: Oh, yeah.

Tatum: Listen, anytime I see... he's also, you know, the Reddest redhead ever. Anytime I see a grown redhead head, I'm like, "Oh that's gonna be Sammy, but he's gonna be so much cuter."

Annie: Tatum says it's like parenting a celebrity to parent a redhead.

Tatum: A thousand percent. Every single time we're in public we get stopped. So I check in with him. I check in with him. I'm like, "How do you feel when people talk about your hair?" He's like, "I like it." I'm like, "Okay, great." We ever have a problem.

Anyway, it's helpful to hear you say that even just talking about what you are doing to survive is purpose, is giving Some purpose to it. So that's really helpful.

David: Yes, I think the other part of where that's helpful is we're also offering kids ideas around ways to navigate their own grief. So if I'm saying, "I went on a walk today with a friend and we talked and that was really helpful. I wrote in my journal today." I say to kids a lot like, "I read the Jesus storybook bible out loud to myself." And I'm a grown-up. That book's not just for kids. Because I need those reminders.

And so we're offering them ideas in the midst of offering this help of these are the things I'm doing so you're not responsible. And these are some ideas that might be helpful for you too.

Annie: How long in a family, after a loss of an infant, are you talking about it? Is it forever?

David: I think it's forever.

Annie: Okay.

David: And I think it's as often as feels helpful. And different family members are going to need to talk more and some will need to talk less. I will simply say to any of you listening who have boys, I can't tell you how often I have heard parents of boys say, "He gets annoyed when his sister wants to talk about it again or when she wants to look at pictures or tell stories." And I have always believed that's so helpful for those brothers even if they act annoyed or put out or "again?", whatever it might be because she's leading him into some grieving that he might not do on his own in the exact same way. That's incredibly helpful. So everybody gets to say.

Annie: Why did you and Jacob say yes to us doing *Where Did TJ Go?*

Tatum: Well, I think when we found out that TJ was sick, one of the things I asked my counselor is like, how can I prepare Sam for this? He was only like 18 months at the time, but he was already very chatty and understood a lot more than I was ready to start explaining about life. And so you asked around and-

Annie: I called David. I called you and Sissy and said, "Can we get a book?"

Tatum: I mean, you called other friends who have walked a similar road who are also authors and we just couldn't find... we couldn't find a book that had the gospel hope infused with the story. There were a few books. There's a couple books that exist that probably worked for some families. There's one that we had that really did serve us and that was helpful.

But the idea of having a book that you can read with your kid because, I mean, we know that having someone else's words is really helpful in these situations. Like when I'm deep in grief, it's really hard, like you were saying, talking to Zanna. It's really hard to come up with words to say to help explain when you're just drowning in it yourself. So to have somebody else's words to read.

But then also one of the things I love about having this book now is I think that even just for the parents to feel a little bit like there's something they can do to somehow help their kid. Because it does feel very... Like you have no control. It feels like there's not a lot you can do to help your kid. And so to have a tool.

So it was an easy yes for Jacob and I to want to share this story, I mean, it's also such an honor to get to share TJ with the world. Most families in our situation don't have this opportunity. And it is such a gift that we get to see how his life really had purpose in ways beyond what we have already seen. It's such a gift. There were so many reasons why we were really excited about doing this.

Annie: Then the name of the child is so important. I don't know that I knew that profoundly. But in 2024 and on Infant Loss Awareness Day, I just did an Instagram story and I said, "You know, we've experienced this in our family. If you have experienced this, then I would just put your kid's name in this. I would just like to see their name and I'll read every name."

Hundreds, David. Hundreds of people. I mean we could not keep up. I could not keep up the amount of people who have experienced infant loss that just wanted to say the name of their child or the name that they would have or "we never named her but this was our story.

I think you know this, Tatum, but one of the things we're doing with *Where Did TJ Go?* is we have in memory of bookplates that are just free. Like if all people have

to do is tell us the name and I'll sign it in memory of that. So that in every copy of "*Where Did TJ Go?*" they can put their kid's name, too. That was really important to me.

