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[00:00:59] <intro music>

Intro: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. We have got a great show in store. Today on the show I get to talk with the lovely Kate Bowler.

Kate Bowler is a New York Times bestselling author, a podcast host, a professor at Duke University. She studies the cultural stories we tell ourselves about success and suffering and whether or not we're capable of change. Her latest book, *No Cure for Being Human (and Other Truths I Need to Hear)*, is so good, y'all.

Kate hosts the *Everything Happens* podcast, in warm, insightful, and often very funny conversations. She talks with incredible guests about what they've learned in difficult times. I think y'all are going to love getting to hear from Kate again. She's been on the podcast before. And hearing her story today it's really special. So here's my conversation with our friend Kate Bowler.

[00:02:03] <music>

Annie: Kate, for starters, why are you in Nashville?

Kate: I mean, cultivating an enduring friendship with you.

Annie: Yeah. Well, (a), number one, of course.

Kate: I'm seeing you have really nice malls too. Yeah, no, just for book stuff and for friendships.

Annie: Okay. Oh, my gosh. How long are you here?

Kate: Till tomorrow?

Annie: So you're just here for two days just to see people and do shows and catch up with friends?

Kate: Yeah, that's exactly right.

Annie: Oh, my gosh, that's so nice.

Kate: You got great restaurants. It always makes me feel special being here. I feel like, you know, when somebody gets off an escalator in the airport and they get to pull their roller bag behind them with kind of "maa" feeling? That's the feeling I get.

Annie: You feel that in at BNA?

Kate: I do.

Annie: You feel that at the airport?

Kate: I do.

Annie: How lovely!

Kate: I'm not going to lie to you. It's a big feeling I have.

Annie: My feeling when I get off the plane here is like, "What's the fastest route to my car?" That is my feeling. What is the fastest route?

Kate: I bet you have very speedy femurs.

Annie: Oh gosh.

Kate: I bet you can get it.

Annie: You can imagine. You know what? An interesting thing about your book, *No Cure for Being Human*, that just came out yesterday... Congratulations.

Kate: Thank you.

Annie: I'm in conversations about my speed. I just move kind of fast all the time and it is not always beneficial. Sometimes it is and sometimes it's not. I would imagine in the journey you've been on the last few years, things like what your body is capable of doing kind of come to the surface really quickly.

Kate: Oh, my gosh, I mean, that is the one hard limit on all of our lives is, as much as mentally we want to be doing something else and doing something else we're always stuck in the... she said respectfully in her own body, "stuck in the meat sack we're in." I think that's probably, I guess, because I've been trying to think about different sort of cultural stories we tell ourselves but how our lives work out, and one of them-

Annie: I mean, that's like both your books are.

Kate: Yeah, that's right.

Annie: It's like, "Here's the cultural stories you've told yourself." And the whole first book was lies, *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*, and this one's *No Cure for Being Human (and Other Truths I Need to Hear)*. That's what you're doing. If you look at what culture tells us, and you say, "I'm going to tell you whether that's true or false."

Kate: I love thinking about those little stories because so often... Like for example, in *Everything Happens for a Reason* or for like this one is you can always hustle your life. Like the one where maybe secretly always trying to undo is the idea that faster, better, more efficient, more, more, more. And there's always a little bit of wisdom in every cultural story we get. There's that little bit of little gem.

And for me, hustle taught me how to hope. It taught me how to try. And coming from the plains of Manitoba, where I'm from, with like seven month winters and just a lot of sort of Little House on the Prairie feelings, I did always want to try in my life. But then when I suddenly was diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer, I think that

was maybe one of the first sort of shocks I got, which is there wouldn't always be more runway.

Annie: Right. One of the first things... I tagged this in the book is where you said, "I wish someone had told me that the end of a life is a complex equation. Years dwindle into months, months into days, and you must begin to count them." I mean, (a) you're such an unbelievably good writer.

Kate: Thanks.

Annie: But that's the idea, right? Is that this is really complex how to count our days.

Kate: Yeah, yeah. Because then the second we start to... Well, I guess because when I got sick I kind of wondered, "Am I just thinking about grief or sadness or mortality?" And I realized, "No, no, I think I'm just trying to get my mind around what adds up to that feeling of enough in our lives the second you start to count it." And that feeling even of minutes, it kind of... you know, I was trying to get over being a hustle monster. And then the second I felt like, "Oh, crap, my life is on a watch," it really did just kick me back to wanting to move faster.

Annie: Yeah, I would think so.

Kate: So for the first, I don't know, year, I mean, I just-

Annie: Of a two-year diagnosis, right?

Kate: Yeah.

Annie: That blew my mind in the book. I don't remember that you told me that in real life that the doctor said two years.

Kate: Yeah. It was Fall when I was first... It was like, "Oh, you have no cancer in your family and now that's it." I remember them thinking like June—June would be it. It felt like it was my first Fall and my last Fall. I started just looking at the leaves and be like, "Oh, my gosh, is this the last time I'm going to see the leaves turn?" And instead of like, well maybe take a nap or maybe just slow it down for a second, be one of those people that just live in the moment. Those people seem great.

Annie: I don't even know any of them. I hear things are going well for them.

Kate: I was like, "Great, great. great. Fast, fast, fast."

Annie: Uh-huh.

Kate: So I was just contemptuous of people who did puzzles in the cancer center even though I wanted to do puzzles in cancer center.

Annie: What were you doing while they were doing puzzles?

Kate: I wrote a book. I mean, not even my sad book. I wrote a whole other... like a monster history.

