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Annie: Hi Friends! Happy Sunday. Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. We have just finished recording this episode. I am still teary. We're going to be fine. We got a great show in store for y'all.

It's Day 11 of the 2021 Christmas Party. So our 12 days in a row of Christmas episodes is about to end. But not before we spend our second Sunday in a thoughtful conversation with someone I'm just honored to introduce to y'all. More on that in a minute.

See, we like to use the Sundays during 12 days as a chance to hear from some wise pastor voices. And if you missed last Sunday with Becca Stevens, trust me you want to go back and give that one a listen.

The music you hear in the background of our party is *Little Drummer Boy* from our friends for KING & COUNTRY. It's on their album *A Little Drummer Boy Christmas*. And it's so good, so be sure you check it out.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to take a moment to share about one of our incredible partners, [Athletic Greens](#). It's been several weeks since I started using Athletic Greens. I'm amazed at just how much important and healthy stuff they pack into one little drink. It's like a one stop shop for green goodness.

With one delicious scoop of Athletic Greens, you're absorbing 75 high quality vitamins, minerals, whole-foods source, superfoods, probiotics, and adaptogens to help you start your day right. This special blend of ingredients supports your body in so many ways: helping with energy, gut health, focus your nervous system, your immune system. I mean, y'all, AG1 supplements so many aspects of your overall health.

Tons of people take some kind of multivitamin and it's important to choose one with high quality ingredients that your body can actually absorb. AG1 supports better sleep quality and recovery and it aids in mental clarity and alertness which I need all things that we can definitely use to live our lives as fully as possible.

In fact, Athletic Greens was created when their founder was experiencing a ton of gut health issues and ended up on a complicated supplement routine to recover. It was like \$100 a day, y'all. Can you believe that? That's brutal. So he created Athletic Greens after experiencing how difficult it was to create an affordable

optimal nutrition routine on your own. Athletic Greens is much cheaper than getting all the different supplements separately.

And right now it's time to reclaim your health and arm your immune system with convenient daily nutrition. Especially heading into the flu and cold season, it's just one scoop and a cup of water every day. That's it. No need for a million different pills and supplements to look out for your health.

To make it easy, Athletic Greens is going to give you a free one-year supply of immune-supporting vitamin D and five free travel packs with your first purchase. All you have to do is visit athleticgreens.com/soundsfun. Again that is athleticgreens.com/soundsfun to take ownership over your health and pick up the ultimate daily nutritional insurance.

Intro: Today on the show, I get to talk with Father Mike Schmitz. Father Mike is a Catholic priest, the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries in the Diocese of Duluth in Minnesota, and a speaker and an author. He's a prolific YouTuber.

But I became connected with him when at the beginning of 2021 I started listening to his new podcast, The Bible in a Year (with Fr. Mike Schmitz), in which he reads the entire Bible gives his own prayer and commentary every day.

Even before it launched, it became the number one ranked podcast overall on Apple Podcasts. And it stayed there all year, you guys. I love it so much. And it has really impacted me this year. I mean, the tears you guys. So I feel so honored to have the chance to talk with him. I can't wait for you to get to know him. So here's my conversation with my favorite Catholic priest and our friend, Father Mike Schmitz.

[00:03:35] <music>

Annie: Okay, Father Mike, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Father Mike: Thank you so much. It has sounded like a fun idea for maybe a year now. That's finally happening.

Annie: That's how long I've been stalking you about how much you have meant to me this year since the beginning.

Father Mike: It's been such a gift. I'm glad we're able to nail it down before the end of the year.

Annie: Let me backup and ask you this. Is this the first year you've read the Bible as a podcast?

Father Mike: Yeah, yeah. First time we ever recorded it.

Annie: Okay, talk me through what happened in 2020 that made you decide to do that this year?

Father Mike: Well, I don't know if you read the news.

Annie: 2020 with stuff.

Father Mike: But in March of 2020, I led a group of our students—I work at the University of Minnesota Duluth—group of our students and some of the students for other campuses to Israel on a holy land pilgrimage.