After that happened in October we were like, "Oh, oh, this is a thing we need to pay attention to. What's that about, David?"

David: It's about a lot of things. But I want to say this first. And this is probably the part where I'm gonna cry. You know, in 30 years of doing this work, I've read, reviewed, and recommended a lot of children's books to families and you're a hundred percent on target that there's nothing like this available. And you two will never know the gift you've given. You just will never know all the places this book is going to travel and the healing it's going to offer and the opportunity for conversation where folks are going to feel overwhelmed like, "I don't know how to talk about this" that you're going to make it so easy to talk about because you were willing.

Because I don't want to assume to know this but I suspect to the great question your sister asked you a minute ago about the why. But David Kessler has done a lot of great work. He's a grief expert and wrote a lot with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross who's kind of the most known voice, I think, in the space of loss. And she talks about the five stages. He added a sixth stage which is meaning.

Annie: Oh, wow.

David: He wrote a beautiful book called *Finding Meaning* and he talked about how important that is as a part of this journey for people and the outcomes that look different when we can find our way to that sixth stage. So it's a great work. To me, you are living evidence of that. And I think this offering is a picture of that in the most beautiful of ways. And so there aren't enough ways to say thank you, the two of you. I can't wait to talk with countless families about this beautiful offering.

Annie: Thank you.

Tatum: Thank you.

[00:37:49] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Our Place](#). I recently made some scrambled eggs because I can cook you guys even though I don't do it very often. But I'm telling you, the prime scrambled egg-making pan is from Our Place. These eggs slid right off the

pan when they were finished and the best part, I'm not getting any toxins in my food from their cookware.

Our Place's pots, pans, and appliances are non-toxic and they are also very cute. All of their products have the most durable toxin-free ceramic coatings ensuring a healthy safe cooking experience. And they come in a bunch of really fun colors too.

Find out why Our Place has 75,000 five-star reviews on their award-winning products and they've been mentioned in the New York times bon appétit, here on That Sounds Fun and more. Go to FromOurPlace.com and enter my code TSF at checkout and you're going to get 10 off site-wide. That's FromOurPlace.com and the code is TSF. Our Place offers 100-day trial with free shipping and returns.

Sponsor: Y'all know I'm trying to be a protein queen. And even though I didn't love beef bone broth in my hot chocolate, I do like to find snacks that pack some protein and aren't full of ingredients I can't pronounce. [Thrive Market](http://ThriveMarket.com) makes it simple to find the best options and they ship everything to me, which is just the best

They have chomp sticks and protein shakes. I like the OWYN brand. And they take the guesswork out because all their products are 100% non-GMO and free from over a thousand harmful ingredients. One really cool feature they have is their smart cart feature. When you create an account, they ask about your needs and then automatically that builds a cart full of cleaner versions of your favorite things. You can tweak it before checking out, but it's a great way to get started, especially if you're trying to phase out some of the junk food.

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: So y'all know I'm splitting my time between Nashville and New York City these days So I've got some of my essentials stocked in both places, and that 100% includes my Prose hair care. I love what it's done for the health of my hair so much that I made sure to get my latest order shipped to both New York and Nashville so I never run out.

If you haven't heard me rave about [Prose](http://Prose.com) before, they have been transforming traditional hair care and skincare since 2017 with a made-to-order model. They take the expertise of their team of in-house cosmetic chemists and pair it with an advanced AI algorithm that personalizes your formulas based on more than 85 unique factors.

So my hair care truly is customized for my exact hair needs and my locations and I can genuinely tell a difference. So can y'all. Y'all talk about it. Prose is so

confident that they'll bring out your best hair and skin in 2025 that they're offering an exclusive trial offer of 50% off your first hair care subscription order at Prose.com/ThatSoundsFun. So take your free consultation, get your one-of-a-kind formula and see the difference custom care can make with 50% off at Prose.com/ThatSoundsFun.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Tatum and David.

[00:41:20] <music>

Annie: It's real funny, David, because, you know, what happened is we knew TJ was sick and I was... and we were coming... It was just days before... Tatum, I need you to tell the part about when I actually gave it to y'all, because I don't remember it correctly, I don't think. But I mean, I didn't write it to make it a book. I wrote it because the skill I have is writing books and my nephew was in need.