Annie: I love that one. Wait, are you talking about the one about women and...?

Kate: Yeah.

Annie: Yeah, that's it. Say the title of it for me.

Kate: It's called *The Preacher's Wife*.

Annie: That's right. *The Preacher's Wife*

Kate: It is just about how women don't usually get to leave. They have to be either the wife or in some... And so instead of, I don't know, maybe slowing it down for a hot minute, I—and this is actually something that I-

Annie: That's when we met-

Kate: We did.

Annie: ...is when you were doing research for *The Preacher's Wife*.

Kate: Annie, and things I remember about that moment.

Annie: Oh, no.

Kate: One, I got to come backstage and meet you and felt really special.

Annie: I felt special too. I loved it.

Kate: You ordered a London Fog drink, and I thought, "I'd never heard of that before." That was the coolest thing ever. And since then I have ordered it several times.

Annie: Yes, girl.

Kate: With a just mildly artificial British accent. And you said, "I want to treat everybody like a real friend." And that made me realize that hospitality is one of the most important things that any of us can do if we decide to actually, I don't know, serve in any way. So that's really stuck with me.

Annie: I remember thinking, "I'm really glad that I got to say yes to this and meet her." Because I was like, "She's very good at this." And I remember we sat in a locker room.

Kate: We did.

Annie: In the back of the arena?

Kate: It was. It was. It was a really smelly locker room. We sat on those thin benches where I think you put jerseys on.

Annie: So you're sitting in the cancer ward getting your chemo and you're writing a *Preacher's Wife*?

Kate: Yeah. I guess that was kind of maybe the first fork in the road I had for... Because at first there's just the crisis. I've got cancer, I'm terrified. I was 35. So it's 2015.

Annie: Okay. Oh, yeah, you're like a month older than me. I'm July 7th and you're June 6th.

Kate: Yeah. Oh, my gosh, you're so good. I'm June 16th. I remember it was in the book. June 16th. It was so close. Go great. You were diagnosed in 2015.

Kate: Yeah. And it's a big crisis. Everything's a crisis. Everyone's making food. Everyone's stressed out. Everyone's like... everything feels heightened.

Annie: Yeah.

Kate: And then I realized, well, I mean, there's one thing to manage your life as a crisis, but then the question is, well, then what are you supposed to do with your actual life?

Annie: Yeah, because everyone else is handling things. You said—I love this. I do—"My house is a hive of people trying to save my life by doing errands." I was like, "Cate, you're so good at writing." That's why everybody's in crisis mode. And then you're just sitting there.

Kate: Yeah. Because there's only so long that you can sort of thank everyone for being there. I always tried to have these meetings and always ended up being like, "Does everyone have enough towels?" You're like getting to the existential heart of the question.

But I had this really weird problem because I was just at a moment in my life/career that I had spent everything on one career. Being a professor is one of those jobs where there's like only two stops on the train. There's the one where you get off, and then there's 10 years later if you get off the train and you're like, "Do I have a job. Can I make enough?" I mean, not even like dentist money we're talking about.

Annie: Why 10 years? Is that when 10 year happens?

Kate: Well, you finish your PhD, which usually takes like seven or eight years. And then I just had gotten a job and I had had to write a first book out of that. So when I got diagnosed, I realized, gosh, this was supposed to be the year where I finish up a second book and get to keep my job for life.

Annie: Right.

Kate: And then I was like, "Well, life. If I don't get to live, is this really how I should be spending my time writing some wonderfully obscure topic that I really care about?"

Annie: Right. It is really interesting.

Kate: Thank you, Annie. Well, that's because (a) you love me and (b), we both care a lot about women in ministry. But mostly those books sell like library copies. I'm rocking like a 500 copy run and I'm like, "Then that's it. That's it." And I pay for my own pictures if it goes in there.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Kate: The point is always just to write this history that you expect to last twenty years. And I was like, "Well, if that's the choice, and the choice isn't that everyone's going to read it or many people are, then the choice isn't, well, I'm trying to keep a job

because I, you know, won't necessarily live long enough to do it, what is worth doing anyway?

I think that has been kind of a beautiful question for me, is like, "What's a job? And what's a calling? What does God give us to do?" What would we do if we had to do it anyway? It feels like the opposite of the lottery question "what would you do for a million dollars?" What would you do with \$0?

Annie: Yeah, yeah.

Kate: But like, a year to fill?

Annie: Yes.

Kate: It turns out I want to write a history book.

Annie: And you keep living.

Kate: Yeah.

Annie: I have a weird question about that if that's okay.

Kate: Yeah.

Annie: Is there a tension that they keep telling you shorter amounts of time and you keep beating it? Is there a tension of like, "Okay, here we are in the second summer when they told me my body... is my body giving out? No, my body's living? Oh, wait, I made it to Christmas. Is this my last Christmas?" Is that a weird question?

Kate: No, that isn't. And I think it's a perfect pandemic question, too because everybody is in these weird fits and starts of their lives. I started thinking of it as short term horizon. So what can you imagine in a season? Like, you know, we're in whatever pumpkin spice latte season. And that's how long it lasts. And when that's over, the season's over.

Annie: Right.

Kate: And then there's kind of medium-term horizons where you're like, "Hey, maybe this is a trip or maybe this is a... I'm committing to this balayage." Whatever it is, there's kind of a medium-term. And then there's this long-term vision where you're like,

"Am I the kind of person who jumps out of a plane or sees the pyramids or whatever?" And immediately, the long-term vision was just gone.

