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[00:01:01] <Music>

Annie: Hi friends, welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. It is a really special week here at That Sounds Fun, and do close it out we have got a great show in store for you.

You guys, Tuesday night, the That Sounds Fun Live Stream November 2nd, yes, I am so excited, y'all, I'm so excited. There's a great VIP experience. There's going to be a Q&A with you and me before the show, and then we'll hop right in with our buddy Eddie Kaufholz.

It's going to be a live version that is not limited to 30 minutes of me and Eddie bringing our list just like we did on Annie and Eddie Keep Talking. It is going to be so fun, you are going to love it. So head to compassionlive.com, that's where all the details are. And be sure to grab your ticket today.

This week on the show, I've gotten to pass the mic over to my good friend, Pastor Mike Kelsey. Y'all know him, he's been on the show with his wife Ashley. He's been on the show himself. And you probably remember last year he hosted the show for a week just like this.

He is a trusted voice, and leading, and teaching me about a million things about how to be a leader, about family life, and racial justice, and what that looks like. And I have learned so much from him over the last couple of years, particularly these weeks where he is hosting the show. I just feel like hearing these conversations between Mike and his friends, without me in the room or on the microphone has led to some really deep learning for me.

So I called Mike a little while ago, and said, "Mike, can I please hire you to come back and do another week of shows for us?" And he has so kindly and so amazingly put together these three episodes this week.

Remember, you can go back and listen to him and Jason Reynolds on Monday. He and Dr. Christina Edmondson and Reverend Dr. Mica Edmondson on Wednesday show. Y'all have been soaking in the challenges and lessons that Mike and his friends have been providing us. And I'm just so proud to be a part of such a thoughtful group of friends on both sides of the microphone. I'm so thankful for y'all. I'm so thankful for Mike and his friends. This has been a great week and it continues today.

Mike finishes out the week with a whole roundtable of incredible women. And I can't wait for y'all to get to know Ashley, that we got to meet her this summer on the live podcast episode, and Jessica, and Christina, Jenique, and Sheila. I cannot wait for y'all to hear this conversation.

[00:03:39] <Music>

Mike: All right. Well, I am in the room with a bunch of beautiful Black women who also happen to be some of my really, really good friends. One of them is more than a good friend, she is my wife. And those of you who are listening you may have heard her before because she rudely interrupted my interview with Annie Downs during the tour.

Ashley: I was asked.

Mike: She was asked and she killed it. But let me have y'all introduce yourselves, and so glad that you're on with us today.

Jessica: I'm Jessica.

Ashley: I'm Ashley.

Christina: Christina

Jenique: My name is Jenique.

Sheila: And I am Sheila.

Mike: It is good to have y'all with us. Now, this is a conversation, the type of conversation that we have all the time, just sitting around hanging out. And what we wanted to do in this episode, is just give women an opportunity to process some of the joys and challenges of being a Black woman.

Because there are Black women who are listening, who have had similar experiences to some of the experiences that you all have had or are having those experiences right now. And there are women who are not Black who are listening. Who are growing in their understanding of some of these joys and challenges or in relationship with women that they love, who constantly ask the types of questions that we're going to be talking about today.

So, I'm super excited to be able to process this with y'all. And I'm honestly low-key intimidated because I'm a dude. And I'll be honest with you, I thought about just handing the microphone to Ashley and having her run this interview. But she told me that was a cop-out. As a pastor, as a man, she was like, "No, you need to sit in this conversation." So I'm super excited.

But here's where we're going to start first. Because we were talking a little earlier about 10 things that Black women want other people to know. 10 things black women want you to know, and I'm just the curator of the conversation. But I'm curious myself, what are some of the things that y'all, as Black women, want other people to know?

Christina: I'll kick it off. I think, you go to the grocery store and you buy your meat for your meal, and you come home, and you take the wrapper off, and what do you do?

Sheila: You wash the chicken.

Christina: You wash that chicken.

Mike: Wait. This is controversial?

Christina: This is absolutely controversial. USDA, FDA has dissenting opinions. I'm telling you wash the meat. Black women really want you to wash your meat.

Jenique: That's good, Christina. And while we're already talking about food, I think it is very important to say that charcuterie is not a meal. It is not. It's just some people-

TSF With Mike Kelsey: Women's Roundtable That Sounds Fun Podcast with Annie F. Downs

Mike: Wait, hold on, because there's some people like me, who, I just learned what that is once I got married. Can you break that down? What is charcuterie, that's not a person?

Jenique: Charcuterie. It's not a person. So its-

Mike: Because that sounds like somebody ran away.

Jenique: ...It's just fancy boards that are made out of meat and cheese, maybe some fruit, some spreads-

Sheila: Some olives.

Jenique: Yeah, olives

Christina: What about a grazing board though?

Mike: A? You girls are-

Ladies: It's the same thing.

Mike: A grazing board?

Jessica: A fancy lunchable.

Christina: It's a long table.

Jenique: It's just not a meal.

Sheila: t's for Boujee people.

Mike: So this is just a warm-up before the meal?

Jessica: It's an appetizer.

Mike: It's an appetizer.

Jessica: It's a strong appetizer,

Jenique: Hors d'oeuvre.

Mike: Hors d'oeuvre. Okay, what else?

Sheila: So Black women have this thing where they make these indiscernible noises. And I just noticed this recently that I'm like, "Is this just Black women?" I have some Asian sisters too who do the same thing. But like when they're cooking, or like watching something like "Mm-hmm, okay. Oh. Mh-hmm" And then they're talking to you. So if you're in the room and you hear these noises, they're not-

Mike: It's okay, everything is okay.

Sheila: They don't need for you to understand, they're just-

Jenique: And you know what, along with those sounds, I think that we make faces with them too. And it doesn't, we're not necessarily-

Sheila: You know what I'm talking about.

Jenique: ...talking to you, we're just expressing.

Jessica: But it is a language, and it do have meaning.

Mike: Now, hold up, actually, so we're going to talk about this, it's like about parenting, like kids. So, Ashley and I are raising three Black kids, we're raising them not in the same Black church environment. So one of the things they don't understand is the mad face in worship. You know what I'm saying?

Ladies: Yes.

Mike: Like when you put some good music or you're in worship, I might look angry, but I'm not. You know what I'm saying? I'm happy. I'm in heavenly bliss. I don't know, maybe.

Christina: I thought you were going to say that angry face that you give your child at church when they're like acting up. Is that mad face?

Sheila: That's a different face,

Ashley: That's a warning, that's what that is.

Mike: Mh-hmm.

Christina: I remember that face.

Mike: I said 10 things, and I realized I don't even know if it was 10 things, I just made that up. But are there any other things that Black women want other people to know?

Sheila: Well, let's just go to the hairpiece. Because-

Mike: Take us there Sheila.

Sheila: Getting your hair wet is an issue.

Mike: Mh-hmm.

Sheila: Now I typically wear my hair curly, but when it is straight I am on the weather app. I am focused on the humidity-

Mike: Wait so let me just add an exclamation point to this, because we were just together two nights ago.

Sheila: Oh my gosh.

Mike: And it was like, I don't even know if we could say it was raining. If there was a mist in the air, Sheila was not coming outside-

Sheila: That's considered moisture.

Mike: ...and when she did come outside, she had an umbrella.

Sheila: And that's right.

Mike: But there were no raindrops.

Sheila: That's okay.

Mike: Okay.

Sheila: There was moisture in the air and it affects the hair.

Mike: Okay.