I was driving from Franklin back to Nashville and I started knowing the story. So I'm driving, so I'm voice memo-ing myself, and I'm just recording and I'm like, and then this happens. And the whole thing was downloaded to me. I knew the exact story I wanted to tell Sam about where TJ was and or where we thought TJ was going to go when he was born.

We did not know we would have the 56 days that we had, but it was so wild to see the whole book and know the whole book and to selfishly insert myself into the story. My own work I've done for the last ten years played into being able to say to kids, There are really hard stories with really beautiful parts to it.

And I don't think I had that language as a grown-up until I was doing my work for the last decade of being able to put together like, this is a really sad story with a really beautiful part. But I'm like, man, if we can teach Sam that at four, or at the time at two, then like, hey, this is a really sad story, but here are the beautiful parts, what a better setup he has.

I mean, we did like clip art. Long before we ever considered publishing Where Did DJ Go? as a book, it was clip art and it was more words than are in the book now. And then after I gave it to Sam, I called my agent and I was like, I actually think this might be helpful. And God bless Revell Publishers and Baker because they were immediately like, "We need this." So then I was like, "Oh, Tatum, this book that I wrote that you've been helping me make better and working on, can we make this? Can we give this to other people?"

So it has just been a God thing from the start, it felt like to me. I felt like it isn't mine alone. I didn't come up with the story. It was handed to me. And it was always

just for Sam. But now it's also for the other six cousins that we have that are in our family that are going to forever have TJ as part of their story, particularly Green, who met him. Did Hallie him too?

Tatum: No.

Annie: No. Just Green. But then now, I mean, we have people that know about the book now... We're recording this before we've announced it. But we have people that know about the book now that say to me, "I have someone I need to give it to right now." And so I'm just glad that... I mean what we say all the time? We don't want anyone to need this book, but for everyone who does, we hope it serves their family and helps them.

Tatum, what did you need from a book that you hope *Where Did TJ Go?* Is for families.

Tatum: I think one of the things I needed was to be able to point Sam to truth and hope that I didn't have to manufacture myself, that didn't have to come from within me. I needed an external source to dream and be creative about the beauty of where TJ was headed, and to kind of prepare Sam for the reality of how what that meant for our family and the sadness that that would be for us here but the beauty that TJ would be experiencing and the fun that he would be experiencing.

And I think that having something... I mean we read the Jesus Storybook Bible. We still do. That's one of our main go-tos. We read a lot about the Revelation one, especially where God makes all the sad things come untrue. But having something that would be so specific to what it's what heaven will be like and the goodness of being with Jesus. To be able to point Him to that. And to be reminded myself. I think that's one of the gifts of this book too is that I needed that hope and I needed the space to dream about what it would be like for TJ.

David: Can I brag on something else I love about this book?

Annie: Yeah.

David: I think in addition to the beautiful way you all anchor folks to truth and hope you accomplish that; I think you give so much space and opportunity for any feeling and what it's like to navigate the sadness. But also, we talk a lot about how kids are concrete thinkers in terms of their cognitive development.

So the world is very black and white, and we tend to accidentally use a lot of abstract language with kids. I mean, it's why so many adults will say that person passed on. That's abstract language. It doesn't make sense to kids. You did a

beautiful job of using concrete, factual language. We talk about being actual and factual with kids, and you all did it in an extraordinary way. I mean, just the language and the way you talked about what happened with his lungs and what happened with his heart.

Rarely do I find work that accomplishes all of those things in the way you just knocked it out of the park. I mean, your capacity for doing all those things is within this work, which is one of the many reasons I love it so much.

Annie: Thank you. And for our friends listening, at the back of the book, you've written a letter to parents with some other resources, some other ways, some tips, for lack of a less crass word for such a thing as this, but some advice on okay, now that you've read it, here is some things you can do and some steps you can take. That's really helpful.

Tatum: So helpful.