Annie: Wow.

Kate: I was like, "Well, I don't know who gets to go to Egypt, but it is not me." I think because I always had these scan intervals—and first, it was two months, and then I'm on a six-month scan schedule—it means I have to be really clear about setting medium-term horizons and then just being able to reset them. But it does honestly make me sort of confused sometimes. Because I'm doing really well, I keep doing really well. But every now and then it'll be 2 a.m. and I'll be like, "Am I okay? And how would I know?"

Annie: Right. It's like you can feel.

Kate: "Who can tell me? Is it you? Is it you? Are you my mother? Are you my mother?"

Annie: Right. Right.

Kate: I find that maybe the most emotionally and spiritually difficult part of... I guess what we're describing is just chronic uncertainty.

Annie: Yes. That's a great phrase. I said to someone today in another area of my life, "For the first time in months, I know what to do for two days." And for two months, I've known what to do for one day. And she said, "Your eyes look so sober. You're so serious." I was like, "I know what to do for two days." And I haven't known what to do for two days in months. So that chronic uncertainty is very draining.

Kate: Yes. Well, and I thought, as a good Christian that faith could solve that problem because people who are faithful are not afraid. And then people say, like, "But trust God." And I was always like, "Yes, totally, love God, big fan. But also trust God to do what in this scenario? Make me not mortal, make life always certain?" And then I was like, "I think I need to maybe redefine the terms a little bit."

That's where I think community and church and the joy of getting to do lovely things, that's what made me realize that faith to me feels a lot more like love and a lot less like certainty.

Annie: Yeah, that's it. Certainty to me has shown itself to be a very untrustworthy lover. Right?

Kate: Yes.

Annie: Where it's like, "No, you seem so up close to me and so comfortable but you're not trustworthy."

Kate: Yeah, yes. It is a fickle, fickle little friend.

Annie: Right.

Kate: Yeah. And he doesn't really care what my plans are and is not very interested in my dreams.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. Certainty will lie to you and say, "Yeah, you're going to get everything." I mean, that is what this whole book is *No Cure for Being Human*. You just list over and over things that we're kind of told we're guaranteed. You know, do what you love and the money will follow. That's what we're told will happen. And your whole book is going like, "Here's what is true about that." But certainty is trying to tell you that's always true.

Kate: Oh, my gosh.

Annie: And certainty is just not certain.

Kate: No. Oh, even you saying that it gives me goosebumps because I miss it. Right? Like I missed that. I'm sure we run into lucky people all the time and they seem very certain. And certainty looks a lot like faithfulness, it looks a lot like confidence, it looks a lot like success.

I guess I'm hoping maybe instead of certainty for a little bit more courage. Courage to see the world as it is, to love people how they are, to allow the world to be a little more. There's that gorgeous Frederick Buechner quote, that pastor who said, Annoyingly lovely thing. And he would say things like "This is the world, beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid." Well, I will be afraid but everything else is exactly... The angels always show up and they're like, "Don't be afraid." Because they must have been terrifying.

Annie: You must be the scariest things ever. If you walk in the door is that don't be afraid, I'd be like, "Why is Kate? Why is Kate?"

Kate: She has a knife. She must have a knife.

Annie: Something must be scary if Kate is leading with "Don't be afraid." It's like you said, "I'm here," and we said, "Yay! Hey, let's go." Chronic uncertainty. Is that in your book? Is that a thing you carry?

Kate: Yeah.

Annie: I'm sorry I didn't see it. Is that so?

Kate: No, no, that's just a thing to think about. I mean, that is such an important... I find myself in life—and maybe this is our age—but I found myself in life going like, "Cling really tightly to the things that are true." I know that sounds-

Kate: No, that's good.

Annie: But chronic uncertainty is very true. And like, okay, things are going to be hard. That is just true. So what are some things that even today you're holding on to as true?

Kate: Yeah. Woof. What a nice question! Thank you.

Annie: My dad loves when people say that. That's why I'm always very grateful. I've always said that on the show.

Kate: Also can we whisper thank you to each other?

Annie: At any time.

Kate: I think it'd be nice. Thank you. Well, I guess true things are... like we are not invincible. I don't love it but it's true.

Annie: We're mortal. When you said that earlier, I kind of went like, "Oh, right, we're actually all mortal." Yeah, that's right.

Kate: Right. It always feels like I'm that person at the party. Like a toddler's birthday party...

Annie: "Oh, Kate's here, you guys."

Kate: She's going to remind us that we're all going to die. I do. I just want to be that person for everybody.

Annie: It's your lane. We all have our lane.

Kate: On little Wyatt's birthday party, "Blow up the candles, sweetie. It may be your last..." It's just a gift I give.

Annie: We're grateful. We're grateful.

[00:19:19] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, Olive & June. Y'all know this about me. I do not like it when my fingernails are not painted or when I'm mindlessly picking off my nail polish on one finger. I'm always scurrying to cover it up with a good coat of glitter nail polish.

But my preference is always just to have a manicure. The challenge is that I'm not exactly an expert. I would definitely fall in the amateur category at painting my own nails. I try but they end up looking not great and chipping pretty much immediately. But the alternative is forking over a lot of money and spending a lot of time I don't have to get regular salon manicures.

But here to save the day, Olive & June's Manicure System do it yourself mani is that look salon-perfect and last over seven days are actually possible, you guys. Olive & June's Manicure System comes with everything you need for impeccable DIY manis. And it's all in one box and only five steps.