We landed on Sunday morning. And that Sunday afternoon, the Prime Minister of Israel said, "On Thursday we're shutting down travel into Israel." And so we're like, "Oh, well, we just got here." And so is this kind of scramble to get flights. We were there for two and a half days. Now, completely grace-filled days. I've been there maybe 13 times or so, and this was packed of grace two and a half days. It was awesome.

But at midnight on Tuesday night, I got a knock on my hotel door saying, "You need to be down to the lobby in 10 minutes because your shuttles is taking you to the airport. You are leaving now." Like, "Oh, okay."

So we all scrambled back and got back to campus. The 30 of us had been in six international airports in five days. So we quarantined ourselves. And then when we were done, then the whole state of Minnesota went into quarantine.

And so it was one of those situations where if you remember we had just said goodbye to everyone for spring break with the idea that we will come back and we want to do something incredible this length leading up to Easter. And now we didn't even get to say goodbye.

And so we started broadcasting our Sunday services or our Sunday masses. That was one of the things that just was so helpful to remain in touch with our students. But then every one of the brothers started some kind of online ministry. And so people were telling me, "Oh, it's gotta be such a great break right now to just slow down, a slower pace in life."

And I thought, "What am I doing wrong?" Because during this time, I find myself being busier than ever. And so I found myself that all was the lead up to this, which is, I found myself being really distracted. Just like there's always something else to do, always something else to listen to. And because I love podcasts, I love audiobooks, that's kind of how I take in information.

And as I was listening to as many people I thought were wise, likewise in the ways of the world, so I was distracted by all those voices. And I was also distressed because just, you know, politically and culturally, and all these kind of things.

And so at the same time, I was reading the book of Judges, and something just spoke so clearly to my mind, to my heart about this of just this isn't the first time that people have got to struggle. This isn't the worst time even. And I mean, even each different story in the book of Judges is a generation or two. And you think, "Oh, we just are going through a couple of months or a couple of years."

And imagine there being this time where there's no end in sight, there's no stability in sight. And as you know, the line in the end of Judges is "In that time there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their own eyes." And I just thought, "Things have been worse. But what did they rely on? They relied on their relationship with the Lord and on His Word."

And so I just had this thought of, "You know what we need to do? You know what I need to do? Is I need to be more in touch with the eternal word of God than with this temporary words the world keeps speaking. And so I thought, "I want to read the Bible. But you know, I want to read it out loud. And I want to read it and maybe people want to listen to this."

And so I proposed it to this group Ascension that I've worked with and done stuff in the past with and they said, "Great idea. Let's get on it." And that's how that started. So kind of a long walk for a short drink of water. But that's kind of how it started.

Annie: Let me do some nuts and bolts questions. Because I also need you to know that I want to tell you how I feel about you reading me the Bible, but I'm so close to tears about it, that we're going to do like other things. So, nuts and bolts. Do you record live every day? I mean, do you record every day? Or do you do a chunk at a time? How are you doing 365 podcasts?

Father Mike: That is a great question. I finished. I just finished.

Annie: Okay.

Father Mike: So I was only maybe 15 days ahead of wherever we are right now. And that was both a gift because I would get feedback from people. You know, people would have questions about stuff or they'd say, "You know, this is something that really spoke to me" or "this is something an update on my life."

We had a number of couples who are struggling with infertility. And over the course of this last year reported back just... there may be three or four podcasts where we specifically prayed for couples and they're reaching out... Now not everyone obviously. But reaching out saying that these prayers were heard. They've had pregnancy, they've actually had children delivered since it's been 12 months since we started. And it's incredible, right? And so that kind of sense of I'm so grateful that I wasn't done in May.

Annie: Yeah, of course.

Father Mike: On the other hand, my plan, my hope was to be done in May. Because I thought, "Okay, I'll be done by the end of next school year 2021 and then just go back to life and go back to normal ministry." And that didn't happen. And it's a gift because you have to be able to walk with everyone. And to really truly know that I can walk a couple of days ahead, but I'm not walking a year ahead. I'm still walking with the people who are listening.