Christina: I feel that on a deep level. And, okay, listen, here's another thing that I think people should know. If you ask me what I'm doing on a Saturday and I say I'm washing my hair, I'm out for the full day.

Jenique: It's an all-day affair.

Mike: Mh-hmm.

Christina: Wash day really does take a full day.

Mike: That's a calendared event?

Christina: It is.

Mike: Wow.

Christina: Full day.

Jenique: And also don't ask how often I do wash my hair. Because that's actually none of your business. It's on need-to-know basis?

Mike: Like can we just talk, okay, like, can we just let's just address the elephant in the room. What about, because your hair looks nice, and sometimes a person might want to touch it.

Ashley: In 2021? Do people really still think that's okay? That's my question. I feel like people know now, don't touch it.

Jenique: I would hope.

Mike: Wait, has that happened? Has anybody, like a stranger walk up to you and touched your hair before?

Ashley: Yes, but not in the last three years.

Mike: Okay.

Jenique: Well, but we were in a pandemic for the past 18 months.

Ashley: That's true. That's true, maybe they don't know.

Mike: Wow, wow. Post-pandemic awareness is important. All right, so, there are some unique joys, some unique challenges about being a Black woman, and being a Black woman I would say in America. And, Ashley, you this episode was actually your idea.

When I told you that Annie asked me to host this week. You said to me one night, you said, "Hey, I don't know if you want to do it, but I have the perfect idea. Something I think, really needs to be addressed." And that was just the experience of Black women and particularly Black women who are trying to navigate predominantly white spaces. Whether that's the church or the

organization where they work. So why did you think it would be important to address the experiences of Black women in particular?

Ashley: Yeah, so you and I've had a lot of these conversations. But I do think that Black women face some unique challenges and particularly, for our experience. We've been now in a White church for, predominantly White church I should say, for over 15 years. And I just think there's some things that people don't know.

And I know that now, because I've been in relationship with people who will say to me, "You know, I grew up and only knew one Black person, for my first 20 years of my life." And I just find that the more you know the more you are really able to be the person you say you want to be.

So I think it's helpful to kind of let people in on some of our experiences. And I think the other reason I wanted to talk about it, is because for the church, like, I'm actually hopeful, I'm hopeful about the future of the church. And Jesus prayed for His church that we will be one, right? Like, I believe His prayers are going to be answered. So I just feel like the more we can have these conversations the more we can take a step closer to the church that Jesus actually prayed for.

Christina: That's really good.

Mike: What do y'all think?

Christina: I agree, I think if we are going to have the multi-ethnic church experience, it can't happen without us. So the more, like you said we are in community with each other means we really have to know each other. So this conversation is really important.

Mike: Well, all right, so let me ask this so coming from a Christian standpoint, just biblically, and this is me putting my pastor hat on for just a second. So because we might have some people who are listening and not familiar with the Bible, and not familiar with Christian teachings. So we believe there is one human race, right?

That we all kind of come from the same basic ancestry, there's one human race. And that race itself as we talk about it today, Black, White, Asian, all of that is a construct like we made it up over time. And it was made up for a specific purpose. It was made up as a tool to oppress certain groups of people.

And so a lot of Christians, especially in more kind of conservative Christian circles will ask, well, basically they'll ask, "Then why do you continue to identify yourself as Black then?" So here's my question for you. All of y'all are followers of Jesus. I know all of y'all are committed to just historic, biblical, teaching.

You obviously agree with what Scripture says about all people being made in the image of God. All people being equal and race itself as we understand it, not ethnicity, because we see that throughout Scripture. But this construct of race is something that was made up. Why do you identify yourself as a Black woman? If somebody asked you that question, why do you identify yourself as a Black woman and not just a woman? How would you respond to that?

Jenique: I would say at least two things. One is, and I don't know how often people think about this reality, but I don't know my ethnic identity. And, so I think it's sometimes easier for people to say, "Yeah, race is a social construct, we're all one human race." But you still get to be Irish or Scottish.

And if you ask, when I ask my White friends, where they're from, I might get, whether they're from in the United States, or my mom is Lebanese and my dad is. I don't have that, that was stolen as a result of slavery. And so blackness is what I have as a result of that, and I think the other reason is that I celebrate that. I have a cultural expression and a lot of traditions that came from a long lineage of resilience. My mom sent me a card the other day, and the front of it said, "Perseverance is in our DNA." And it's true. So I celebrate who I am despite the fact that I don't know my ethnic identity, and I own that I'm proud of that.

Jessica: And I'll just jump in, I, like you, don't know my ethnic identity. But I've been able to understand like my family history within my community that I came from ninth generation of my family in the area. And having walked the land where my family worked, and having met with cousins who live in Canada, who our ancestors traveled from here to Canada to escape and be free. I have a sense of pride in being a Black woman.

And I think about this whole idea of like we are our ancestors just greatest achievements, right? And so I fully embody my Black womanness, because, listen, somebody almost died for me to walk this earth. And therefore I'm going to celebrate every bit of my blackness and my Black womanness as a result.

Mike: Yo, your family is like, look, if I went to the barbershop, I take the boys to a barbershop here in the area-

Jessica: Do not talk about that.

Mike: Listen, I'll walk in a barbershop and Jessie's family is like on the wall in this barbershop. Your family, seriously I mean, so many generations of your family being in this area. And you had an interesting experience growing up here in the area. For those of folks that don't know Montgomery County is literally one of the most-diverse counties in the country. Four of the top-10 most-diverse cities in

the nation are in Montgomery County. That's where you grew up, so you grew up in a very diverse environment. What was your experience like when for the first time you stepped out of Montgomery County, and then you went to Hampton University, an HBCU-

Jessica: The real HBCU.

Mike: Hold on one second, don't start controversy. We are here at the D.C. area; Howard University is here.

Jessica: That's right.

Mike: But you went to Hampton University, which is the Historically Black College University. What was that experience for you like stepping into, not just a predominantly Black environment, but an environment that is intentionally trying to equip, and empower, and release young Black minds?

Jessica: I'm going to keep it as short as possible, it's a complex situation. So growing up, I lived in, I grew up in a small town where the White folks had been in the same small town forever, same with the Black folks. A lot of the white friends that I had their families were Quakers. There was a Quaker church behind my high school, my grandmother integrated my high school. And so I grew up with White people all around.

Mike: Well, hold up, when you say your grandmother integrated your high school what do you mean?

Jessica: My grandmother was a part of the first class of Black students that entered the all-white high school.

Christina: Wow, that's amazing.

Jessica: And she didn't want to go until this day, if she had the choice she wouldn't go. But anyway, growing up around a diverse community, I had White friends who I called brothers and sisters. I'd walk into their front doors and sit down and have dinner, and they'd do the same in my house.

So going to Hampton University, and there was a lot of other diversity within that high school and community situation. But going to Hampton was, I'll just tell you this, I spent the first semester learning about my blackness. I spent the first semester learning about the history of Hampton University. And I walked away from that first semester incredibly angry at the fact that I had been robbed of so much of my history, and only taught certain aspects of it.

And I also kind of walked away super-empowered, like, I am a Black queen, as you just heard me mention earlier. But I take that with me, and it's a part of my identity, well, in the right ways.

Mike: That's huge. So let's talk then you started in a predominantly White but a very diverse area. You moved into Hampton University, which was, I mean, it's a Historically Black College University, that was a huge awakening for you, you're learning a lot. A lot of us now we are together in a predominantly White, but increasingly and beautifully multi-ethnic church.

But we also, some of us, are here at the church or work on staff of the church. Most of y'all don't work on staff at the church and are working in a variety of different places. Whether that's working in the home or working in corporate America or have had experiences working in corporate America, Jenique in the non-profit sector.