It comes with a poppy, this flexible, easy-to-grip brush handle that fits on any of their bottles of polish. And since it's so easy to grip, it steadies your hands and makes it so easy to paint with both hands. That means both hands end up with smooth, perfectly manicured nails instead of one looking great and the other not so much.

The Mani System with six polishes breaks down to only \$2 per mani. Y'all, I mean, come on, we spend more than like \$35 on just one gel manicure, right? The Olive & June polish is amazing. I love the color options. I'm very partial to this deep purpley blue shade called OMG. The polish especially with their signature topcoat is so shiny, it looks just like gel and it doesn't chip. It lasts a whole week. I know it never happens. My nails look great, last for days, and I do it myself.

Olive & June's Mani System is the secret behind salon-perfect nails at home, all in one, no guessing, no messy nails, no salon price tag oliveandjune.com . And as one

of my friends, you can get 20% off your first Mani System at oliveandjune.com with my code That Sounds Fun. Your new nail life is here friends. Get 20% off your first Mani System when you use the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN at Oliveandjune.com. We are done with expensive, bad manicures. This is the new us, okay? Oliveandjune.com and the code is THATSOUNDSFUN.

And now back to our conversation with Kate.

[00:21:35] <music>

Kate: I do believe that people are magic. I mean, it's one of the most consistent experiences I have of God and the Holy Spirit really is there are these little.... you know. And that's the feeling I guess of being overwhelmed by minutes is the idea that everything is finite and everything feels like it's shrinking. People just have this way of turning like minutes into moments. And then all of a sudden it just like stretches out in front of you and then you get to hear about somebody's dumb whatever, or their aunt Linda something rather and then the world is magic again. So yeah, I'm a giant believer that people are magic.

I guess some of the other ones that I feel like I'm hoping Christians respectfully, lovingly, will stop being as confused about is the idea that positivity is the same thing as faith. We're people of hope. Hope that we're drawn into a story that isn't ours. Like God is telling a story about us and about the world that is for the salvation the whole time. So you know, like, no big deal. Just a cosmic story.

But it's not always the same as right-siding people's problems or saying that we know how everything's going to be okay. Because it will be okay in a deep, deep way. That's God's truth. It's not always the thing we get to saddle other people of.

Annie: That's right. I love that thought of hearing... You know me. I'm a seven. I'm positive on accident. That is just like, "Oh, did someone not show up? I bet they're planning a surprise party for us." That is what my brain does, right? So that is my natural bent is probably things are going to go better than I think they are. I don't think they're probably going to go better. But I have had to wrestle with positivity and faith.

So what does it look like to... we've talked a lot recently. I feel like this is a theme Lord is kind of bringing upfront for all of us about faith, is being sure of what you hope for, but certain of what you don't see. So without having to pull yourself up by your bootstraps with positivity, how do we be full of faith?

Kate: Well, I guess, if you don't mind I get to put on my historian hat.

Annie: I want you to.

Annie: Is this where I call you Dr. Kate Bowler?

Kate: Yes, please.

Annie: This is a question for Dr. Kate Bowler.

Kate: Thank you. Thank you so much. Well, I think part of the way that Christianity started to use more and more positivity, emotion therapy language, it really took off in the 70s. And more and more Christian language started to take on the same language as self-help. And so we began then to equate our faith with feelings or having then certain feelings. And so then all of a sudden we're like, if there's a wide range of human emotion from like despair to joy, then where people who scream "choose joy" at one another.

Annie: Literally screaming. You're right.

Kate: And instead of allowing Jesus on the cross to feel abandoned or to weep for a world that isn't yet. And a lot of it is social media, and a lot of it is just my other intellectual obsession with the rise of the prosperity gospel. And somewhere along-

Annie: You have a book about that too, right?

Kate: It is called *Blessed*.

Annie: *Blessed*.

Kate: And that's because it was not a popular hashtag at the time. And they just "Let me title it that." Had I just bought the website, Annie!

Annie: I know. You'd have brought your own plane here. That's for sure true. That's right.

Kate: We could tape this.

Annie: That's right.

Kate: You could have taped this for my plane. That's right. We have all these different strains of Christianity: therapeutic Christianity, what I think of as Instagram theology, prosperity gospel, they all come...

Annie: What do you consider Instagram theology compared to prosperity gospel?

Kate: Because we now have to perform our emotions in front of crowds that we imagined are real, that we took on more and more of the work of entertainment culture. I mean, even just like when people's social media feeds become, quote, "personal branding," it doesn't make it hard to have say, like, grieving the loss of or days that feel impossible. It's just the wider spectrum of human emotion doesn't read well visually and it certainly doesn't make us feel special.

We want to be known but then we're so terrified of what it would be like if we were, especially in the mediums that are available to us. I think all of that kind of combines to create this very, very performative faith. And that doesn't mean that we're hypocrites if we feel that way. I think we all feel that way. But I do think there's more and more pressure, and I would say, especially on women to equate faith with a performance of joy.

Annie: Wow.

Kate: I don't know. I started being like, "Is that how we are?" I love that I work with other theologians and-

Annie: You're still a professor at Duke, right?

Kate: Yeah. I just wander around the hallways at Duke Divinity School asking people for advice about stuff like this. I'm like, "Should I feel joy more than I do?" What does joy look like as a Christian?" And the beautiful answers that they were giving me, they're like, "Well, Augustine says..." No, thank you.

Annie: You're like, "I have his work memorized. Let me..."