And so even though I finished recording a couple of days ago, every day still just praying for those people who are listening today. Just that note of really wanting to honor and try to respect that relationship that seems to have formed over the course of the last 300 you know, 50, 60 plus day years.

Annie: Yes. You could not have imagined it would do what it's done.

Father Mike: No, not at all.

Annie: It's been the number one podcast for the whole year, Father Mike.

Father Mike: That's incredible.

Annie: Tell me when it started like catching on and wasn't dropping down, what were you thinking?

Father Mike: So I am an under reactor at times. This is the worst. I'm an under reactor when it comes to happy things. When it comes to sad things, I let myself feel the sadness, I let myself feel like the power of the moment. But when it comes to rejoicing, I'm like, "Oh, yeah, that's neat." Like, what's wrong with me?

So I remember thinking, like, "Oh..." The people from Ascension said, "Have you looked at the, you know, iTunes, whatever?" And "Oh, wow, look at that. What do you know?" That was my response. "Oh, Wow. Okay. That's neat." Because I'm from Minnesota. "That's neat."

Annie: Minnesota Nice I heard it's called.

Father Mike: Exactly. And the understatedness. Well, it can always get worse is my mentality, which I know is dumb. It's backwards. But my deeper response would be gratitude. I can't take any credit. That's one of the things that I'm just so grateful to the Lord for is...

I might have shared this before, but someone had in the first couple, maybe a month or so of the new year when it was doing pretty well. I have a number of people, but people I've known and people I had no idea who they were reaching out saying, "Hey, congratulations on this new podcast but don't let it go to your head."

Annie: Really?

Father Mike: And I was thinking, "I appreciate that, like wanting to keep some humility there." But I remember thinking, "Well, thank you for saying that." I've had my weekly sermons online since 2007 and I've done another podcast since 2015. And none of them have even gotten as close to this.

And I'm thinking, Okay, I'm just reading the Bible and it's done better than anything else I've done myself. So I don't think there's any room for pride there. I think actually that's a dose of humility that tells you like, "This is where you rank, bro. Tell the truth about yourself." And that is, when it's your thoughts and ideas, it's on the low rank. When it's the Lord's word, hey, then people can tune in because it has nothing to do with you. And that's the good word of just gratitude to be able to say, "I don't have to own it."

This is the thing. I remember praying about this last night, even yesterday, and coming to this place of, oh, I don't own it and it doesn't own me. I'm grateful. So grateful. But it's not mine. And I'm not its, I guess.

Annie: Yeah. So what happens next? Do you do 2022?

Father Mike: That's a good question. One of the things we wanted to do from the very beginning was let this live on as a podcast. And so what they're going to do is they have a plan. It's going to live in two different places. One is the episodes there are going to be there. But those who want to start it in 2022 can get an episode today.

Annie: Oh, they'll like build a new feed and refresh it?

Father Mike: Right, exactly. So kind of rerelease it in many ways. And I'm so excited, because that's what I'm going to do.

Annie: Go back and listen?

Father Mike: I read it, I want to go back and just like markup my Bible with listening. Because as I was reading, you're really focused on getting the words right and making sure it's eligible.

Annie: The names-

Father Mike: The names.

Annie: ...you're able to do. That's the first time I was like, "I've got to reach out to this guy, because he is doing so great saying all these names."

Father Mike: That's a challenge. But just to be able to recognize that this is an opportunity for me to do for myself, in some ways, what I wanted to offer to others. And I'm no different in the sense of, yes, it's going to be a new year in a few weeks, but my need is the same. Like I still need to be fed by God's word and I still need to be formed by His word.

And that was the prayer from the beginning was, I think, as a culture, maybe even as a church, you know, as Christians, I think a lot of us have lost a biblical worldview. And that was that sense is I said, "I'm listening to a lot of wise people say smart things. And that's not bad. That's a really good thing. But there is a greater worldview that should be my lens. And that that worldview is the word of God." So again, that wasn't just for 2022. That's probably for the rest of my life.