So what are some of the ways, and this is let's just jump in. Like what are some of the ways that you've experienced mistreatment or hurt as a Black woman in a predominantly White environment? Or let me ask it this way; what are some ways your friends or your church community have made you feel alienated, even when they're not intending to.

And the reason I ask that is because sometimes, A, sometimes people just don't believe that the stories are real or people assume that when you share those stories, you're just dogging everybody out. And a lot of times and there are people listening who have good intentions. But want to be made aware of what are some of the things I do that alienate you, that hurt you, that make you feel other, even when I'm not intending to do that?

Sheila: Well, I'll just say, this is Sheila, I'll just say that I've been a part of this church now going on 24 years. About five years into it, I was attending a class for parents taught by a White couple and I'm always the only black person in the room.

And the subject that they were discussing was moving me. And let me just say that we were sitting in rows. So it's just like being on an airplane seated right next to someone. And I began to cry, not sob, not wail, but weep. And if you're sitting on an airplane and you're sitting next to someone, you will know how that person is reacting. No one said a word to me. No one approached me before or after the class.

And let me just give you a story to contrast that. Years before I was looking for a church, and I stopped into a predominantly Black Apostolic Church, and they

were having high praise, full-on worship and I sat down. And I was moved by that-

Mike: Let me just say real quick. If you haven't experienced high praise-

Jessica: Apostolic one.

Mike: You need to go visit yourself. They say, "Settle in we're going to be here for a while.

Sheila: And so I'm sitting there and I'm moved, and I'm also dealing with some things going on in my heart in my life at the time. I start to cry. A woman comes over, and I'll just say what my youngest niece, how she would describe her, but she would say, "She was fluffy."

So she came over in her fluffiness and enveloped me and just let me rest my head on her shoulder and cry. She never told me her name. She never asked me my name, she let me cry. And then I got up and put up my finger and stepped off the back door because they were still worshipping.

So the contrast is I go into this church, and I express myself, and I'm comforted. But I'm in my own home church around people and I am invisible in that setting. So was it intentional? I can't say, but I felt hurt by that experience.

Mike: Yeah, and I think that's important because there are things that happen that are intentional or are explicit. And we can talk about those if y'all want to share some of those experiences. I've had those experiences. But a lot of times, a lot of times, some of the hurt. Some of the lingering sense of isolation comes from just a lack of awareness.

It's not necessarily somebody looking at you as a Black woman and saying, "Well, I'm just not going to go comfort her." But even the cultural difference of a mother in the church, which is like a real thing in a Black church. Who is looking around to see who needs to be comforted. That cultural difference stepping into a different church environment in and of itself, can just, it can hurt you know what I mean?

Sheila: Absolutely. And I just never went back to that class. I continued to participate in church, but I just didn't go back to that class. I just didn't feel welcome in that setting.

[00:22:51] <Music>

Annie: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, Olive & June. I have a hunch that the ladies who are joining Mike in today's conversation love to keep their nails looking good and me too.

A good mani is a must, the challenge is that I'm not amazing at doing my own nails. I try but they end up looking like my mini BFFs painted them. They chip easily or they're not smooth. But the alternative is spending a lot of money and time I don't have getting regular salon manicures.

Well, rest easy my friends Olive & June's Mani system is here for us. Do It Yourself manis that look salon-perfect and last over seven days, yes, it can be done. Olive & June's Mani 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 that's easy to grip, a handle that fits on any of their bottles of polish. And since it's so easy to hold it steadies your hands and makes it so easy to paint with both of them. That means both hands end up with smooth perfectly manicured nails.

The Mani system with six polishes breaks down to only \$2 per mani. I mean y'all that's compared to at least \$35 for just one gel manicure in a salon. And Olive & June's polish is beautiful. Tons of variety in their color options including glitter polish, and their signature top coat is so shiny it looks just like gel, and it keeps your nails from chipping for an entire week.

The Olive & June Mani system is the secret behind salon-perfect nails at home. All-in-one no guessing, no messy nails, no salon price tag, and as one of my friends you can get 20% off your first Mani system at oliveandjune.com with my code THATSOUNDSFUN.

Your new nail life is here. Get 20% off your first mani system when you use promo code THATSOUNDSFUN at oliveandjune.com. We're done with expensive bad manicures, okay, this is the new us you guys, oliveandjune.com, and the code is THATSOUNDSFUN. And now back to Mike's conversation with Ashley, and Sheila, Jenique, Christina, and Jessica.

[00:24:53] <Music>

Mike: What kind of experiences have others y'all had?

Christina: So in my corporate life, I do PR for DNI. And I was talking to my boss about an initiative that I wanted to do for women of color. And she found herself reiterating what I had shared with her but saying, colored women.

Mike: Mh-hmm.

Christina: And I kind of stopped her, and I said, "Oh, you said colored women." She said, "I didn't mean to say that." And just moved on. And I walked away from that conversation just feeling completely disregarded. Not even an, "I'm sorry." Is an all-White company, majority White company, trying to create an initiative for Black women. That centers Black women and women of color, and then having that kind of bounce back at you was a little jarring.

Mike: But, let me push back just for the person who's listening, and they're like, "Well, but she just made a mistake." It wasn't, of course, it wasn't like 1953, trying to be derogatory. Why did that hurt you so deeply?

Christina: I think it's because I knew that this was a new term for her saying women of color. And I think in her mind she hadn't quite understood. I don't know, I don't think she quite understood, like, what the concept I was trying to deliver to her and all of that.

But long story short it hurt me because she didn't see the humanity within the thing that I was sharing with her. And the fact that like, this Black woman is talking about a program for people that look like her. And she misspoke and didn't have any kind of like, maybe not even remorse, but she didn't publicly just say, like, "I'm sorry." And it's just kind of been a trend ever since, of just like not really seeing the humanity behind the person. I'm just like, the resource-producing.

Ashley: I think another reason too it can sting, is because a lot of times when you're talking to people and something like that happens. These are people that you know are educated, and they make themselves aware of lots of other things. So it's a priority for them to, okay, I'm going to be trivial, but like to know, the best yoga pants on the market right now. I'm just saying, like, people who have access to information, they have resources.

So when people are dismissive, like, "Oh, that's a thing I shouldn't say, oh, well, sorry." It does feel, you feel dismissed as if, like you say, like, my humanity is not as valuable. You know what I mean?

Jenique: Yeah, can I jump in off that in the working world. I also used to work at a PR agency, and I can remember just some of the isolation I felt working at a predominantly White PR agency and the social conversations that would happen.

Whether it was at happy hour or before the meeting started, it would be like, "So what did you guys do over the weekend." And I was like, "Oh, here we go."

Because the activities were so homogenous. And then me, I'd be like, like you said, "I washed my hair and it took me all Saturday." You know what I mean?

So when I had to think of something that is appropriate, because I'm in a corporate setting and because I need to be a part of the social scene, that was one thing. And then also just experiencing, there is a social hierarchy in America and Black women are on the bottom.

Women in general already have this level of marginalization, but I experienced that play out in the working world. There were times where I was at the same level as different people and I had a manager who liked blondes and brunettes.

And I saw White woman after White woman get promoted to be in this, like his number two person. And I was on the team, and I knew I would never. I could dye my hair around, but I wasn't that kind of brunette. And so I knew I would never ascend to that position, despite the fact that I was working twice as hard.