Kate: Yeah, yeah, yeah. "I mean, in the fourth book, blah, blah, blah..." But what they were saying was like, as a fruit of the Spirit, it really kind of comes on as like a gift. It's like a surprise and a present. It's not necessarily something that we muscle our way into by trying to perform it all the time. So I have felt joy right after a surgery when I was hurt and scared and didn't have great odds. But I could feel really the overwhelming love of God and other people. And I was like, "Holy crap, that's joy. I didn't muscle this up. Thank you, God." That is like just God's little glitter on us.

Annie: Yes, yes, yes.

Kate: But it's not the same thing as muscling our way through telling other people they're not allowed to be sad. I would just love it if we could kind of lift that burden off of ourselves a little and just be a little more honest. I think God will meet us there.

Annie: You were in Canada for a lot of COVID.

Kate: I thought it would be a great idea to go home for a year to Canada, where I'm from for the pandemic.

Annie: With your family, right? Your husband and your kid?

Kate: Yeah. I put my kid in French school the way I grew up. We wore ski pants for like six months.

Annie: I did see that.

Kate: I am not more attractive in that season, in that endless season.

Annie: But comfy and warm.

Kate: It's like wearing a giant onesie for most of the year.

Annie: Right. So now back in North Carolina, back at Duke, and back at school.

Kate: Yeah, I'm teaching. I'm just using my professor voice a lot.

Annie: Do your students know your story?

Kate: Right now I get to teach the history of the prosperity gospel.

Annie: Oh, my gosh. An entire class?

Kate: Yeah. Like, "Hey, guys..."

Annie: That's awesome.

Kate: We're doing this a lot. So at the very end, they have this actually a really fun assignment called... she said of her own class. Sorry, for complementing myself. But I think it's great.

Annie: Thank you.

Kate: Thank you. It's called the not prosperity, prosperity gospel. So they have to look around in their life and think of something, like the way I do in my own life. Like, "Wow, I thought I could outwork this. I thought I could..." And they have to find a thing that isn't technically, you know, like Joel Osteen, but it feels like the prosperity gospel. So the presentation I heard the other day, one did the Cubs believing that it's always going to be and that their faith can create a victory. But that was-

Annie: You can't know how much I would love to hear because every year I think Georgia Bulldogs are going to win the national championship, including us sitting right at this table right now. I'm like, "Oh, this is our year. This is our year."

Kate: That only your faith can make it so.

Annie: But if I don't believe... yes, yes.

Kate: Exactly.

Annie: I mean, one of our co-workers buys a new shirt every season, and does not change the shirt until they lose because what we wear determines how the season goes. I would have loved to hear that presentation is what I'm saying. Because I have a lot of sports theology that is very not godly.

Kate: This is a confession now?

Annie: Yes.

Kate: This is deeply problematic.

Annie: Dr. Bowler, I-

Kate: I am not a pastor but I promise that God-

Annie: So when that guy or girl gets up, I could be either, gets up and says that about the Cubs, is there emotion in that presentation?

Kate: Yeah? Well, I guess we're all kind of confessing that all along we all have these ideas that if we just figure out the formula, then it's all going to work out. And so at the very end, I'll show them my very sad TED Talk where I'm like... Because that is my testimony. Like, I really did try to save myself, I thought it was going pretty well. And then when my life came apart, I had to figure out that God's love, all these other beautiful things are really... that my life is not really mostly going to be determined by the things I choose. It's going to be the things that happened to me.

Annie: Right. That's terrible. When I read that, I was like, "Nah, man, she's right and I don't like it."

Kate: Every time I write something, would you mind just sending me a voicemail and it's like, "That's terrible."

Annie: I'm like, "Oh, you're such a beautiful writer and a beautiful friend, and that is terrible what you just told me. I hate it." But I also really—and you know this from our real-life—I really need you. I need your voice. I've needed your books to say there is a way to be hopeful and not deceiving yourself.

Kate: Yeah.

Annie: That's right. Because you find that a lot of times we tie our hope to self-deception.

Kate: Yes, yes, that's right. And I think hope can just be things and prayers, like, "God, let me see the world as it truly is." And that can include, "God, let me see the structures that break in our lives, personal sin, structural sin, evil. Let me see the world as it is. And also God, let me see the world as it is. You are saving it. You are pulling us into a future where there will someday be a time and a place where there will be no more tears. So God, let me just see the world as it is."

Annie: Everyone listening has something they want they don't have. All of us do. Every person. And so for the person who wants something that they don't have, there are two paths. There's the "Yeah, you should probably give up on that because of your age or your life place, or where you live or what's happened. Yeah, you should probably give up on that." And then there is the other path of like, "Believe no matter what. Tie yourself to the mass of this ship and go." Where do you fall on that spectrum?

Kate: Holy Annie, I love you so much for knowing that this is... I think this is exactly the existential question that we have. And we have it not just in our bucket list feeling.

We should have it in the morning where we're like, "Am I going to be the person that says, 'anything is possible' or Am I going to be the person that says, 'nothing is possible'?"

Annie: Right. Right.

Kate: I know based on my intellectual work and my own experience that it can't be that everything is possible. I mean, everything is possible in, I mean, salvifically in Christ, and... they're really just talking about the resurrection. I'm happy for all of us in a deep way but that doesn't mean...

Annie: Keep it context, everybody. Yes.

Kate: Keep it context. And we can't be people who are fatalistic and despairing. So I think the language I'm hoping for is, and this is what I think a lot about, limited agency. Agency just being the ability to choose. And limited agency is finding that little space between those two poles. And I think it looks a little bit more like, "so then what is possible today?" Let's live in our dumb finitude.