Annie: Yeah.

Father Mike: So yeah, my plan is January 1, day one, and go back to Genesis and Job.

Annie: Are you surprised how many Protestants have come along?

Father Mike: I'm so grateful. So grateful. And not just nationally or globally, but even in my town here in Duluth, Minnesota, there's people at the gym I go to. And they'll come up and they'd be like, "Father Mike, I'm doing that..." I'm like, "That's awesome. These women, these guys that come up, and yet we have never maybe necessarily talked about faith ever before and again, don't go to the same church. But the fact that here we are in day 353, 360 whatever it is by the time the podcast is released, and they're still hanging with it.

In fact, one of the guys I only see him on Saturdays because I go into work out at like 4:50 in the morning, and he goes at night where normal people would be awake. But on Saturdays, I see him. And he posted something on Instagram the other day that the podcast was his number one Spotify podcast. And I thought, "That's insane. This is incredible." He's I think Methodist or something and I'm Catholic, clearly. It's been one of the best joys of my life to be able to share that with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And then the other side is to be able to share it with people like... I don't know if I... this summer I was filming in a parish in my hometown area. So I was staying at my mom and dad's place. At one point, I came down Sunday afternoon into the living room, and I heard my voice in there. And I came in and they're both listening. I'm like, "Hey..." They're like, "Shhh." I'm like, "I'm sorry." They're like, "We're listening to you."

And it wouldn't have been bad if it was the Bible part of it. But it was the commentary part. The fact of the matter is, I got to read the entire Bible to my mom and dad, and some of my siblings who have been going through this whole thing. And I think that is crazy humbling. And it was an insane honor. Because these are the people who taught me how to read. And here I am getting to be able to read God's word to them. And I just think, who gets to do that? Honestly, in their life, who gets to do that?

I mean, one of my friends reached out and said something similar. They said... Let me go back. When I was 17 or 18 in high school, I always asked to be in this event where they asked, like, "Here's some background information that when we introduce you to the crowd, let them know a little bit about you."

And so one of the things that was what do you want to do with your life? Like, what's your biggest goal in life? And I think I wrote something like, "I want to

bring as many souls to Jesus as I possibly can." And so when they introduced me, they said, "This is Mike Schmitz. He wants to do a lot of good in the world." He kind of neutered that one.

Annie: But you knew you wanted to be a priest then?

Father Mike: I didn't know. I wasn't sure what God wanted. I knew I wanted to be a missionary or I wanted to be a priest maybe or teach theology or something like this. I knew that Jesus had to be the center of all of it.

And then one of my friends pointed out, they said, "Do you realize you get to proclaim the gospel to all of these people at one time." And I just think, "I didn't realize that. No." I just thought I was... you know.

Again, I don't want to talk about myself, but it's just an honor. So when you started by saying, like, "How does it feel?" I'm like, "Oh, I'm an under feeler. Here I am now going like, Actually, never mind. I'm a misdiagnosis of myself apparently, because it's just gratitude is probably the number one thing. Overwhelmed by gratitude.

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, Simplified and their [Simplified Planner](#). My dear friend, Emily Ley, started Simplified as a response to feeling busy and overwhelmed with a mission to equip and inspire other women to simplify their lives too with the goal of weeding through all the dings and buzzes and notifications that bombard us in an increasingly digital world. She wanted to give us all a place to write out our thoughts and to-dos. And this led to their Cornerstone product, the Simplified Planner.

Besides my Bible and my journal, my Simplified Planner is my go-to, gotta-have-it-with-me item. It's how I know what's coming up and remember the things that I need to remember and arrive where I'm supposed to be at the right time. So get everything out of your head onto paper so you can spend more time focusing on the things that matter.

The 2022 editions are available now and they are just lovely, beautiful cover design, spiral or book bound, and daily, weekly or monthly options. And if you're not a paper planner person, never fear, Simplified also has tons of other beautiful products to help you simplify your life too. Notepads, baby books, art prints journals, and more.

