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**Annie:** 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've got a great show in store.

And before we jump into today's conversation, I want to take a moment and tell you about one of our amazing partners, [BetterHelp](#) online therapy. Around here we love to normalize going to therapy. I mean, we're willing to go to a gym or to a doctor for our physical health and we'll go to church and join a small group for our spiritual health. Why not go to counseling for your mental health?

You're going to hear a powerful story about the impact and importance of mental health in today's conversation. Going to therapy doesn't mean something's wrong with you, it means you're investing in and being a good friend to yourself to keep your mind healthy.

BetterHelp is customized online therapy that offers video, phone, and even live chat sessions with your therapist. So you don't have to see anyone on camera if you don't want to. It's much more affordable than in-person therapy and you can start communicating with your therapist in under 48 hours.

Why invest in everything else and not your mind you guys? This podcast is sponsored by BetterHelp online therapy, and our friends listening get 10% off your first month at [betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun](https://betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun). That's [betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun](https://betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun).

**Intro:** Today on the show, I get to talk to Sheila Walsh. Y'all, she is the author of more than 30 books that have sold nearly 6 million copies. You probably have one on your shelf like I do. Even though she's a household name for so many of us, you might be surprised to learn about her battle with clinical depression and one that landed her in a psychiatric hospital alone and continues in many ways to this day.

In her new book,  *Holding On When You Want to Let Go: Clinging to Hope When Life Is Falling Apart*, Sheila vulnerably shares the traumatic events of her childhood and the loneliness, anxiety, and depression that still creep into her life and how the coronavirus pandemic magnified her struggles in the last couple of years and the source of the hope that keeps her holding on each day and every day.

I know you're going to be encouraged by her heart and her story and her wisdom, and her Scottish accent, you guys. So here is my conversation with my friend Sheila Walsh.

[00:02:18] <music>

**Annie:** Sheila, thank you so much for being on That Sounds Fun.

**Sheila:** Oh, it's absolutely an honor, Annie. I love your writing.

**Annie:** Thank you.

**Sheila:** That's the first time I actually get to meet you.

**Annie:** I know. I know. It's surprising we haven't met in person before because we do so many of the same events, but we miss each other.

**Sheila:** Yeah, I know. That's true. And you're with so many of the same friends.

**Annie:** Yes. Oh, Sheila, we share all the people. That is 100% true. Okay, my leading question to you is, will you tell me where you're from in Scotland?

**Sheila:** I'm from a little fishing town called Ayr just south of Glasgow.

**Annie:** Okay, do you know I used to live in Edinburgh?

**Sheila:** No.

**Annie:** Yes. I lived there for almost a year helping with a church plant there.

**Sheila:** Wow. I love Edinburgh. It's such a beautiful city.

**Annie:** So I'm Scottish in my heart even if I'm not in my accent, Sheila. That's the truth.

**Sheila:** I love that.

**Annie:** I'm very Scottish in my heart. And I actually have been to Ayr because I have a lot of friends... we used to do a camp over in outside of Glasgow... I'm going to forget. In Paisley.

**Sheila:** Oh sure?

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Sheila:** That's where Glasgow airport is.

- Annie:** Yeah, yeah. So we used to go over there every summer. I probably did a summer camp there five years in a row maybe.
- Sheila:** Wow.
- Annie:** Yeah. My church in Atlanta would partner with a church there and we would take our summer camp and do it for Scottish kids. It was so fun.
- Sheila:** That's amazing.
- Annie:** I know. It's awesome. So I love it. What do you miss about living over there?
- Sheila:** I miss my sister, I miss the hills and I miss... there's a place that I used to go on the beach because our ocean in Scotland it's not like Florida. It's wild and rugged. And I love that. I used to love, on rainy days, go and watch the ocean just speak volumes. I miss that.
- Annie:** Rainy days being every day.
- Sheila:** That would be every day, yeah. I think there's one dry day in June.
- Annie:** That's exactly right. In June or July you have a shot. But I cannot tell you when I moved home how many pairs of shoes I just chucked. Because it was like they did not survive this winter, this weather, the rain. American shoes do not know what to do over there.
- Sheila:** In fact, somebody said to me when I first came over to America, "Gosh, your skin looks really moisturized. What do you use?" And I said, "I grew up in Scotland. It's been soaked every day since I was born."
- Annie:** That's right. I mean, it just became part of no matter what the morning looked like I did not leave my house without a raincoat or an umbrella. Because it was like, "I know it looks beautiful, but I also know what happens today at some point."
- Sheila:** I know. And I grew up wearing Wellies. Everybody has Wellington boots.
- Annie:** Yeah, absolutely. If you show up wet, people are fine. Like no one's surprised if someone shows up somewhere wet.
- Sheila:** It's expected.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right. I found the people, on the West Coast particularly, the people to be very similar to Southern people. There's just a lot of like kindness and the speed is similar and the "we feed you to make you feel better" is similar. It just felt like the more time I spent with my friends on the West Coast, the more I felt like, "Are we all one people group that just got split over the ocean?"

**Sheila:** That's so true, because Edinburgh, the East Coast is a little more snooty. But the West Coast... like my aunt, Mary, if I went to see my aunt, Mary, I had to be in a diet for two weeks afterwards because she would home bake all these things, and you had to have one of everything or you really offend her.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right. I love the people. It is amazing to me. A country you can drive from east to west in - what? Three hours? Can you get from coast to coast in three?