Annie: There is no care for being human as you say.

Kate: We'll just whisper it to one another but not when we're trying to run a 5k. That's when we need to be "anything as possible" people.

Annie: Right. Right. Right. One of my co-workers here, Fallon, we had this long conversation a couple of weeks ago. We just did a podcast on singleness a few weeks ago. And Fallon and I talked about this before that about how would you live today if you knew God was going to answer your deepest prayer tomorrow?

So when you think about this with the limited agency, if everything's going to change tomorrow in any direction, where you get exactly what you want or you get a phone call that someone you love is no longer here, you know, it could go in any direction, I'm always going to lean toward "He's going to answer our greatest prayer."

Kate: Absolutely.

Annie: So, I'm going to go on 'the anything is possible' just because it's more fun things, but it could be in any direction. If we knew God was going to change everything tomorrow, what would you do today?

Kate: Well, right. And that is a question we always have to ask when we pray. Like how could we pray "if." So I know that I pray for "God, I'd love to not have cancer. I'd just love it. If you could just make me healthy, and pain free and give me..."

Annie: Are you in pain?

Kate: I have chronic pain stuff.

Annie: Oh, I didn't know that.

Kate: So I just have a lot of-

Annie: I'm sorry I hugged you so tight.

Kate: Oh, I loved it.

Annie: Okay.

Kate: I was like, you probably gave me just a light chiropractic adjustment which I needed.

Annie: Which I'm very happy to see.

Kate: And I was happy to see you. Chronic pain makes me-

Annie: I did not know that.

Kate: ...it makes me scared because pain meds make you foggy. I just love my brain. I love going well, I just need to go someplace with it. That's what I need for my brain. So if I could pray for anything just for myself, I would pray to be healthy. And I do. Because I do believe that it is always possible that God can change anything genuinely.

Annie: I like that language. Anything's possible versus always possible. It's always possible. And anything is possible. We don't camp there. But it's always possible.

Kate: I think-

Annie: That's beautiful, Kate.

Kate: Thank you. Thank you, Annie. This reminds me, though, of this lovely conversation I had with Jerry Switzer. Do you know him?

Annie: No.

Kate: He had this very famous book that I think all of our parents read on grief because he had lost most of his family in a tragic car accident.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Kate: So people turned to him to ask the questions of "why and what now?" And he said something really sort of touching and hard the other day. He said, "Even Lazarus, even the one who's risen, who's pulled out of the grave from Jesus really only gets... has to die again." Every miracle, he was saying gently, is a temporary reprieve. And I think that kind of help me-

Annie: That's so interesting.

Kate: ...believe as much in miracles as then finitude because like, okay, let us pray for the things that make her life beautiful and joyful and glad in our hearts. And also, every miracle is also just like a little firefly. I'm kind of rooting for both I guess.

[00:38:15] <music>

Sponsor: Hey, friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about a great new book from Baker Ravel Publishing called *You on Purpose*. What if I told you that the idea we've all heard that you can be anything you want to be isn't totally true?

In their new book, *You on Purpose: Discover Your Calling and Create the Life You Were Meant to Live*, Dr. Stephanie Shackelford and Bill Denzel write down common myths about calling to reveal the truth, instead of you can be anything you want to be, they help us learn that your context shapes your calling. With intentionality, and for God's purposes, He has placed you in a specific location, situation, and time in history.

I hear from so many of you who find yourself at crossroads moments and are looking for clarity about major life decisions. If you need a way forward through a career change or are trying to discern any career at all, the clear and simple four-step process outlined in *You on Purpose* can serve as your trusted guide. Use

the code TSF40 at [Bakerbookhouse.com](https://www.bakerbookhouse.com) to get 40% off *You on Purpose*, plus free shipping in the US. That's TSF40 at Bakerbookhouse.com.

And now back to our conversation with Kate.

[00:39:30] <music>

Annie: That's it. When you talked earlier about being a mortal, that was the idea that started spinning in my head but I didn't have any of that language for it of like, "Oh, yeah, every healing is only until we are not healed."

Kate: Yeah, yeah. Well, I used to study healing rallies. And so I was always sitting with people who were waiting to be healed, sitting with people-

Annie: Did you do that before you got diagnosed?

Kate: Mm-hmm. I did for years.

Annie: Okay.

Kate: I have-

Annie: No, jokes on me.

Kate: Oh, my gosh. And then when I got sick, they were like, "Moths to a flame."

Annie: I bet.

Kate: They were so excited that I was about to experience a miracle. I think all my time around people who are desperate for miracles has been really good for me. I guess one of the things I love about that mindset is I have seen people just delight in the tiniest little details of their life and be like, "Hey, guess where God was today on this walk?"

I love the feeling that our lives just matter so much in every little... our specificity is kind of gorgeous. Ridiculous and gorgeous. So I love that. I think the part that was very eye-opening is watching people who were not healed constantly experience their own lives as failures.

Annie: Watching people who are not healed constantly experience their own life as failures. Yes. Oh, I had to think about it for a second. Because when they walked

away, if they did not get healed in the way they thought, the expectation was on the chair and the front side.

Kate: Yeah, yeah. I've seen people in hospitals refuse to allow their loved ones to pass. I've seen people pray for resurrection at a funeral. I mean, things in which when people can't let go, they can't let us be finite, it is like it becomes a tragedy, and then hope becomes a poison. I think finding-

Annie: But then there are people who are raised from the dead, okay?