And somebody on the team asked me, like, "Do you think like he likes you?" And where I had to land was, "I don't know if this manager likes me but he will respect me." And that's as much as I could hope for, because I didn't have that leverage. So I think that is also really isolating.

And if I could add one more thing, it would be not being believed. There are times, especially in corporate America, where I would say things and it would be completely dismissed. And then another person will come along and say the exact same thing, "Oh, that's a great idea." And the feeling of that happening not once but over and over again can really take a toll on your own self-esteem. So that's really challenging.

So that's really good. I think, as you guys were talking, I was thinking about how just the collective elevation of cultural norms, and how that can be isolating. So if I think about it, in my terms, like I'm a Black, Christian woman in a predominantly White space.

And I think for me as a believer, it can be really hard to separate, or to not confuse godliness with culture. And so I, as a disciple, or I'm trying to grow in my relationship with God, and a lot of discipleship is imitative. So you think about Paul, he says, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

So I'm here as a Christian woman, and I'm looking around trying to find other Christian women who are following the Lord and I imitate a lot of that, but what I have to do is to cut aside the stuff that doesn't matter. So I have to make sure that I am imitating the godliness, but not the package that is coming in.

So I don't have to follow what other women are doing in terms of their interest or how they talk or the way they dress. I have to make sure that I'm imitating the godliness and my own package. So as a Black woman from Winnabow, North Carolina, who likes to wear hoop earrings and high-top tennis shoes.

Mike: You got them hoop earrings on right now. So, okay, let's break that down for just a little bit. Because what you just said is so clutch about confusing godliness with culture. What are some examples? Let's just talk about the church, what are some examples where that gets conflated?

Jenique: Yeah, I mean, simply put, I think about so, I am in a predominantly White context. And so as I'm looking at the way women dress, how they dress in the church, a lot of women dress the same way. And it can be written off as like, "Oh, this is the modest way to dress. This is how a nice Christian woman should dress." And I just come with a different sass and different type of flavor.

So, I'm going to come to church in my skinny jeans and my high-top shoes and that too can be godly. So the way that my expression of godliness is just different.

Ashley: Yeah, and we, yeah go ahead.

Christina: I was going to say this is funny that you mention dress. Because when I first started going to a predominantly White church, that's the first thing I noticed. It was back in like 2013, I'm like, "All these women have infinity scarves and pompadour-like hair situation."

Mike: Pompadour.

Christina: So, y'all remember the pompadour? Everybody looked the same. I'm like, "Come on, ladies."

Ashley: That's so funny. We and Jenique we have talked about this, I think before. And I do think is interesting, because I know growing up in a Black church, you had to come dressed to church. And it wasn't seen as flash or what's the word? It wasn't extravagant, like, this is how you come to give reverence to the Lord. It was almost like a sense, it was like a sense of pride and dignity.

And so that has been actually a struggle for me, just because I like fashion. It's like something that I kind of care about. But also, I do love fashion.

Jenique: Be honest.

Ashley: Let me be honest. But I also and I think like coming into this space, sometimes valuing aesthetics can be seen as-

Jenique: Superficial almost?

Ashley: Yeah superficial.

Mike: Vain.

Ashley: Vain. People are-

Mike: Materialistic.

Ashley: Materialistic. Okay, all right.

Jessica: Okay, all right wow. [00:33:08 Crosstalk]

Christina: I would even add that because we, I would dress in a different way. It's almost as if, because I'm not fitting the norm, it's almost as if I'm an exhibit. So if I come wearing something different or outside of the norm, people will talk about it and make comments on it.

Ashley: Yes, and you don't want to be the subject of those conversations. But then like can I be me, right? You know what I mean? Is it not godly to wear my gold hoops? You know what I'm saying? So.

Mike: I think a lot, so there's a parallel with dudes. And I'm curious, I mean, y'all have already mentioned the hoops and I'm wondering if there's another example. Because a lot of Black dudes dress from the bottom up, which is a cultural difference. You know what I'm saying?

Like, we pick out our shoes first and then everything else coordinates according to the shoes. And those shoes are probably going to be some Jordans or some Air Maxes or if you are from the D.C. area, some Foamposite some Flightposite something like that.

Jessica: 992s.

Mike: Some 992s, let's go. I know models and stuff I'm wearing them now. But we've been wearing 992s for a long time here at PG County in D.C. But when you step into some of the more conservative and predominantly White church environments. There's a biblical value of simplicity, of not being materialistic, of not just being super flashy, that's a biblical value. But where I come from Jordans are just, that's you know what I mean? That's just what we wear.

Ashley: It's not flashy.

Mike: Yes, it's not necessarily flashy you just got some Jordans, and I found that people can condemn or at best kind of critique, "Oh you bought some Jordan's that's too much money." And nobody talking about those Ferragamo's is over there though. Do you see what I'm saying? That slick CEO has on.

So is there an equivalent like for women, whereas Black women, and again, y'all are not speaking for all Black women. Black women are different are not a monolith. But are there things that you guys have experienced where you're like, "Hey, this is just my culture, it's not necessarily a mark of godliness."

Christina: I would love for you to do a second podcast on Black women in the church and like modesty and dress, and we're talking about appearance right now. But as a Black woman having felt discomfort in my physical appearance. That also translates into like my personality and how I engage with you and I have felt suppressed.

Jenique: Okay.

Christina: In both regards, like I, at one point, was working at a majority White church institution and I found myself questioning my attire, questioning the way that I interacted with people. Because there was this idea that I had to be modest. I had to be quiet. I had to be gentle. I come from generations of very strong, ambitious, I'm sorry, they aren't gentlewomen, right?

And so I was met with such a culture shock of who am I? How can I look at myself in the mirror when all I'm trying to do is fit in and be something I'm not. And I just think, I would love for us to unpack that.

Ashley: Yeah. Well, I was going to say just on the gentleness front, because I think this is important to say. I think gentleness, it depends on how you define it. Gentleness can mean being very quiet to some people. But what Sheila described is being in an environment where she was comforted, that's gentleness, right?

Seeing somebody's pain and meeting them where they are is gentleness. Being not assertive is not necessarily the same thing, you know what I'm saying?

Ladies: Yes. Yeah.

Christina: Yeah, that's true. And I think anything taken outside of its normal expression, and then put into a different environment looks off, right? So like, if you meet, when I was dating, my mom told me, "I don't care who you bring home don't bring home an African man." It's because she had had experiences with African men being very assertive. But if she weren't-

Mike: And you did it anyway.

Christina: And I'm married to a man from West Africa, love you, mom. But if you were to go and visit and see the environment, it would be perfectly normal for an African man to behave in Africa. So it's the same with us, if you take us outside of our microcosm of like blackness, and you put us against a stark contrast of white we will stand out.

Because our norms, like even what you're saying about gentleness, like our norms are just different. To be black in America is to have to be resilient. And if you take that resilience and put it against a very just a different type of cultural expression, where there's leisure, and there's comfortability. And you're walking in a room and you're not thinking about and protection, then it looks and feels very different. I mean, even what we're talking about with the pants. Can we talk about Black women's bodies? I have tried to wear the clothes, these hips don't lie, I cannot stuff the, so it's just different. And I shouldn't be expected to conform.

But I think we enter these environments with a mind of how we cannot draw attention, and how we can fit in. And it's I mean, like you said, you get to the end of the day, and you're like, "Wait, who am I? What do I like again?"

Mike: So, wait, so on that note, because I know, I have a mom, I have a wife. So I'm familiar with some of the challenges right that women in general struggle with in our society. Our standards of beauty are ridiculous and it's crushing to women.

Sheila: Yeah, all women.