**Sheila:** Oh, I think you could probably do it in an hour and a half.

**Annie:** Yeah. That's train. Because I used to take the train over from Edinburgh to Glasgow because a lot of concerts that come to town or come to Scotland didn't come to Edinburgh. So I would go over like Brooke Fraser, all these people I go to Glasgow to hear them and I would take the train back the same night.

**Sheila:** Oh, absolutely.

**Annie:** So it's amazing how different the cultures are even just a train ride apart.

**Sheila:** That's what was so strange for me when I first came to America. I opened for an artist called Phil Keaggy.

**Annie:** Oh, yeah.

**Sheila:** Our first date was in Texas. We drove for days. And I'm like, "Are we still in Texas?"

**Annie:** When y'all first moved to the States, did you move straight to Texas or did you start somewhere else?

**Sheila:** No, I actually moved to Laguna Beach in California. It was the first place I was and I'm like, "I love America. It's beautiful."

**Annie:** What a switch!

- Sheila:** I lived in California for a while, then I lived in Virginia Beach for a while, then I lived in Nashville for a while, and now we're in Texas.
- Annie:** I moved to Nashville in 2008. How long ago did you guys leave?
- Sheila:** Let's see. We moved to Nashville when our son was one and he's now 24. And we left when he was... I don't have my calculator. It was a while ago.
- Annie:** Well, because when we were setting this up, I said to my team, I was like, "I think Sheila lives in Nashville, we just haven't crossed paths." So maybe I just had that tucked in my brain from one of your books somewhere that I knew you had at some point lived here.
- Sheila:** At some point.
- Annie:** But now you're in Dallas.
- Sheila:** And I love Nashville. I miss it. What I miss most about Nashville is so many of my friends live there. And in Dallas it's like my hair is not big enough for Dallas. But here I am.
- Annie:** And you're right, you're a good 45 minutes from any of your friends no matter which direction.
- Sheila:** Yeah, absolutely.
- Annie:** It's wild. Okay, will you tell me about life today? All of our friends have been on and absolutely love it. How did you get into the TV world?
- Sheila:** You know, it's really interesting because my first TV gig I worked with the BBC in London after I graduated from seminary. They were looking for someone to host one show on contemporary Christian music. And they didn't know anybody who was a Christian.
- So they asked a friend of mine, a guy called Cliff Richard, who's a big pop star in the UK, but is also a believer. He said, "Well, I have a friend, Sheila Walsh. Why don't you talk to her?" So we did this one program, and they thought it would just be a disaster. But they got so much response we ran for five years.
- Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Sheila:** And then I came to America and I worked on the 700 Club for five years. Life today is my Primo job because I get to do everything I love. I mean, I love interviewing authors and finding new musicians that are just that maybe nobody's heard of yet but they're like, "You've got to hear these people."

But I also get to do our... we have these three specific outreaches. One's called Rescue Life. So I get to go to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, or Bangkok, Thailand, and work with our people who rescue girls out of sex trafficking and set them on a whole new path. And I spend a lot of time in Africa where we set up feeding programs and drill water wells.

But the thing I loved about the people I work with, it's never this "here comes our big white saviors in to save the day." We find out who's God using in this country, and how can we underwrite what they're doing and listen to them? So I love that. I just love it.

**Annie:** Tell me what you love about interviewing so much. Because I do too.

**Sheila:** Well, to me, it's fascinating. I love to listen. Like I'm not a huge talker, talker, talker. I'm really an introvert. But when you listen to people... and even if it's an author, you know, but it's like you get these questions from the PR company, and I'll ask the first one just to see where it goes. But they'll say something and I think, "Now, that's interesting." And it was a little look in your eye when you said that that made me think there's more there. So I'm just fascinated by people. One of my favorite Jewish writers said, "I think God made people because He loves stories."

**Annie:** Oh, wow. Yeah, I find myself endlessly curious about people. And this has been the medium that's appropriate.

**Sheila:** Otherwise you're a stalker.

**Annie:** Otherwise I'm a stalker or I'm too nosy or I'm a gossip. There's all sorts of other ways this has played out in my life. Somehow this became my job. I get it. So fun. One of the things I love about you, from a distance up until now when our friendship has now begun, but our mutual friends say this: everyone really looks up to how you talk about the gospel and how you share about Jesus. But your new book,  *Holding On When You Want to Let Go* , really dives into this kind of behind-the-scenes of depression.

**Sheila:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Will you talk about holding both of those things? You can get up on a stage on a Saturday in front of 10,000 women and talk about Jesus and then crumble in your hotel room that same day.

**Sheila:** Yeah, absolutely. Back in 1992, I was hospitalized for a month with severe clinical depression. I basically had not dealt with my father's death. My father was my hero, and he had a massive brain aneurysm. Unfortunately, my dad tried to kill me before he killed himself.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh.

**Sheila:** And back in those days you didn't talk about suicide, particularly if you're a Christian, and anything to do with mental illness. Because he died in a psych hospital. He was buried in an unmarked grave and we left town, and we never mentioned his name again. And I just stuffed all that for years.

But the foundation stone at the kind of basement of my soul was, "There's something wrong with me." Because if your dad who once really loved you could suddenly seem to hate you, there's something intrinsically wrong with you. And so I stuffed that for as long as I could.

And then one day... and it was a simple encounter with a kind of person. I was kind of a well-known, very lonely person. You know, I kept this wall around my life. And one day, this sweet woman just looked me in the eyes and asked me, "How are you doing?" And I wasn't expecting it. And I didn't have time to pull up my wall, and I just crumbled.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Sheila:** By that evening, I was in the locked ward of a psych hospital same age as my father.