Visit Emilyley.co/thatsoundsfun and use the code THATSOUNDSFUN15 for 15% off your order. That's emilyley.co/thatsoundsfun, and you'll get 15% off with the code THATSOUNDSFUN15.

[00:19:05] <music>

Andi: Hey, my name is Andi Andrew and my new book is called *Friendship--It's Complicated*. And my favorite Christmas song is *Joy to the World*. And I'll tell you why. Because my daughter Finley Grace Andrew, when we were doing the Christmas pageant, she had the solo to start out the song.

And as she began to sing as an angel, everybody else started singing with her. And she turned around while she was seeing *Joy to the World* and gave a stank eye to every single person singing with her while she sang *Joy to the World*. And I will never forget how it gave me so much joy to watch that happen. But also *Joy to the World* because Jesus has come. I love every single part of that song.

Annie: And now back to our conversation with Father Mike.

[00:19:46] <music>

Annie: You are also my number one Spotify. I will show you a screenshot. Number one Spotify top podcast of the year. But the funny thing, Father Mike, is it says, "You've listened to 247 episodes." And I was like, "That's not that impressive when they're 365 in Spotify." That number isn't quite all the way up. But I was like, That was also before December started so 330. So I'm better than one out of three.

Father Mike: No. Are you a one time speed or a 1.5 time speeder?

Annie: This is a great question. I'm embarrassed that you asked it. For some reason, 1.5 felt disrespectful. And so I do 1.2. Here at 1.2. It's awesome.

Father Mike: No, I love that. I had so many people tell me that. I asked that question because I have to listen sped up. So I was listening to the Gospel of John. And myself, I thought, "Well, it's the Gospel of John. It is so profound and deep. I'm going to listen at one time speed." And I actually had to text the producer of the podcast and said, "Did you all engineer it slower? Because it seems so slow."

And he asked some of the editors, and like, "No, we didn't adjust this at all. That's how..." And I thought, "Oh, that's what people have to listen to." I felt so sluggish.

So I realized that I like it snappy, even the word of God I like it snappy. When I say snappy, not disrespectful snappy, but just to kind of like-

Annie: How fast do you listen to yourself?

Father Mike: At 1.5 or 2 times.

Annie: Or two?

Father Mike: Yeah.

Annie: Father Mike, that is definitely disrespectful to yourself. That's too fast. That's too fast.

Father Mike: I don't know. I don't know. It's a... yeah.

Annie: Tell me how you and God are different after this year?

Father Mike: I just celebrated a birthday-

Annie: Happy birthday. I love it.

Father Mike: ...earlier this week.

Annie: Oh, this very week?

Father Mike: Yeah. Yeah.

Annie: You should have told us on the pod. I talked to you every day. You're supposed to tell me when it's your birthday.

Father Mike: Sorry. But one of the questions someone asked, they said, What... It's kind of like your question. It was, "What is something you take away from this last year?" And I would say one of my takeaways is I know that I am well-loved. I've been loved very well. I'll say I've been loved very well. And so over the course of this last year, I recognize that God has loved me really well.

How are we different? I mean, I've known He's loved me ever since I was told that from as long as I can understand English. And it gets deeper. But I would say that over the last year that one of the things that God has just reminded me of is that

He's loved me well and that my family has loved me well. And that I have like our students, they love me.

So after I recorded the final episode a couple of days ago, I told some students like, "You guys, I'm done. This is incredible." And one of our students, she said, "Oh, that's awesome. That's so great. We're really proud of you. Do you think you'll be more available now?" And it was one of those kind of like daggers to the heart of like, "Ah, has that felt like that? Has it felt like this has taken me or taken my time, taken my heart away from you all?"

And I can't just dismiss it and go, "Oh, it was fine. It was fine." I have to sit there and say, "Okay, yeah, this didn't just cost me something. This might have cost some of our students the attentiveness of a father.

It's interesting because as a priest, one of the things that we... the deepest identity... So I remember in seminary, back in the day, they had said, "As you get ordained a priest, you're not just ordained this functionary to dispense the sacraments or not just go to the liturgy, that kind of thing." They said, "You have to be something more than that. Something other than that."