Mike: All women, it is absolutely demoralizing and dehumanizing to women. I think all women to some degree or another struggle with that. How would you say American standards of beauty affect Black women uniquely?

Sheila: I think when it comes to your hair, depending on how you wear it, are you making a political statement? If you walk in the door with cornrows or braids or even wearing your hair natural, or even wearing an afro. Are you making a political statement other than saying this is how I choose to present myself today? Then it becomes a distraction. You can't even be heard because people are just focused on your appearance and wanting to understand how you made your hair that way, and that is constraining.

So for a long time being in this predominantly White church, I didn't wear my hair in an afro or in what would be considered a wild way. Whereas if I were, for example, someplace else I would have the freedom to do that. And it feels like it's coming down to constraining myself to make somebody else feel comfortable. So

that I can be accepted and so that I can communicate or be heard and those days are over, frankly, but that's been an issue.

Jenique: I also think about the context that my husband and I serve in. We work with a lot of young millennials who are in the stage of dating, trying to find a mate. And I think there's some statistic out there that talks about how young Black women and young Asian men are people who are the least attractive.

And so I look around at other minorities, particularly Black women, who are in that dating stage right now they're not being asked out. They, when you look at the standard of beauty that we have right now, a young White woman with blond hair is like the most likely to get asked out. And so I think about that in terms of attraction and relationships that people will end up in.

Mike: Well, so I want to hear other standards of beauty or how that affects you. But Jenique you just brought up dating. So I was, and Ashley knows this, I was at a conference back in 2019 called Just Gospel and there was a pastor, Pastor Darryl Williamson in Tampa Bay, Florida. And he gave a message at the conference where he was talking about just the effects, the lingering effects of racism even in the church.

And one of the things that they did and I so just respect him and his Church for this. So they noted that Black women between the ages of 22 and 26 confessed a bunch of different things. This is in his church. So his church is an increasingly diverse church. Started out as probably predominantly Black and in terms of its growing diversity was more Latino, that kind of thing.

But he said, their fears were fear that they would never be married. Intimidation from, and this is a quote from all the quote-unquote, "Cute Hispanic girls." Their long-standing hatred for their own darkness. Their belief that they weren't the kind of women brothers in the church preferred.

And so they looked at all the weddings they conducted with young adults over a seven to eight-year period. This is the church, just one local church doing this. And here's what they found, when they looked at all the weddings that they did, they found 30% included Black brides. 61% included Black grooms. Only 15% included Black grooms and Black brides. Of the Black groom weddings, 75% of them were with non- Black brides.

So only 25% of the Black men who got married in that church over that period of time married Black women. And some of the Black single men, because some people might say, "Well, maybe it was just less Black women." That might be true, but some of the Black men in the church were clear about why they prefer

non-Black women. And they were clear that some of it included Black women stereotypes that they mentioned. The exotic nature of Latino women.

So these are real issues and he said this, and I remember writing this quote down, he said, "The issue is not that young Black women don't marry they do. But not nearly at the same rate as non-Black women. And more importantly, is the large number of never-married Black women who are over 35 in our church." And he says, "And that creates a kind of anxiety among some of the younger women."

Now I point that out, first of all, because I so respect that church's intentionality to address the issue. When we talk about race in the church, we ain't just talking about who's in your small group, you know what I'm saying? Like there are deep, embedded issues that need to be disciplined, and this is Romans 12:1-2, verse two talks about being transformed by the renewing of your mind. We need our minds to be renewed. We need this type of stuff disciplined out of us because it has real effect and impact.

So I wanted to bring that out, Jenique. Because you talked about just with the young women that you and your husband, Eric, they're doing ministry there as you're discipling people that's a real issue. So those standards of beauty affect Black women when it comes to dating. So I'm curious with that, and feel free to jump in on any other standards of beauty that you see affect Black women. But do you think single Black women are at a disadvantage in multi-ethnic churches?

Because I've heard a lot and seen some stuff written lately. That's just like, "Listen, Black women, you want to get married? Y'all got to get out of the," quote-unquote, "Diverse churches, you need to go back to the Black church, find you a husband." You know what I'm saying? And then decide if you want-

Jessica: Can you send me that link?

Mike: I mean, do y'all see that with the women that you disciple? In your own experience, do you feel like Black women are at a disadvantage in multi-ethnic churches when it comes to dating?

Sheila: I would say yes, depending on how you look at it. If you are a Black woman who only wants to marry someone who's Black, then yes. But what I have seen this is more anecdotal, but even in our church, there are a lot of interracial couples. Many of them, like there's a Black woman she's married to someone who's not Black.

So I think that if young Black women want to just open it a little bit more, broaden their horizons. But I do think it's also true that in, especially, in

multi-ethnic settings for whatever reason a lot of the Black men that I meet, they do prefer there's a look they prefer.

Jenique: Right.

Christina: It's the infinity scarves I'm telling you.

Sheila: Oh my gosh,

Christina: Something about that infinity scarf.

Sheila: You are so crazy, girl. There's a look, there's the long hair that has less kink. There's the lighter skin. There is a certain size preference and for many of us, like, being a size two would be, it would be very difficult, okay, miraculous even. For many of us, not all.

But I just think that I don't know, well, like one of those things where I almost don't want to say it, because I don't want it for us as Black women to be walking around, like, "Woe is me." Especially when you go to some other parts of the world too, a lot of men think Black women are very beautiful. But I do think culturally in our context, for some reason, we've all bought into the lie. And it is a lie that Black women are less than-

Christina: From the pit. Yes.

Jessica: I didn't realize that majority, well, and looking at the data, I had to ask myself as a single Black woman in the church, "Do I even expect to find my husband in this church?" And to be honest, for a long time, and up until today, like I really don't even think about it like that. Like I come to church, and I'm with my girls, and it's almost like that saying, "When you go to college you find your bridesmaids." I found my bridesmaids in the church.

I haven't found my husband, but I don't even walk up in here thinking that I will. My eyes aren't open. I'm not hottie hunting at the church. But it's a good perspective that data, it gives some good perspective.

Mike: Are there any other ways you feel like standards of beauty affect Black women outside of dating? Self-perception any other ways?

Jenique: I mean, just sheer functionality. Like we just got brown nudes in the 2000s, let's talk about this. Like we were wearing-

Mike: Wait, hold on, all the women just understood what you just said. But there are some dudes that are like, "Can we talk about nudes now?" So can you just clarify?

Jessica: Oh, yes. Sanctified, Literally, like if I wanted to buy a nude set of undergarments.

Ashley: Yeah or like a camisole-

Jessica: Or a sandal [00:47:36 Crosstalk]Or a chemise.

Jenique: Yes there was one-

Mike: Nude as in the color?

Ladies: Nude as in the color. The color, thank you.

Mike: Yes, I'm just trying to help y'all.

Jessica: There was one shade of like, pale beiges, pinkish and it was called nude for everyone.

Jenique: How many, I have a question for the table, how many weddings were you in where you had to wear nude-colored shoes that were not actually the color of your skin?

Christina: Oh my gosh. Lord.

Sheila: Well, it was mostly black weddings, so love it.

Jenique: Oh, just kidding.

Christina: Several, maybe five pairs.

Ashley: Oh, okay.

Jessica: We just got an aisle in Target. This has just happened like for ethnic haircare.

Sheila: An aisle?

Jessica: An aisle. Let's talk about the new colored Band-Aids.

Jenique: Oh yeah that's right.

Jessica: Our little black and brown babies are blessed.

Christina: Okay, that's true.