**Annie:** Were you already married? Did you already have kids?

**Sheila:** No, mm-mm. I didn't marry my husband till I was 38.

**Annie:** Hey, let's talk about that. I'm 41. Let's talk about it.

**Sheila:** Really?

**Annie:** We're going to talk about that, Sheila. You just hang on. Man, so you were the same age as your dad. Were you already a believer at that point?

**Sheila:** Yeah. I became a believer when I was 11. But the interesting thing was I became a believer through a very broken window. My mom was the one who prayed for me. And when she said, "Not only is Jesus your number one in life. No. You have a heavenly Father." And that would be good news to a lot of people, but I remember thinking 11, "Wow, I've got one more chance to get it right."

**Annie:** Oh, Sheila.

**Sheila:** "Whatever my dad saw in me that made him hate me, I cannot afford to let that happen again with God." So I thought, "I'm going to be the perfect Christian if it kills me." And it almost did.

**Annie:** One of the quotes from the book that I loved is you said, "Why are so many of us who love Jesus so unhappy? Why are we just hanging on by a thread? Why do we struggle in our relationships? Why is everything a little disappointing? Why is nothing quite as great as we thought it would be?" Whoo, Sheila, that messes with me?

**Sheila:** But it's so true. But I think it's because I feel like... remember the woman that we meet, I think it's Mark 5. And she's never named. She's called a woman with the issue of blood.

**Annie:** It bothers me so much how many women in the Bible don't have names, by the way-

**Sheila:** Oh, I know.

**Annie:** I mean, there are men too. There are men too. But there are a lot of women.

**Sheila:** History tells us her name was Veronica.

**Annie:** Oh, yeah?

**Sheila:** Some of the early church fathers mentioned her. But it doesn't make it into the Bible. So yeah. Anyway. But she came for a specific miracle. She wanted the bleeding to stop. And when that happened, she could have left but she would not have received the miracle she needed, which was telling Jesus the whole truth. I think it's so interesting that He stopped and said, "Who, who touched me?" It's like



big decision time. But because she got to speak and told Him everything, then He said to her, "Go in peace."

And I think that's what happened. I think I gave my life to Christ at 11 but I ended up in the psych hospital at 34. And for the first time, I told Jesus everything. I told Him I wished I was dead. I told Him I didn't like my life. I told Him I didn't want to go through this. So if He was kind enough to take me home, I would be very grateful. Because I didn't want to kill myself and do that to my mom. You know, that she would go through that twice. But it just felt this is too much. It was one of God's greatest gifts to me to end up in a psych hospital.

**Annie:** Really? I think so many of our friends listening would have looked at your life and not known any of this. I mean, you've talked about it some and you've walked around it, but you go so deep in  *Holding On When You Want to Let Go* . I think this is interesting for people to hear. You're telling a lot of stories from 1992, from decades go up till now. Why was this the right time to write this book instead of 1995? Or instead of never?

**Sheila:** That definitely was an option that I considered.

**Annie:** Right.

**Sheila:** Because my depression... I mean, I've been on a pretty even keel. You know, I was prescribed medication back then. I take that faithfully every day. And I know some of the things to do to kind of keep myself in check. But maybe halfway through 2020 I found myself really spiraling again. Obviously, all my events were canceled. Life was canceled generally speaking.

I remember I would wake up every morning with such a feeling of despair and heaviness. And every now and again, I would watch the news, I tried not to, but I would see. There was one that just killed me because it was on our local news. It was a woman and she was probably, I don't know, 70. And her husband was in hospital with COVID. He was in intensive care and all she wanted was to be able to go and say goodbye. And she wasn't allowed to. I mean, I just thought the world has gone crazy.

That's when I started to write. It was like, "Okay, God, this is a whole new ballgame. I don't have to live in this normal. I mean, a while ago they gave me some tools and I've learned some things. And it's good. I mean, I have bad days and good days, but I'm okay. This is a whole new normal and I'm not okay, and I'm not sure I can do this."

**Annie:** I think there are so many of us that didn't have the knowledge or the capacity to handle what a pandemic does to a life. Like we just didn't know. It was our great grandparents who experienced anything like this. I've heard John Eldridge say that we drained our reserves. And we may feel okay today. But if someone said, "Hey, we're going on lockdown again tomorrow," like they've done in Australia, we see that our reserves are empty. That it feels impossible. Like I just feel like I would rage in some sort of way.

**Sheila:** And what made it the hardest for me too is our son, Christian, who's 24 he was in grad school in Houston. So for a whole year he's in his apartment by himself with his cat. And I wanted to go because he got COVID and I couldn't.

**Annie:** Oh, gosh.

**Sheila:** When I would be doing these Zoom calls or FaceTime calls with him, I could see he was disappearing a little bit more every day. And I could tell that his anxiety level was off the charts. And he would try to be like, "No, Mom, I'm good," but I mean I could feel it in my gut-

**Annie:** You're the mom.

**Sheila:** ...that he was not doing well. And that made it so much worse. You know, how do we do this? And you're right, John's right. It was like whatever sand was left in that whole egg timer, every last grain was gone.

[00:18:36] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, [Brooklinen](#). Okay, have you ever wondered if you would pull off just wearing your comforter from your bed all day?