Kate: Not, that I've seen-

Annie: Not that I've seen.

Kate: ...in the funerals I attended.

Annie: That's right. Same, same. Same, same. But you hear the stories, right? So it's this weird juxtaposition of, yes, open hands and let go or keep praying? I don't know. I don't know.

Kate: The people I've studied and interviewed that were sort of leaders, I mean, there's the kind of... I guess, the way that we... I'm just thinking of all these really sad versions where people promised that they could raise people from the dead, of course.

Annie: Oh, gosh.

Kate: I'm just thinking of an example where the US Postal Service had to contact a prosperity preacher and ask him to stop making those promises because people were mailing them coffins...

Annie: Oh, gosh.

Kate: ...is the actual truth of that story.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Kate: I guess the thing that I feel like is most kind of loving about what we do with hope is we have to be really careful stewards of it. We just have to be really responsible with each other's hope, really tender with it, instead of throwing our certainties or expectations and allowing people's pain to kind of take up as much space as it needs to before we're throwing our solutions and imagining that God has to.

Those arguments always work like, "God is good and therefore." It's a beautiful thought but the world is also not yet. And it's okay that we live here like this. It really is.

Annie: Francis Chan does this beautiful example of a very long rope and how very short our lives are. The very long rope of eternity. Right? Like one of those pictures. But it has helped me to go like, if this life hurts for 100 years, okay, okay. No, it doesn't feel good today. But if it hurts for 100 years and we're doing what matters, and we're loving God as best we can and loving our people, then okay. I don't love that. Hear me clear. This is one of the truths that I have had to embrace, not because I like it, but of like, okay, if I'm lonely for 100 years, okay.

Kate: Yeah. That's good.

Annie: Right? We'll be alright. And so I just think there's got to be... and yet, the "and yet"... I'm "and" person. So my "and" would be "and I also want to be known for hope." I know what God can do for all of us, for your body, for my body, for our friends we care about. How do you balance when other people want to believe and have hope for you?

Kate: Well, I'm always great. I guess the real answer is it depends. I would say there's a big spectrum of the way people have hoped for me or hope for other people. One version, which always really annoys me, is they're just so polite that they can't possibly hope. I think because they're a little embarrassed. Like, well, what if I hope for something for you and it doesn't come true? Yes. And I always wondered if certain Christian traditions would be fine if I just died very politely, very quietly, very politely.

Annie: Good. That's it. We don't think about that anymore. Right.

Kate: You're like, "Oh..."

Annie: No, that's not my tradition. I'm not going to let either of us die quietly.

Kate: And then there's the sort of almost irresponsible language that people use with other people's pain where because they don't necessarily want to have a wider bandwidth for reality, they say things that are really, really painful for people who are suffering. Like, "If you have faith, then..." Or like "Imagine a formula and then you just have to."

So I've been given every possible list. I've been given, gosh, a whole spectrum from "Only this particular person of prayer can heal you. You have to go to this particular place. Let's go through your unconfessed sin, I have some thoughts."

Annie: Oh, certainly. Certainly.

Kate: "I have some recipe." And then there's not just like the Christian solutions. It's always 'it must be something I eat.' It must be... everybody has their reasons for why it's me.

Annie: The oil. The right oil.

Kate: Everyone whose cousin has just discovered essential oils and he's really excited about them.

Annie: That's really interesting. Everyone thinks it's me and not them. Everyone is assuming there's something you could control in your body to make this better.

Kate: I guess maybe that always feels like a big dividing point with people's intentions because some people just can't bear to let you suffer because it would break a belief they have, that everything can always be fixed. And that to me feels like an unfair way to saddle suffering people with like, "Hey, I understand that's your theological problem. I'm just trying to like to have cancer and be a mom and love God right now."

Annie: Right.

Kate: "But thanks so much for this." I'll take the NutriBullet if it makes it good. I'll take the blender.

Annie: Giving away blenders because they're scared for me. Fine.

Kate: I'll take it.

Annie: I will take it.

Kate: I will take it. I draw the lines of crystals. I mean, it's such a wide range of people with their formulas. I think what I love is when people's cultivation of hope comes just straight out of love and less out of obsessive certainty.

Annie: When you wrote *No Cure for Being Human*, I mean, I love when you got here, you're like, "The ending, spoiler alert, I lived. I lived. Don't worry, I lived." What do you hope happens with this one compared to *Everything Happens for a Reason*? Why is this one different? It reads different but...

Kate: I guess when I first got sick, I was trying to... *Everything Happens for a Reason* felt like I was trying to think through the why. Like, why is this happening? I was living this huge crisis. I was really scared.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Kate: But I really wanted to figure out how to live with it. And *No Cure for Being Human* is sort of it just became what happens when life is a chronic condition. We're all just stuck with before and afters and you can't go back. So you have to find a way forward. Well, then what? There's a lot of advice for that. Just be present, hustle. There's so many formulas for that I realized, I think I need a minute to ask myself, how do we live here now with the things we can't fix, and still be people of hope and courage?

Annie: A friend of mine, we've been talking a lot about how our bodies don't lie. Do you think that's a true statement?

Kate: Mm-hmm. What were you thinking when you said it?

Annie: Well, she was hoping that her body would do the thing in front of the doctor that it's been doing without the doctor there so that she could get diagnosed correctly.