Jenique: We grew up just having beige Band-Aids for everyone. So yeah, functionally, these are things that are just starting to take root. And I still think there are products out there that have yet to be invented that account for Black women specifically. So yeah.

Mike: All right, how have you been blessed as a Black woman being in a predominately White or multi-ethnic space?

Sheila: Well, again, just because I have been a part of this church for so long, I've made lots of relationships. In addition to these women sitting around this table, I belong to a group where I am the only Black woman and there are nine other White women. But we've known each other now or engaged with each other consistently for about 12 years, and we've gone deep in our relationships.

And then there's others like I was paired up with this woman, her name is Beth. We taught together and it has been the friendship of a lifetime. I wish they were all sitting around the table with us, because we would be able to just share what it's like. Actually, she and I went to your live presentation in June and we were in Grand Rapids together. So it's been a huge blessing to make these lifelong relationships that we're going to spend eternity with.

Christina: There are lots of people in our community who have become like family and I'll just share a quick experience. I, unfortunately, had a miscarriage earlier this year and my husband had to go away on business immediately after my miscarriage.

And some members of our small group came over, we were getting a couch delivered. And I couldn't lift anything or do anything, and they just showed up right after work. Came straight from work, work clothes on, put the couch together in my living room. And I could have cried. I didn't because I'd done my makeup that day. But just the meaning for me in that moment was so special. So we have a lot of folks here who are like family to us.

Jenique: Yeah, I think about like when we first came into the church that we're at. Someone just taking me under her wing and sharing with me just the subtle things that I didn't understand. Like things that you should bring to a potluck party or things not to bring or just things like that, that I did not know about the church or about culture around here.

People really like took me to the side and said, "Hey, Jenique, like, this is what's going on here." Or "Here are the things that you can show up with." I really appreciate those friendships.

Sheila: And I mean, I think I already mentioned this, but I've had some of the most amazingly meaningful conversations about race with some of the White folks in our church. Who have been willing, these are people who maybe are like, polar opposites in terms of upbringing, political affiliation, like all of those things. They're willing to sit there and have the hard conversations. I've just been very blessed. I've been formed, like really informed by those conversations. And I think we're all like our whole community has been blessed by that.

Jessica: I think I could probably do more in this area of like reflecting and thinking about where the blessing lands. But I do have one friend who is my White sister. And one of the hardest days that I had just processing race and all the things that have been going on over these past few years. I was just kind of in despair, and just said, "You know, I'll just get over it." It was kind of one of those conversations with her I was like, "You know what, it sucks, but this is what it is."

And she said, "No, this isn't what it is. We're going to fight together. We're going to create change." And it was in that moment that I said, "You know what, girl, you got your black card. We're in this together."

Mike: You're stuck with the good girls.

Jessica: You're stuck with the good girls.

[00:51:55] <Music>

Annie: Hey friends, just taking a quick break to tell you about one of our amazing partners, Id Tech Camp. I know that even as a former teacher, an avid reader, and a generally curious person. I learn best when I get to see the connections between ideas and how those ideas play out in real life, don't you?

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And I have one last incredible partner to share with you, Your Enneagram Coach. How much do we love Beth McCord, you guys. Have you ever shared an Enneagram with someone in a way that helped them and encouraged them? And do you enjoy coming alongside people and championing them as they journey toward health in themselves and their relationships? If your answer to either of those questions is yes, you're going to love hearing about this special opportunity.

We are such big fans of the Enneagram but bigger fans of Beth McCord, Your Enneagram Coach. We love her. But do you know that Beth and her team actually certify Enneagram coaches? They have over 1500 Enneagram coaches worldwide, including one of my best friends Haley who was our expert during Annie at Summer 2021.

These coaches are literally changing their own lives by building a flexible and successful career doing something they're passionate about. But more importantly, they're helping others to grow, and heal, and flourish using the powerful tool of the Enneagram from the Christian perspective.

Beth's certification program opens a few times each year and it is opening soon. But before it does, Beth wanted to give you guys the opportunity to explore this further. So right now, you can register for Beth's mini-course; Getting Started as an Enneagram Coach: The Three Essentials for Coaching with the Enneagram for a limited time for free.

If you're even slightly curious about what an Enneagram coach is, what they do, and if it might be a fit for you? Then Getting Started as an Enneagram Coach: The Three Essentials for Coaching with the Enneagram is an important training tool for you.

And for a limited time, Beth is offering the mini-course to our listeners for free, that's so awesome. Learn more and sign up for your free Getting Started as an

Enneagram Coach mini-course at yourenneagramcoach.com/tsf. And if you're listening to this episode after enrollment is closed, you can still sign up to be notified next time registration opens at yourenneagramcoach.com/tsf. And now back to hear the end of Mike's conversation with Ashley, Christina, Jessica, Jenique, and Sheila.

[00:55:49] <Music>

Mike: When it comes to parenting, some of us have children. Raising young Black children as mothers, I'm just curious, do you have or did you have any concerns raising your kids in a predominantly White environment?

Jessica: So I did have concerns and I do have concerns. So my husband and I have two young Black boys, three and five years old. And one of the things that concerns us most is that we're raising them apart from our Black extended families and in a predominantly White church. And so the spaces that they are normally in, in those spaces they typically see only White leaders.

So they have White teachers, they have White caretakers. Most of what they see people who are doing really well for themselves are White people. And so if that is a context that you are growing in, it can be very easy, I think to begin to assign value to a color. So if you see only White people doing great things, then you can think that that is what greatness looks like. And so it remains a concern for us. But we also have done a lot of intentional work.

So we have to be very intentional about putting people in front of our kids who look like them. Because we want them to see Black excellence, we want them to experience different cultural experiences. And we want them to not just see the beauty that is like in the context that we're in. But we want them to see all of God's creative beauty and different people and not just like what is immediate to them.

And so yeah, we have to do intentional work about making sure that our kids see and experience different things outside of our just immediate community.

Sheila: Absolutely, I mean, I have raised a son, he's an adult now. He's been in every community, he would tell you. But his base which is home, his family, his culture that was celebrated in every way. But absolutely, he knows how to navigate in any environment. And he's been educated in those environments. He's recreated in those environments. He's worshipped in those environments, both/and, and I think that's important to be an individual in this society. So absolutely, it's a concern, but it's a requirement, I think.

Ashley: Yeah. No, I think that's good. So I think I have some high hopes for my kids because of it. But I do have concerns for my daughter, particularly, when you're a young girl, you are impressionable. There comes a point where you want to figure out what is acceptable, what's considered beautiful.

And I've worried for her that she would feel like that is always out of reach. And I didn't grow up that way, I grew up around mostly other Black kids. So I didn't feel like I was less than the other girls that were around. And I'm not saying that we want to raise her to, like, as if that's the most important thing. But it has such a huge impact on your emotional mental well-being. That is a concern that I have for her.

We've had very candid conversations with her early on. Just about this person's hair is like this and that's beautiful, but God made your hair too that's also beautiful. One is not better than the other. I can tell her that at home, but then if all she sees when she goes to school is something else and all the little boys like this something else, it can be confusing.

But I think your parenting makes a difference. I know for me growing up I was raised in a predominantly Black environment and then my parents moved up like George and Weezie. So, I went to high school in a predominantly White high school. There were 13 Black students in a class with 3,000, 4,000 students it was really White.

And So there was no prom for me, there was no homecoming for me. So I had my social life back at the predominantly Black community. So I had a good education but I didn't have a social life. But I never felt that I was not beautiful because of what I saw around me, because of what was reinforced at home and that made a difference. So there is power in parenting.