Okay, let me tell you. Y'all, hand to heaven Brooklinen's new loungewear is basically the socially acceptable equivalent of wearing a duvet all day. It is so cozy. I have the t-shirt and I have the joggers. And hand to heaven, you guys, I have put them on my body every single day since I got them. All winter long you are going to see me in these not real pants. I mean they are unbelievable. It's the button-free, zipperless, softest clothing option.

Finally, your comfort dreams are coming true. So are mine. And while we still have to get out of bed, you can bring the ridiculously soft fabrics that Brooklinen always

find into your days with you. This loungewear is almost unreal. You'll look like a person even if you're totally bulging out in your mind.

Brooklyn has been listening to what we all need most and they responded with ultra-comfy loungewear at a fair price. This loungewear has classic cuts and no zippers for limitless comfort that you can pull off in real life. Be cozy all day. You guys, we can be cozy all day. I'm telling you, I'm telling you.

Bonus points. Brooklinen offers bundle deals on loungewear so you can get more comfort for less money. And if you're looking for more ways to enhance your comfort, check out Brooklinen's candles, and eye masks, and accessories to properly celebrate your chill. There's a reason Brooklinen has over 75,000 5-star reviews and counting. I am going to go write one today for the loungewear, you guys.

Go on, get comfortable and get it for less at Brooklinen. Go to Brooklinen.com and use the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN to get \$20 off, with a minimum purchase of \$100. That's Brooklinen.com and enter the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN for \$20 off with a minimum purchase of \$100. That's Brooklinen.com, promo code THATSOUNDSFUN. And if you want to be twinsies, my pants are green and my shirt is white. Let's all be complete together.

And now let's get back to our conversation with Sheila.

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**Annie:** So did you start writing this while we were still in the middle? Were you like, "One of my healing moves will be writing"? Or did you kind of get to the end of 2020...? I mean, I don't know how fast they'll get your books out because you're a huge deal. So maybe they can turn it around real fast for you. When did you start writing and what was the motivation to like, "I've got to get this moving now"?

**Sheila:** I honestly didn't start writing it as a book for publication. I started writing it more as a kind of journal for myself. My spiritual mentor, before she died, was Ruth Graham. Sometimes when Billy would be off in crusades, I would go and stay at the house with Ruth, and she poured so much wisdom into me. And she said, "Sheila, when you're struggling or when you're trying to find out something, don't just read what's current. Go as far back as you can, because those who have gone before us have left a roadmap."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Sheila:** So I found this thing by Athanasius who wrote in the fourth century. And one of the things he said just captivated me. He says, "Whereas most of Scripture speaks to us, the psalms speak for us." They give us a language of lament. They give us a language of pain of questions. So what I started to do... we live in a little townhome, and it's got three levels. And I would go out every morning. I did it today. I'd go in the balcony and I'd read three psalms out loud. Because it's good for my ears to hear what my eyes are reading.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Sheila:** And it's like a declaration of what I believe to be true no matter what I might be feeling at that particular moment. And I found that really healing. The other thing that I'm a huge believer in is pouring out your pain, but in the presence of Christ, as opposed to I'll be back in a minute. But I have some things I need to do over here.

You know, I think of how He was in the garden of Gethsemane, just processing His pain in the presence of His Father. And I found that that leaves more space for grace in my own heart. I'm not careful with my words. I don't think, "How is this going to sound up in the heavenly courts?" I just pour it all out. And it feels very cleansing for me.

**Annie:** How do you pick which three psalms you're reading out loud every day?

**Sheila:** I make it a discipline. I have this sweet book. Oh, it's still up in the balcony. I have this sweet book and it's just all the Psalms. Dr. David Jeremiah gave it to me. Oh, it's here. It's called *The Focused Life*. Every day is three psalms and one chapter of Proverbs. And it's made me go through the Psalms that I missed before because I thought "Well, that's not a very upbeat Psalm, and that's far too long." The discipline of going through all the Psalms has made me pick up things that I would have missed before because it's not a psalm that I landed on. It's been really great.

**Annie:** We've been talking here at the show a lot about prayer and Psalm 23 keeps coming up as a theme that people go back to. Have you found that one particularly to be a part of the healing for you?

**Sheila:** Do you know what's interesting to me, if you really break that psalm down, there are 10 of the names of God in that one psalm. Just even starting from "the Lord is my shepherd." But the thing I love is, my mom was a farm accountant in our town. And so she did the books for all the farmers of the shepherds, which gave me

excellent access to lambing season. I was allowed to go and watch the lambs being born.

But every now and then there's a strange phenomenon where ewe will give birth to a lamb and she'll immediately reject it. They're called bummer lambs. And then the shepherd has to take that lamb into his house and feed it with a bottle and keep it warm. At least at some part during the day, he'll hold it close to his heart so the lamb can hear a heartbeat. And when it's strong enough, it goes back to the flock.

But this is the thing I loved seeing. In the morning when the shepherd comes out, and he will call, "Sheep, sheep, sheep," the first ones to run to him or the bummer lamb because they know his voice. And I just think that I will be a bummer lamb until the day I die. But it's not the bad news anymore. It's the good news. It's not that Jesus loves His bummer lambs anymore. It's just that we actually have been flat on our faces, broken, dead, done, and He picked us up and held us close to His heart.

**Annie:** Yeah. I mean, throughout the book you do go through these "hold on" and then how God is holding on to us. Will you talk about why both of those promises matter? Not just the "here are the promises of why we can hold on and what we should hold on to," but why it matters that God holds on to us as the bummer lambs.