Annie: Our illustrator Jennie Poh who's also done *What Sounds Fun to You?* and *So Happy to Know You?* just did such an incredible job on this.

Tatum: So beautiful.

Annie: Oh my gosh. I mean, she went back and read the whole caring bridge, she drew.

Tatum: She did?

Annie: Yes. She read the entire caring bridge. She drew TJ as we knew TJ. She drew TJ as a kid. I mean it is just amazing. By far my favorite page that I think was such a gift she offered, it felt like a gift to me, is when Jesus is reading to TJ, He's reading TJ one of my books. And so did Tatum. Tatum read TJ one of my books. And so it was just such a gift that there's this idea, this like moment in *Where Did TJ Go?* that...

I'd like for you to talk for... I'm getting somewhere on this. I'm not just self-talking.

Tatum: Just a counseling session.

Annie: Right. Unfortunately for David, I imagine his entire life are counseling sessions because you're so-

Tatum: That is how it goes.

Annie: ...you're so generous with your wisdom. But that mattered to me because it's not my kid, and I'm not the mom. I'm the aunt. And there are a lot of our friends listening

who are not the mom. They are the aunt or the sister or the cousin. They are the best friend of the... I mean, Tatum's best friends were so helpful and so heartbroken with us. I mean, the funeral was full. I mean, my best friend's parents came to the funeral. So our college friends sang at the funeral. Everyone has to process this grief.

And so Jennie drawing that of Jesus reading TJ one of my books felt like a reminder that other people see the other people besides the parents. So will you talk for a minute to the aunts, will you talk for a minute to the uncles, to the extended family and friends-

Tatum: The grandparents.

Annie: The grandparents. Right. I mean, our parents have suffered. I mean, it's been tragic to watch. And our uncle. I mean, a lot of people have... Everyone's grieved but talk a minute to the aunts and the others.

David: I love that you asked that. And I would first say that I think the same rules apply in terms of making sure we've got places where we can do our own work so that we, again, have all those things to offer these little people we love.

I would say, secondly, you know, even going back to the great question, Tatum, you asked a little bit earlier that, you know, when I talked about kids just need that one safe person, it's important to acknowledge within your question, like, I can't be that person every hour of every day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. And so what does it look like for me, you know, to lean into all that wisdom of it takes a village? And knowing that these are the other trusted adults in my child's life who are going to step onto the court when I need to step off the court and be that?

I think the other thing I would say is what we often see with kids when families are navigating grief and loss is that as kids have their thumb on the pulse of a family in ways that I don't think we give them near enough credit for. Like it's fascinating how they read families.

Annie: And kind of terrifying.

David: Yes, it is. It is. They're so intuitive. And as that's happening and they may become aware, "My mom is having a really hard time right now. My dad is having a really hard time right now," what will start to happen is that they will feel a safety to bring their questions and emotions to an-

Annie: Can we call Annie? Can we call Sally?

David: Absolutely. And we even say in our work to parents like, it's not that you're not safe. Like it's just that you are a key player in the story and there'll be moments where it just feels better to unload all of that here because I'm not carrying all the extra stuff. And so that is-

Annie: And I'm not disciplining. And I'm not feeding. I'm not bathing. I'm not doing all those other things.

David: Yeah. So it's just an incredible gift and this extra layer of support we have to offer. I'd say the last thought I had was, I think to the finding meaning and purpose piece, you can play such a primary role there. So you know, as they're thinking about "I don't know what to do. I want to do something," I think that's so often what kids are feeling.

And you could say, "Let's make your mom's favorite banana bread right now. You know what? Let's go walk that puppy because they need a lot of walks right now, and mom's taking a nap." Like, whatever it may be, that allows them to move into something missional that they feel this sense of "I can take the emotion to something constructive," that's so needed for kids. And I think those amazing aunts, uncles, friends play that primary role in helping that happen.

Tatum: I was so thankful for your friends and our like... the way that your friends and like Mom and Dad's friends and Sally's friends came around y'all was such a gift to me because... I mean, I'm sad. My tiny, immediate family is sad. But I'm also sad for y'all and y'all are working so hard to take care of us. And so having your friends taking care of you was such a gift to me, knowing that y'all had places to be cared for, y'all had people who you could cry to, y'all had... Oh, that was such a huge gift.