And at least the time when I was there, they'd never really gave a real clear sense of what is that. It was kind of they would, say, talk about like ministry of presence and whatnot. And it wasn't until a few a bunch of years ago, maybe 10 years ago, where it really became clear here, especially being on a college campus that "Oh, there is a reason why we call priest father. It's because there's a spiritual fatherhood that we were ordained for.

So I realized that. And especially for some of your listeners that are like, "Oh, that can be a problematic thing, because didn't Jesus say somewhere about 'call no man Father'?" This is a good question. But at the same time, the depth of... you might use that... How about this pastor, the heart of the shepherd? But we recognize that it has to go deeper than that. And so what is the number one thing a shepherd does with a sheep? It's not merely guard them, it's not merely feed them; it's be with them.

What's the number one thing a dad can do for his kids? Again, it's not all the other things he asked to do, which is raise them and teach them and train them and work for them, but it's to be with them. And so I think that there's an element where it's grievous when someone says, "Father, you weren't there."

So my prayer is that if it costs them something, then they get the blessing as well. Because I know it's cost me something, but hopefully there's a blessing. Does that make sense?

Annie: Yes, yes. You don't mean to do anything. It's great. This makes tons of sense. Really. The tears are still too close for me to respond directly to that. So let's talk about Tobit. Yes.

Father Mike: Okay. Yes.

Annie: You read me books of the Bible I have never known. I need you to know that in this year I've bought a Talmud because of a Jewish friend of mine. I've got a First Nations Bible because of my Native American friends. And I bought the Great Adventure Bible because my friend, Father Mike. So now I own three new spiritual texts that I did not own before. So I have my own copy of Tobit. There are seven books in the Apocrypha, is that correct, that you read to us?

Father Mike: Yes, yeah.

Annie: Okay. But Tobit is the one for me. Do you have a favorite in there?

Father Mike: No, I really like Tobit a lot as well. The prayer of Tobit at the end, not only the story of God's care and His providence for Tobit, for Tobias, for Sarah. But also, there are... you kinda like how Sirach and Proverbs have also Sirach.

Annie: I did not like Sirach too, yeah.

Father Mike: Wisdom have like life advice. But there's these little gems—or James. Even the letter to James—there's little gems in the Book of Tobit of just "here's how you should live. This is a wise way to live. This is the way that honors God." Yeah, I love it.

Annie: I think I may have told you this when it was happening. But I was on vacation when you were reading Tobit. So I'm at the beach and I'm just walking. And I'm saying to myself, "I've never heard any of this before." I'm like crying on the beach being like, "This is the kind of story I've ever heard it." I've never read this. I'm 41 years old. I've been a believer since I was five. So I've been in this game for a while. I have never known that Tobit existed. And it is one of the most impactful parts of my 2021.

Father Mike: That's phenomenal. We have a retreat we put on for high school students. It's called TOBIT.

Annie: I'm too old. I missed it.

Father Mike: So it's not only the name, it's also an acronym for the Theology of the Body Immersion for Teens. So T-O-B-I-T. I mean, even just think of Tobia's prayer the night of he and Sarah's wedding, and where he just "Arise my sister and let us pray to the Lord and ask His mercy upon us." It's so incredible.

In fact, so many of our students they will choose that as their wedding reading, where Lord, you know that I did not marry this woman out of lust, but for a noble purpose. That helped us to grow old to a ripe old age. And the both of them say together: Amen, amen. There's something about that desire expressed through scripture to honor, to uphold, to love each other truly in the face of risk. And I love the fact that the people who are listening to this podcast-

Annie: Tell them. Tell them. Tell them.

Father Mike: ...Sarah, who she's been married seven times before this, and every night of the wedding night, this demon Asmodeus has killed her husband. And yet she keeps trying. And that just blows my mind. It just blows my mind.

Annie: Same.

Father Mike: We're surrounded by people like this all the time. We're surrounded by people who there are real sufferings in their lives, and every morning they keep getting up and every morning they keep trying and they cry to the Lord. And there may be some times when it's really clear that God is responding, but oftentimes here's the Lord, He's silent. He's not absent. He's silent. But they keep trying.