**Sheila:** Yeah. I think that perhaps for me is the biggest deal. Like I was doing a little study. One of my favorite chapters in the whole Bible is Romans 8. I mean, I can't wait to go to heaven and say to Paul, "Hi five, Paul. Brilliant job."

**Annie:** Sheila, you need to know that Paul and I aren't best friends. Peter and I are best friends, but Paul and I aren't best friends. But Romans 8 this fall is bringing me more around and more around than Paul.

**Sheila:** I totally get that. I totally get that. And I love Peter too. I identify more with Peter than I do with Paul. But the thing I love about Romans 8 is that well-known verse, you know, everybody quotes Romans 8:28, I used to have a bit of a problem with that. Because I'm thinking, "How can anything good come from my father's suicide? How can anything good come from my friend who lost two children?" Don't tell me that that was good or that God's going to bring good from it.

But then I thought, "Okay, here's the deal. I'm me. I'm a little person that was born on the west coast of Scotland and I'm walking through this life and doing my best job. This is God we're talking about. So if He tells me something, and He's never lied, therefore, I have to shift how I read that verse." So I have to say, "Okay, here's

all the broken bits. Here's the bits that I don't get, and you have promised that of all of this, you'll bring good, so there you go. Warren Wiersbe writes: "we live by faith and not by explanations." And sometimes, I would like explanations-

**Annie:** All the time I would like explanations, Sheila. That could be my Twitter bio. I would like some explanations.

**Sheila:** That has actually helped me.

**Annie:** That's beautiful.

**Sheila:** I kind of repositioned myself as really seeing myself as I used to be. I came across an old photo on my phone last night. And maybe two miles outside of where I was born there's the ruins of a castle. And there's also five miles up the road this beautiful castle. The family still live there. My sister liked that castle. But I was more comfortable in the ruins of the castle because there was something about it that felt familiar.

And I find myself in Scripture verses now but differently than how I heard them, you know, when I was growing up, or in seminary, or on the 700 Club for years. I take it now based on the fact that this is God saying this. So if there's a problem, I think it's probably on my end.

**Annie:** Yeah. If there's a misunderstanding, it's most likely in me.

**Sheila:** Yeah.

**Annie:** I'm going to say 95% of the time... I'll give the Lord 5%, but-

**Sheila:** Chances are, yeah.

**Annie:** Chances are pretty high it's an Annie problem. The one in Romans 8 that I would love for you to talk about that has meant so much to me lately is Romans 8:24 that says, "Hope that is seen is no hope at all." I mean, I just love that.

**Sheila:** Yeah. Yeah. Hope that is seen is no hope. I know. It's like... how do you even unpack something like that? It's so much bigger than my human mind can take in. It's almost I feel like at the moment like I'm in the orchestra pit, and everything that's going on around because life has become so noisy, and people are so angry and so annoying, and so confused, and so polarized. And I'm like, "You're out of tune at the moment."

But I feel as if every now and again when I get this glimpse of the greatness of God, I almost feel it's like for a second he just pulls back the curtain and I get this teeny glimpse of this hope that is enormous. And I wouldn't be able to take more than a tiny glimpse because it would blow me over. But it makes it easier to live with a cacophony here knowing that that's ahead.

**Annie:** There's a big hope ahead. The other thing I'm thinking about is when you said that about faith, that we walk by faith, for our friends listening and are depressed, who feel really like they're in a bad season, who feel confused, how do we balance faith and walking by faith and having crazy faith, like Pastor Mike Todd teaches about, and having these real deep sadnesses or chemical imbalances? How do we hold both of those things?

**Sheila:** You know, it's interesting. Faith was totally redefined for me by an encounter with one young woman. Because I have been part of so many different parts of the church. I was raised in a small Scottish Baptist Church. Then in seminary I went to a quite high Anglican Church. Then for a time I was in the charismatic church. So I ended up like goodnight Vienna.

**Annie:** You tried them all.

**Sheila:** But then while I was on the 700 Club, I got this letter from a girl and she said, "I watched your program three times a day and sometimes it helps me and sometimes I want to take my shoe off and throw it through the screen." And she included a phone number. So I called her and I said, "I hope you don't mind me calling you, but I have a couple of questions. First of all, why do you watch it three times a day?" And she said, "Because I have a terminal illness and I just look for any scrap of hope."

And I said, "Okay, this is the real question I want to ask. Why do you want to take your shoe off and throw it through the screen?" And she said, "Because you never talk about people like me. You never talk about people who love God and who are not being healed."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Sheila:** "You never talked about people who..." She blew me away. And that day after that conversation, I went up to Pat Robertson's office and said, "I quit."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Sheila:** And he said, "Why do you quit?" And I told him about the conversation. And he said, "So what do you want to do about it?" And I said, "We need to start telling her story, stories like her, when the marriage doesn't get fixed, when things don't happen. Because to me, that's faith. These people still believe when they didn't get the big Whoo from heaven."

**Annie:** Right.

**Sheila:** And so Pat was amazing. The 700 Club used to be 90 minutes, he cut it to 60 and he gave me the last 30 minutes. And she was my first guest. She flew in with her nurse. And what I saw was that some of us are running in the snow and leaving trails. Some people leave like one footprint, but the depth of that footprint is spectacular.

**Annie:** It makes me think of that part in Daniel, where the three guys say to King Nebuchadnezzar, "We know what God can do, but even if he doesn't..."