Mike: And I think that's so important. Because one of my desires in having people hear this conversation is one, obviously, for those who aren't Black, to just hear and become more aware of some of the challenges. But also for listeners who are black and as we're talking about parenting, to understand, like, "It's okay, man." And we celebrate, I thank God for the doors that have been opened for so many of us to be in more diverse environments, to be in a multi-ethnic environment.

Me personally being a lead pastor in an increasingly multi-ethnic church, all of that. But there are very real issues as I raise and disciple my kids. And so that they got to have someplace where the uniqueness of their brown skin, and their hair, and black cultural values is affirmed.

And so if that's not going to be in the church that I grew up in, New Samaritan Baptist Church, 1100, Florida Avenue, Northeast Washington, D.C., shout out.

Ashley: Every time.

Mike: If that's not going to be the church that I grew up in, then that's got to be somewhere in my home or wherever. And I remember when our daughter was really, really young. And she got an American Girl doll for the first time, it was this little white doll. And then my mom bought her an American Girl doll.

Ashley: She bought her both of them, that was the confusion.

Mike: Oh she bought her both of them? That was confusion, okay. I don't know, I'll tell you what, for whatever reason, she really loved the white doll. And, man, I was trying to hide that doll and just put the black doll, I mean like, I didn't really try to hide it.

But I was a little concerned because I remember when we lived in Prince George's County, in an almost all-Black environment, I remember, she loved her braids and her beads. And she loved when she would whip her hair and the beads would just clap together and she loved all of that. And then we moved over here to Montgomery County. I distinctly remember all of a sudden her being ashamed of that. Of her asking, "Can you not put braids in my hair? Mommy, can you straighten my hair?" We had never had those conversations that was just the power of the culture and the environment, and the dominance of cultural values in an environment.

So it is, it can be a difficult thing. And I think for folks who are listening who aren't Black or are adopting Black children which is a wonderful, beautiful thing is to go into it eyes wide open. It makes multi-ethnic environments, even just being in Black environments that much more important. Reading history, reading books, and following Black culture, to be able to at least give your child the opportunity. Because they're going to hit a point in their life where they start asking questions. Where they feel, as much as they feel a part of the family in your house, they're going to be in another environment where they are forced to feel other.

Jessica: Can I just say, growing up in this area, and then going to an all-Black school, the thing that I struggled with most was the lack of diverse understanding within my own community. So if you're Black, I would find myself engaging with people from small towns all over the country. And they had an idea of what Black was, an idea of what Hispanic was. And if you're Hispanic you are Mexican.

So I would just say like, if you're raising your child in this super diverse space, also find room to talk to them about other people's experiences in small towns. Like we need to do a little bit more educating on it's wonderful to have all the

colors of the rainbow present in your friend group. Sleepovers are fantastic with this pyramid of diversity.

But there are also some people in this world that haven't seen diversity and how do we engage with them? And there will be people that you stumble across that you need to actually like invest in like, how do you navigate that.

Jenique: That's one of my kind of one of the things that I wrestle with, with my boys. I have two boys seven and four, with them not being in the Black church. That's how I was raised and that's all I know. And there was a sense of empowerment that came from hearing my grandmother's testimony over and over again or learning negro spirituals or God Bless Hymns, all the hymns, all the verses, do not just sing the first verse. And my kids don't know that.

And I'm discipling them increasingly more and more for the present, but also for the day where they will have that othered experience. And in Black church, I think Jessica you are the one who said this to me, you said, "When I was in the Black church I didn't realize there was a whole, there was a deeper theology beyond suffering." Because so much of our experience is around that.

And so my kids I fear, I know the Lord is writing their own story, which is how I feel comforted. But they will get to that moment. And I want them to have that groundedness in their own story, and that comfortability in their own skin. So that when they experience whatever the world has to throw at them, they can be steadfast.

Mike: All right. So I want to ask y'all a question and it's a two-part question you can answer any one you want. For church leaders, I want to talk specifically to church, as a church leader. Because I think there may be church leaders who are listening, who are saying, "What can I do? What can I do to create an environment where Black women feel affirmed, and seen, and they're able to be disciplined in their uniqueness and all that. So to church leaders what do I do?"

Or I think the other side of that is for any Black women that are listening, that are in a diverse environment. Where they're minority, where they're in a predominantly White environment, where there's just certain cultural norms there. They're trying to be faithful in that environment. They're trying to be who they are and bring that to the table, while also fit in that environment. What advice would you give that person, so either to the leader who's saying, "What can I do to help Black women?" Or to the Black woman who needs advice in how to navigate that environment with dignity and with godliness. Any advice that you would give?

Sheila: I would speak to the Black woman. I think being young, I was 22 when I transitioned to a majority White church. So my adult Christian experience has been in a predominantly White church. I would say, I think we have a tendency, we come into environments that are not all-black, to have this guard around us this shield up. And to maybe even have a little bit of a chip on our shoulders. And as much as you can, I would say just drop that, just leave it, leave it and trust that the Lord will actually protect you.

I feel like I missed out on some things, I missed out on some relationships. And I overlooked some of the efforts that other people were making to try to make me feel comfortable and welcome. Because I had a chip on my shoulder and that wasn't always the case.

But I think sometimes we can miss out on things. And I think if we're willing sometimes to be vulnerable enough to maybe get hurt, maybe get our feelings hurt. There's something really beautiful on the other side of that if we'll let that happen.

I've had some very difficult but sanctifying experiences, conversations with White brothers and sisters in our church that I would not have had if my attitude was, "I know best. I'm the one who's oppressed. I'm the minority like you don't get to speak to these issues. Your experience is not even really relevant in the conversation."

And I had that attitude at different points. But I think when I've been able to kind of let that go, I just think the Lord has something really special for each of us if we're willing to both be sanctified by the experience.

Jenique: Can I just say that's one of the things I admire about you most, we've had this conversation. And if we're keeping it real, I do have a little bit of a chip on my shoulder, y'all, I'm at that place, I'm in that season.

But I have seen and I've heard you talk about pain and hurt, and like that's just a part of the ministry. That's a part of the people work that you're doing. And you have to truly rely on the Lord and His leading to get through that. And I know, I'm just reiterating what you just said, but I have seen you go through those seasons and question myself, like, "Why is she putting herself on the line like this." Like shelter in place.

Mike: And it doesn't mean you don't speak the truth.

Ladies: Right. Right. Right

Mike: And it doesn't mean you always have to stay in that environment.

Ashley: Right.

Mike: But it does. Meanwhile, you're there, and that's why I just appreciate y'all so much. That balance between speaking the truth, calling other brothers and sisters in Christ, to care about the vulnerable, to care about justice. But at the same time being like Jesus and being willing to love, and to stay to the extent that God has called you to stay is a pretty remarkable thing.

Sheila: And I have an example of that, because early on in my experience at the church. I came to this church, having been a leader at a predominantly Black church, and that included teaching because that's my gift. I came to this church and I was told by a leader, "I don't see you as a teacher." This person had no exposure to me at all other than seeing me to say, "I don't see you as a teacher." I had a choice at that point, "Am I going to read him the riot act on my resume?" I said, "Okay, fine."

Eventually he saw me as a teacher, it became crystal clear. It wasn't his decision, but he ultimately saw it. So my choice was to stay and persevere, and keep trusting God, keep serving, keep doing what I was called to do, and eventually, it became clear. My answer to someone is, know where God has called you to be.

Jenique: Amen.

Sheila: And trust that, and serve in the gifts that He has given you. He will make the way. He equips the called and He will do it. And I just want to say, I know all of you because I belong to this predominantly White church.