Annie: And I had a migraine yesterday and so I ended up missing the whole day of work in a very inconvenient time for me to miss a day of work. And there's just not much you can do when your body decides that it can't do. And so I've just been thinking about how we need to trust our bodies more because I just don't think they lie. I think they're telling the truth.

My brain can tell me "You can keep going. Get up, go. You got plenty of things to do. You can get it all done." And then my body says, "Let me actually tell you the truth."

Kate: That's super wise.

Annie: Is that true? Is that what you've experienced? I mean, even though your body has cancer in it.

Kate: Mm-hmm. Which I am not picking. Yeah, I think that is such a big truth that I think the idea that our bodies are telling us truths is a wonderful counterbalance to this overly therapeutic Christianity that we've inherited, where if we're all mindset, if we're all positivity over reality, then we don't let our bodies tell the truth. So I think that's a wonderful corrective to obsessively positive things that-

Annie: I know. That is the [inaudible 00:49:52]. One of the things I love about No Cure for Being Human because I think is such an idea of yes, we're supposed to persevere and also your body tells the truth. Yes, we should have hope, don't have toxic positivity. Yes, we should pray and believe that everything happens, don't give up on God when things don't turn out... I mean we are just... And in your book does this beautifully but the role of being a human is "yes and" everything we experience.

Kate: And if we always knew that everything was always going to work out, we wouldn't need hope and we wouldn't need courage. We would just have a straight path.

Annie: Right.

Kate: I mean, that is... you love bravery.

Annie: I do.

Kate: I'm getting on board.

Annie: I mean, I don't love the act of it. It still wears me all the way out. But the fruit of that tree has turned out pretty tasty for my life.

Kate: I really like that one. That to me feels like not just sort of endless, big "everything is possible" horizon. It's just like learning a step forward into the unknown even like this.

Annie: What did we not say that you want to make sure we say?

Kate: This was a complete delight.

Annie: I love that. I just love being at the same place as you. It makes me so happy. It's such a gift. I can't wait for people to read No Cure for Being Human. Happy launch week. I hope it is really fun.

Our last question we always ask, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Kate: Taste tests.

Annie: Oh, what?

Kate: I've been having this really it's kind of like, you know, stressful garbage health season. And I just find that the more I have to deal with that nonsense, I really just want to have taste test parties. And so I'd like to try-

Annie: Please look at correct space. He's so confused. It's the best. It is the best. It feels like, huh. But keep going. French fries for every restaurant.

Kate: Hush puppies. I have been trying six kinds of barbecue.

Annie: Very North Carolina of you.

Kate: Yeah.

Annie: I bet they're living it up you trying all their barbecue.

Kate: I know this doesn't really make any sense. But when I was recently—just passed over this in silence—bitten by a poisonous snake, I was on drugs. And apparently during that time, I contacted a bunch of people to have a taste test party.

Annie: Of barbecue? Is that the barbeque one?

Kate: It was honestly for something really specific. I was like, "Guys, we should try a lot of halibut." They were like, "Do I even know what that tastes like? I'm going."

Annie: I am not going to skip over you getting bit by a poisonous snake. Are you all right?

Kate: Sure. I was-

Annie: Where did it bite you?

Kate: On my leg. Oh, I was envenomated. Which means I got like-

Annie: Did someone suck it out of your leg?

Kate: Oh, my gosh, wouldn't that be sexy, though?

Annie: I want that to be the story.

Kate: No, it was actually a lot of fun to be able to walk into a hospital and utter the words "I've been poisoned."

Annie: Right, right.

Kate: And they're like, "Oh, gosh." Then the drugs for it were \$100,000 and I lived in the emergency room for two days, and I met all kinds of lovely people. It was on the whole surprisingly positive experience.

Annie: When it happened, were you like, "Come on"?

Kate: I couldn't stop laughing. Honestly, I couldn't stop laughing. I went in during the intake process, I was like, "Guys, this really hurts but you can't tell because I think it's so funny."

Annie: You're like, "Let me tell you another part." Answer. Answer.

Kate: I was like, "Guys, I feel like I should break it to you."

Annie: You're going to get some things back on that blood test. But I'm going to tell you you're not telling me something I don't know.

Kate: It's like I don't know how to describe myself as an unlucky person in a way that you'll understand.

Annie: We laugh a lot about this, yes. Okay, bit by snake, taste testing. Okay, so while you're Nashville-

Kate: Great summary.

Annie: ...there's a place called Ladybird Taco. I would like you to do a taste test at Ladybird Taco if you can just, and try three of their different tacos.

Kate: That's sounds-

Annie: It's very close here. I don't know who else you're eating with-

Kate: That sounds so fun.

Annie: ...but we can work it out. I don't know what else your life is. But it is great. It's great. It's the best breakfast tacos. So you can try three different ones.

Kate: Yes, please.

Annie: I'll make you happy. Ladybird. Okay, thanks for doing this. I love you, friend.

Kate: You are the absolute best.

Annie: I'm so grateful. I can't wait for people to read this: No Cure for Being Human. There is no, but you're right. I feel like I'm reading Anne Lamott and I feel like I'm reading... Every time I read you, I think I need a whole Saturday with nothing else to do because I just want to... you're just such a fine writer. So thank you for telling the story, Kate.

[00:54:29] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, don't you love her? Oh, my gosh, she's just so special. She's so special. I could not get enough of her. I adore her. Hey, make sure you pick up a copy of No Cure for Being Human and make sure you're following Kate. Tell her thanks so much for being on the show.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, all the places you may need me, that is how you can find me. And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Have a great couple of days and we'll see you back here on Friday. See you then.