**Sheila:** I know. That's faith to me. And there's been so much corruption in our evangelical Christianity of this whole name and claim it and mark it and pack it garbage. Because my thing is, okay, I spent quite a bit of time in malnutrition clinics in Africa. If what you're teaching doesn't work in that Malnutrition Clinic, it's not the gospel.

**Annie:** Wow, right. Right. But then the challenge I feel with that, Sheila, is I do... I mean, the parts of praying and believing and seeing God do miracle things, I mean, I still love that part of my faith.

**Sheila:** Me too. And I absolutely believe it. I mean, I absolutely believe. So if anybody comes up to me and says, "You know, would you pray for me for this or that?" I will always do it because I believe God can do the impossible. There's nothing too hard for God. But I don't have the right to demand the answer I want. Again, it's like Jesus. "If there's any way, move this off the table, but, your will be done."

**Annie:** I mean, is that what your prayer life still looks like? Do you still bring the full request and just have gotten better at the surrender on the backside? I'm very good at the first half of that. I'm coming around the back half. I'm getting a lot of practice in the back half. But is that what your prayer life looks like?

**Sheila:** Yeah. And it was changed just two years ago. I got back from a trip... I mean, you know, it's like you're always tired when you've been kind of speaking and pouring



out. But I had this headache I'd never had before and it was slightly troubling. So my husband said, "Let's just go to a drop in clinic, maybe you've got the flu or something."

And they asked me, you know, "Is this the worst headache you've ever had?" And I said, "Yes." And then came the follow-up question, "Has anyone in your family ever had a brain aneurysm?" And the atmosphere changed. Immediately I'm taken to the emergency room. In the car, all I'm thinking is, No, no, no. I mean, I went from loving my father to be terrified of my father. And I'm like, "God, you cannot do this to me. You can't do this to my son. You can't do this to my husband. Am I going to be like my father? He never got his words back. They were on a shelf where he couldn't even reach them."

So I'm rushed into this thing and put into this huge tube. And the guy who's the clicker said... he gave me this little panic button and he said one thing that just shifted everything. He said, "I'm going to be in the other room. So you need this because you're going to be alone in here." And in that second I thought, "No, I'm not."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Sheila:** I mean, I didn't say that to him or he would have moved me to a different area at the hospital.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Sheila:** But suddenly I had this incredible awareness, Annie, I am not going to be alone in there. And I was in it for like 45 minutes and I found myself praying and saying, "Jesus, you get this. I did not want this. But you have a track record with me and I know that you love my husband and my son more than I ever will. And you love me. And so I'm gladly leaving the results up to you. Whatever is going to be the thing that brings you more glory, I'm in."

And the thing that's so good about God is I had that piece before I got the answer. I mean, they just said, "No, you're good. You've been working too hard. You need to slack off a bit." But I honestly believe, Annie, in the worst moments of our life, the peace of Christ is available.

**Annie:** Yeah. You're like, "Can I keep that panic button? It's just a gift."

**Sheila:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Gosh, Sheila, thank you for sharing that. I think so many of us are in the tube. Right? So many of us do not know the answer yet. We do not know how this story goes. We did not think we'd be here. And whatever it is, I mean, that is what your book is all about is this is not what we thought it was going to be. And what do we do with that? How do we hold on? How do we trust that God is holding on to us and believing that Jesus loves us more than we understand? I mean, is that kind of what it needs to come down to? I'm having this real-time revelation with you of like, do I just need to go, "Oh, yeah, Jesus loves me more than I remember."

**Sheila:** Yeah, absolutely. And the thing that's kind of ironic and paradoxical about that is he knows absolutely the worst about me. Even the things I'm not even aware of yet myself that will pop up next Tuesday. I mean, he knows everything. Yet he loves me more than anybody else ever will.

When I kind of began to get that in a fresh way, for some reason it just shifted everything in me. Because I thought, "Okay, I'm not sure what's going to happen, but I know you've got me, and I know you love me more than I even would have the capacity to hold."

**Annie:** Yes!

[00:37:21] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about our incredible partner, [Raycon](#). I say all the time what an honor it feels like that you have this podcast in your ears and that you spend this time with me, letting me into daily aspects of your life like grocery shopping, or your commute, or your workout. Well done, don't quit! And I'm also really aware of the content, the music, and the podcasts that I allow be in my ears.

Well, my Raycon earbuds help me set the tone for what's in my head, whether that's worship music to call me during stressful moments or the right BPM when I need a little motivation on a run, or listening to podcast that teach me and encourage me. My Raycon is an everyday necessity in my life.

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And now back to finish our conversation with Sheila.

[00:39:24] <music>

**Annie:** I am reminded again that our hope and salvation is about what happens after this. But I'm very thankful for how our hope and salvation is the nearness of Jesus right now.

**Sheila:** Right, absolutely.

**Annie:** That it is not just about a ticket to the next place.

**Sheila:** No, no, it's not. I mean, it sounds kind of cliché, but He really is my closest friend. I mean, it's the first person I say hello to in the morning and talk through my day with. Like last night I had this stupid thing I blew up at my... really at my husband, but my son was there too, over something really stupid.

He was telling Christian that, you know... first of all, my son is kind of this old soul and this beautiful spirit. He's got bright pink hair and tattoos. It's just a heart as big as Texas. He's just as beautiful. But my husband says something about the way Christian was dressed, and that not being good because he's in grad school, and he's doing clinical psychology, and you need to be yada, yada. And they're having a normal conversation.