Jessica: Mh-hmm.

Ashley: That's right.

Jenique: Hey Sheila.

Sheila: And that's a blessing.

Christina: Yeah, that's real. I think I would also say to Black women, there's a quote my husband says often, it's, "Civilizations advance when men plant trees whose shade they will never sit in." And I think you can't underestimate, to your point, Sheila, where God has you.

We have all experienced being the only Black person in the room. Sometimes being the only Black woman in the room, but so often, we are trailblazing, and we don't know it. I think about the story you shared, Jessica about your

grandmother, and how hard that experience must have been. But the generations of Black women, and I mean Black boys and girls that have come behind as a result.

So I would say let us not grow weary in doing good. We will reap a harvest at the proper time if we faint not. And also, I think Jesus too our example, like He was not, He didn't come and He wasn't accepted and He was rejected. And I relate to Him so much more intimately in my experience as a Black woman. Because I can intimately know the sufferings of my Savior in that way. And that endears me to Him in a really special way.

Mike: I know we got to wrap up, but I just got, is that fair?

Ashley: Is it fair?

Mike: Like I mean, is that fair as a Black woman is beautiful. I guess what I'm feeling is for the woman who's wondering, "Are you telling me that I got to stay and endure this?" You know what I mean?

Christina: I left.

Mike: You did?

Christina: Sometimes you got to leave.

Jessica: Sometimes that is the best, yeah, the best thing.

Ashley: But I think is what Sheila said is has the Lord called you there? It's not fair. There's nothing fair about it. And you know you've heard me crying, me screaming, cussing people out, I'm sorry, Lord. But really it hurts, things hurt. But I stayed because I felt that's where the Lord had called me. There is a season for everything.

Jenique: Absolutely.

Ashley: And so there may be times, it comes to the point where you're being abused and it's time to go. But I think for many of us, if we know that we've been called to a certain environment and that environment is hard, because it's hard doesn't necessarily mean it's time to go.

Christina: And, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's easier in a predominantly Black church.

Ashley: Exactly.

Jenique: That's so true.

Ashley: There are other issues there as well. So are you called there to persevere? Are you called here to persevere?

Jessica: I feel like there's pain in the staying or the leaving. It's the season that you're in and it's how you're navigating it in the Lord.

Christina: But I left. Don't be afraid to walk away.

Jenique: Feel empowered when you need to a season of rest.

Mike: Well, I think, Christina, I think where you landed us, I think is a good spot to be because we do look at Jesus. And Jesus's sacrifice wasn't just for the sake of sacrifice it was for the sake of love. And so whether we feel, whether God is leading us to leave the environment that we're in or to stay. I think, "Looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame." He endured.

And so I think there's a dignity in that. I think there's a strength and a beauty in that, I think y'all exemplify that. Y'all are some of the women that I trust the most, your godliness, your zeal, your passion, your sass, all of that. I just, I love y'all.

And I love that I got this opportunity to just facilitate a conversation. Where hopefully people can be encouraged, that wherever God has them in the journey. Wherever God has them, and I just want to see, me personally, I want to see churches. And I want to see Christians who fan out into society bearing witness to the kingdom of God in the way that they engage people who are different from them.

And sometimes that includes being hurt, and strong, and calling for justice. And sometimes I think that includes deferring and yielding, and enduring, and staying, and to God be the glory in all of that.

All right, I got to ask this last question, before we wrap it up. This podcast is called That Sounds Fun. I know it's a hard left, what do y'all do for fun?

Jessica: Every Thursday me and my girls go to dinner, tonight is pizza night.

Mike: Oh, shout out, pizza. Where do you do pizza?

Jessica: All-Purpose, Washington, D.C.

Jenique: I love a slow stroll through the aisles of T.J. Maxx. If you can give me a gift card.

Mike: That is the most mom thing you've ever seen.

Jenique: Listen by myself no kids.

Jessica: I'll meet you there, girl. [01:15:15 Crosstalk].

Christina: Vacation. Yes.

Mike: Sheila what do you do for fun?

Sheila: Well, I like to crochet.

Mike: Listen.

Ladies: Yes.

Sheila: And the fun part is giving away what I've made. But I'm a first-rated carpenter.

Mike: We appreciate it, we love it. It's warm.

Sheila: So I love to crochet.

Christina: I love hiking. I really enjoy it. I'm not like a serious hiker but I enjoy being out in nature. It's something my kids and I can do together. So yeah, I would have to say hiking.

Mike: So you just like walking around basically?

Christina: Yeah. Okay, can we be honest? I did not know that's what hiking was until-

Sheila: Just walking.

Christina: Yeah, I was like wait, so we're just going go for a walk.

Mike: It is cultural.

Christina: It is cultural, just like in the woods though.

Ashley: In the woods, walking in the woods.

Christina: Got it.

Ashley: Okay, I'm going to describe to you a day that sounds fun to me, okay. It would be-

Jessica: Mike take notes.

Ashley: Yes, take notes. It will be waking up whenever my body felt like waking up. Let's call it 8 a.m., let's call it 8 a.m. My husband bringing me coffee perfectly, I was going to say seasoned, perfectly prepared with cream and he knows how I like my coffee. And then I would get up, I would get dressed, I would put on makeup because I actually do enjoy that. I would play around with it, maybe do a little contouring, I don't know.

Jessica: Come through.

Mike: You're doing the most?

Ashley: I'm doing the most, this is fun to me. And so then I would go to some shopping place that had like multiple furniture stores. Where I could go and try out different sectionals. And imagine rooms with all of the decor in the store and I will do that for a couple of hours. And then-

Mike: We're out of time.

Ashley: Then you would meet me for dinner at my favorite restaurant.

Jessica: It's okay if we are not.

Ashley: And oh, should I say it? Should I say my favorite restaurant?

Mike: I don't know what it is?

Ashley: It's a 1789 or 1879 I always get it wrong.

Mike: I swear to God, we don't have 1789 in Montgomery County.

Ashley: We don't, but this is what sounds fun to me.

Mike: Well, I got to go work on my to-do lists. So we got to shut this podcast now. Thank y'all so much for being on and those of you who are listening I hope you've been blessed today

[01:17:28] <Music>

Annie: Oh, you guys, aren't they just incredible? I want us to just flood Mike Kelsey and his friends this week with gratitude for their generosity to us. I mean, gracious,

I'm so thankful with how honestly and kindly they have poured into us and taught us. These women today were amazing. And I have only ever been me and I've only had my experiences, but man, I believe our host and our guests this week. I believe them every one of them. And I am thankful that they poured into our community like this from this week.

So your homework, friends, I don't ever give you homework, but your homework is to thank these guests and Mike Kelsey. Just whatever that looks like for you, just let's reach out and thank them a lot.

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's how you can find me. And I think that's it from me today. Friends, what a great week? Mike Kelsey, I love you, my friend. I cannot thank you enough for the shows you pulled together for our friends this week. I am very, very grateful to you.

So friends go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you, I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is Halloween this weekend I love being with my mini BFFs. So y'all have a great weekend. I can't wait to see photos of all my mini BFF trick or treating or at the fall festivals, or block parties in their costumes this weekend.

Tag me I want to see your kids dressed up, especially if they dress like one of the characters from What Sounds Fun to You, for sure tag me. And then we'll get this holiday season kicked off right when we get back here on Monday with Amanda Bible Williams and Rachel Meyers. The girls from She Reads Truth as we talk all things Advent. We'll see you guys then have a great weekend.

[01:19:26] <Music>