Annie: I just remember at the funeral, my best friend Molly's dad, Bill, hugging me. And it gave me this moment to like, "Oh, I can let go on Bill. And I can on dad too... I mean, my parents are fine. But we were all suffering and here's a dad who could hold me for a minute.

David: That's beautiful.

Annie: And I thought, man, what a gift that I have a Bill in my life. Thank God for Bill Dykes.

Tatum: So whose brother-in-law delivered TJ?

Annie: Yeah, that's exactly right. Small town. Such a gift.

Tatum: I mean, everything was just so orchestrated by the Lord in that.

- Annie:** Doctor Randy is a wonderful human and wonderful human. When he was the one on call that day, it was just like-
- Tatum:** Oh, no, I scheduled it with him.
- Annie:** Oh, you scheduled it with him?
- Tatum:** I pick him.
- Annie:** Oh, well done.
- Tatum:** He's the one. No, no.
- Annie:** Okay, is there anything we didn't say about the book or about TJ that you want to make sure we say? I mean, it comes out tomorrow, available to any family who needs it. And we're sorry that you do, but we hope it helps. What else? Tatum, what would you like to say?
- Tatum:** I think we've said it all.
- Annie:** Okay.
- Tatum:** I think.
- Annie:** David, any parting words that you want to make sure we get?
- David:** I really want families to be thinking beyond the individuals in your life that need this. I want you to think about the places that would benefit. I want you to buy a copy for your church library. I want you to buy a copy for your kids' school library. I really want this book to be in all those places so that it's easily accessible when people are living this story.
- Annie:** It can be picked up when they need it.
- Tatum:** Yes, that's such a gift. And such a gift for those people to keep their... like, even if you just buy a copy to have at your house for when it's needed, like what a gift that would be to that family that they don't even have to go search out resources, that somebody just hands them something.
- Annie:** Also, I mean, we have nonprofits that we really care about, that a portion of the proceeds are going to the nonprofits, that have been really helpful to you and your family that have really served us and our families. That matters to us, too, that

everyone who stepped in and helped us gets supported by the work that we're getting to do here. So well, thank you guys for doing this today. I'm really grateful. Well done, Tatum. First podcast.

Tatum: First podcast.

Annie: You nailed it. David, we love you so much. Thank you.

David: Thank you for having me.

Annie: I'm so grateful.

David: I'm so honored to be here with you too.

Tatum: It's so great.

[00:56:14] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, aren't they the best? What a special episode to get to do today to share with you such a deep part of our own winter season, but also the light that has come from it@ We would love for you to go order your copies of *Where Did TJ Go?* today? And I invite you to go ahead, like I've said, to grab a few copies, put them in your closet for the next time someone you know needs one.

Thank you for celebrating my nephew with us, for celebrating this book with us. And thank you for sharing it with your people this week as we officially launch it into the world tomorrow.

And just a reminder, if you would like a signed bookplate to go inside your copy of *Where Did TJ Go?* Or you'd like me to sign one in memory of someone that you've lost, just head to wheredidtjgo.com and fill out the form. I would be honored to sign a bookplate for you.

And if you enjoyed hearing the behind-the-scenes of writing and releasing books, I think you'll also enjoy the episode where we talked about releasing our last kids' book, *So Happy to Know You!* You can find the link to that episode in the show notes below.

If you have 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 to us on Instagram @ThatSoundsFunpodcast and we'll try to answer them there.

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

I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you and I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me, you will not be surprised with a book launching tomorrow, we are celebrating tonight in New York City with my family, my team, and some of my besties here in New York. So that sounds fun to me to get to celebrate this book that releases tomorrow. Thanks again for your support and your friendship through this season and through these last couple of years, particularly around the loss of my nephew.

And thanks for being with us as we get to release this book into the world. Y'all have a great week. We're actually going to see you back here on Thursday with a new episode just for me, an Always Annie episode about grief. We'll see y'all then.