And suddenly, it just triggered something in me. I just went up to my husband and like, "Let's not do that." And it just kind of quieted the whole room. And Chris said, "You know, I need to go downstairs finish a paper." And Barry said, "Do you want to talk?" And I'm like, "No." And he went upstairs.

And I was like, you know, whenever I have a response, a proportion to what's happening I know there's history attached. So I still am constantly bringing those pieces of my history into the presence of Jesus. We still have our Christmas tree up from last year. Do not tell anybody that.

**Annie:** I'm so proud of you.

**Sheila:** I sat next to the Christmas tree in the Lord's presence, it's like, "Can you believe that?" "What is wrong with me?" And then there's all sorts of little memories coming back of where, you know, we were the poor kids after my dad's suicide, we got free school uniforms and free school meals, and I never wore the right clothes. And Jesus showed me, He's like, "You're still feeling like you're that little girl, but you're not. And it's okay." His friendship is life-changing.

**Annie:** I am interested to hear your take on this? Do you think some of the gift of getting married at 38 is the friendship you built with Jesus?

**Sheila:** Yes, absolutely.

**Annie:** Me too.

**Sheila:** Because the only person I actually get to tell everything to when I'm still processing things is you, Jesus. So we've been married five months, and it's Christmas and we're going we're decorating the tree. And I'm thinking, "This is going to be brilliant," until he takes out the tape measure and starts measuring where all the ornaments should go as if they could be equal distance.

**Annie:** Barry!

**Sheila:** And I said, "Can you just give me some minutes?" And I allowed myself the time and I'm like, "Lord, are you kidding me? I've married a nutcase." So I talk life over with him. And then I came back and said to Barry, "That's not the way I'm going to hang them. I'm going to hang them all over the place. You're going to have to be okay with that."

But because I've learned I can talk over everything with Jesus and then I can talk with Barry when I'm not so "Are you kidding me?" It's like we've been married 27 years, and we've built this good life together.

**Annie:** This summer, when I was on vacation, I went on a walk on the beach, and I was talking to Jesus, and I just said, "Why am I like this about this one situation?" I was like, "Why am I like this? Does this make you as crazy as it makes me?" And so kindly the Holy Spirit just said to my heart, "It's just because you have a really tender heart." And I was like, "Oh, it is. You're right."

**Sheila:** I love that.

**Annie:** I could start to cry saying it to you. For all the ways that I hoped and thought I'd get married in my 20s or my 30s, those conversations are the ones that I go like, "Man, I wouldn't trade my life for the one that I have. I wouldn't trade this life for the one I thought I'd have because of the gift Jesus is to me, that I don't know that I'd experienced if I would have chosen... If I had gotten married at 22, that guy would have had a heavier load to carry than you can imagine because I'd have wanted him to be everything.

**Sheila:** Yeah, of course.

**Annie:** And now who I marry, I'm like, "You're very welcome to come in here. I've got a very important primary relationship." Because even on that day, I was talking to Jesus before I talked to a man. Like I was trying to sort something out before I mess something up.

**Sheila:** That's brilliant. To me, that's life-changing. It's literally life-changing. I mean, it's like no matter where I am in the world we're together.

**Annie:** We do have a crew of women and men who listen that are not married yet. We have a lot of mamas, a lot of married friends. But will you speak for a minute to our unmarried friends about how to cultivate a friendship with Jesus and how to really learn how to make Him the number one relationship? Teach me to, teach us how to do that.

**Sheila:** Gosh, I never think of myself as an expert in anything. I think of myself as a constant learner. I mean, I write books more out of desperation than I do out of, you know, those moments when you go eureka. But when I got out of the psych hospital, one of the first things that I did I'm going to go through a period of two or three years where it's just I write Jesus a really long letter-

**Annie:** Wow.

**Sheila:** ...almost as if we've never met. Because I felt as if... I went to seminary when I was 19 to learn everything I needed to do so He wouldn't stop loving me. So it was heavily filtered. So I went somewhere where it was nice and sat down by a river and I wrote a really, really long letter kind of introducing myself. And basically saying, "I really, really want to get to know you better because I feel like I've been on the fringes. I feel like I've been kind of in a goldfish bowl where I could see you but there's just something there between us."

And believe it or not, Annie, that actually was a starting place for me. It was just this open, pouring it all out, here I am. I don't know if you know this..." Of course he knew this.

**Annie:** Right. Right.

**Sheila:** "I don't know if you know this and here's what I'm afraid of, and here's what I don't think. Here's what I don't like." And then it was just this ongoing conversation of just talking to Him about everything, about absolutely everything. At the moment I have a stack of six books to the right of my laptop and it's just the sayings of Jesus. It's just all the red letter stuff. It's just all the... Even I'm reading... I'm sure you've read. Have you read Dane Ortlund's book, *Gentle and Lowly*?

**Annie:** No. Everybody is talking about it, though. Everybody is talking about it.

**Sheila:** I'm not far into it but I love the fact that he says lots of people describe Jesus in different ways; this is the only way He described himself.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Sheila:** It's the only time Jesus says, "This is what I'm like. I'm gentle and lowly." So I am just hungry to get to know Him better, to fall more in love with Him, to get this bigger picture of this...

Annie, every time when it gets close to Easter, I get so... I don't know how to even express it. Like that kind of grief where you feel that you could bend over of thinking the intentionality of this is going to be the worst moment of my life because for that, you know, from like noon till three when the sky goes dark, Jesus is alone for the first time in eternity. His Father turns away and He says to John, "This is your mother." She's not my mother. He's fatherless and He's motherless for

three hours. And He purposely did that because He didn't want to live without us. That's just mind-blowing to me.

**Annie:** I think writing a letter feels like such a beautiful thing that we could all do today or this weekend. We talk a lot about Sabbath and taking a day. I'm an enneagram seven and so I'm a very...and you know this about my personality but I choose the fun a lot more than I choose the sad. But on my Sabbath day is really when I grieve a lot because I get quiet.

So I'm thinking, man, what would I say if I wrote a really long letter to Jesus this weekend? What would it...? Say that feels like a really good practice for all of us. It feels very simple. Write a letter to him and just tell the whole truth. A lot of people are worried about writing things down. I have a lot of people push back when I talk about journaling of like, "What if my kids see it? or "what if my husband see it?" or "what if I die and my parents publish it or something?" So I would just say to people: if you write a letter, write it one time and then you can throw it away or you can burn it or you can do whatever.

**Sheila:** That's what I did with that letter, Annie. I wrote it and it was like five pages. And then I sat it down and I set fire to it. And as the smoke was going up, that was just my, like, "Mailed."

**Annie:** Wow mailed. Yes, mailed. That's beautiful. Just mailed it like that. Oh, I love it. *Holding On When You Want to Let Go* has been out for a couple of weeks. What has it been like seeing the response so far? I would imagine it's so tear-jerking.

**Sheila:** It's been really nice. Because sometimes I like to jump on Facebook Live and just say, "Hey guys, how's it going? What's happening?" And to get some of the responses of people saying, "I feel like somebody has said my story out loud and not self combusted."

**Annie:** Wow. Wow.

**Sheila:** That's wonderful for me. Even just talking about suicidal ideation, or you know my father's suicide, I got a note from a young girl, she's 18 and I could see the tears on the computer page even though they weren't there. Because it was like her dad was an elder in the church, had struggled with severe mental illness and had taken his life, and some moron in the church told her that her father was in hell.

**Annie:** Oh, gosh.

- Sheila:** And to be able to say to this girl, "No, the second your father took his last breath here, he took his first breath in the presence of the Lord."
- Annie:** Wow. I mean the beauty of writing books with this depth is you speak to people's deepest places. The problem is when they share their stories, it's their deepest places.
- Sheila:** I know. I know.
- Annie:** Wow. Wow. Okay, is there anything we didn't talk about that you want to make sure we cover?
- Sheila:** No. I love the way you interview because you just talk. I love that Annie. I mean, I have been a fan from afar. I love the depth of your writing. I love the authenticity. And I love the fact you tell us to get a hobby. I mean, that's just so cool.
- Annie:** I believe it. I made a list this week where I was like, "I have got to cross stitch something. I haven't crossed it steady thing in 2021. Let's go. Get your hobby back out."
- Sheila:** Well, when I thought about the hobby thing, I thought okay, "What can I do?" because I don't do anything like that. My son and I go down, we volunteer at the shelter. We walk all the dogs, clean up.
- Annie:** It's a good hobby.
- Sheila:** I love it.
- Annie:** So because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me why it sounds fun to you.
- Sheila:** Right now what sounds fun to me would be getting on a plane flying to Glasgow, renting a car, driving down to Ayr, and my sister and I going for a picnic in the park where we used to go when we were children. There would be big cages of bunny rabbits and then if we sat really quietly the little deer would come over and we could watch them.
- Annie:** What are you going to eat? Tell me about the sandwiches. What are you going to do? Are you going to make them or are you going to pick them up?



**Sheila:** Oh, no, we always made them because we always lived on a really low budget. It was always tomato sandwiches. White bread and tomato sandwiches and salt and pepper and a flask of tea. No iced tea. None of that.

**Annie:** No, no, no, no.

**Sheila:** Oh yes. Yes. Millionaire shortbread, oh.

**Annie:** People try to make it here and I appreciate it. I do. They'll bring it to shows, they'll bring it to our live podcast, all these things. They'll bring me a box of millionaires shortbread. It's delicious. But it is like the water is different in Scotland.

**Sheila:** Oh, totally. Totally. I know. My mom made the best millionaire shortbread.

**Annie:** Oh. Our friends listening have heard me say this before. But my best friends at Edinburgh, they will ship things to me from the US side and then I'll just bring it over when I come visit. And like I have things stacking up in my closet because I won't be able to go in 2020. So I'm like, "I still have that pair of Allbirds you ordered in the fall of '19. So I've got to get over there just because I need some space back at my guest closet."

**Sheila:** That's funny.

**Annie:** Scotland is one of the purest, truest places where I've experienced God and so it will always be a home to me. So I'm sorry I don't have the accent to prove it. Sheila, I thank you for your kind words about the work we do. And I just can't tell you how much I honor and respect you and look up to you. So thanks for even making time to do this.

**Sheila:** Thank you, Annie. I loved it.

[00:52:50] <music>

**Outro:** Oh, you guys, don't you love her? Ah, I love her. Be sure to grab a copy of  *Holding On When You Want to Let Go* . Make sure you're following Sheila and tell her thanks for being on the show.

If you need anything else for me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), all the places you may need me, that's how you can find me. And I think that's it for me today, friends. I hope you have a great Wednesday. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I

will do the same. And today I'm going to eat lunch at Baja Burrito. That sounds so fun to me. Next time you're in Nashville, eat at Baja. It's awesome.

Have a great couple of days. We'll see you back here on Friday with my dear friend, Mac Powell. See you guys then.