And you think about the virtue of hope and the virtue of humility, which are just so wrapped up in the virtue of courage. That you think here is Sarah, who says, "I'm not going to give up." And here's Tobia's who says, "I'm going to take a risk." Every wedding I'm at, I always think of those two and think, like, "Here' a couple that are saying, 'I'm not going to give up,' and a couple that says, 'I'm willing to risk the rest of my life for the chance to be yours.'"

Annie: In that, her father is digging a grave for Tobias while they're getting married.

Father Mike: The whole thing, I mean, I'm like, How is this not a movie we've seen? That the father's out there digging a grave because seven other times the next morning, the guy's dead.

Father Mike: Right. Exactly. That's been a gift. When you emailed me about that, I was like, "Oh, Annie, I'm so grateful that you reached out because it is one of my favorites." There's so much wisdom and there's so much, again, of God's heart that gets revealed. Kind of like how in Hosea, the Prophet Hosea, just his brokenness, but so much of the Father's heart is revealed through Hosea letting his heart be broken.

Annie: Every day when you're doing the commentary, have you pre-written what you're going to say? Or are you just going off of your own experience and what you think stands out to you that day?

Father Mike: Yes. So I have a number of commentaries that have been helpful over the course of the year. And sometimes I know that, oh, gosh, I need to write down the bullet points of what I want to say or I'm going to be completely lost. Especially, man, the New Testament has been a rough one. The Old Testament was really clear in some ways. But going through the letters of Paul or any of the letters, you go through three chapters, you've covered a lot of territory.

Annie: Yes. Yes.

Father Mike: And so it's kind of one of those, what do you pick? But for the Old Testament, it was a gift because I could have bullet points and say, "Okay, I want to cover this and this and this." But then nothing else is written out. I'm just kind of just trying to offer my best reflection after some study and prayer.

Annie: You can tell you've been thoughtful about the Bible for a very long time.

Father Mike: I hope so. Because I want to have fun. You know, hopefully, there's an energy and a lightness about it. But at the same time not flippant and not disrespectful or Cavalier.

Annie: Well, you've done that really beautifully. Let me ask you one of the questions that our friends from our AFD Weekend Review email have brought to us. Kelly's asking, she said, "My son is considering and leaning towards going to seminary to become a priest. How did people support you while you were a seminarian and now as a priest? Is a Father and priests the same thing? Sorry.

Father Mike: Yeah, yeah, yeah, exactly.

Annie: Yeah. Is there a lower level of priest under Father?

Father Mike: Nope, nope. Great question, though.

Annie: Listen, I know nothing. This is just the beginning of our friendship, where I'm going to ask you stuff and you're like, "Annie, have you read a book before? Have you ever known a Catholic before?" So sorry.

Father Mike: This is great. No, no, it's awesome. There's three orders essentially in holy orders. It's deacon, priest, bishop. Those are kind of the levels under holy orders. And so in some ways, you could say like the priest is the deacon and then Bishop.

So how could someone support? I'll tell you my story. I was discerning like, "God, what do you want me to do?" in high school. I went to a normal college and I studied theology there instead of going to a seminary in college. And I was so grateful because I felt like I had a lot of pressure, not pressure, internal pressure that if I didn't go to seminary and college then I'd be saying no to the Lord.

But one of the things I've discovered since then is God is never waiting for us to answer a question that He hasn't asked yet. So if I didn't say yes to seminary I thought I'd be saying no to God. But then I realized, "Wait, He hasn't actually specifically asked me to do this."

My dad actually he was one who spoke and he said... you know, he had discerned whether he used to be called to be a priest or not, and that was the answer. But he said an older priest told him that if you're called, you'll always be called. So just be at peace. And he said, "Why don't you go to a normal college for four years, and maybe in four years you'll have more clarity."

And that was he just gave me permission. And that giving me permission was so helpful. So I went to, as I said, a kind of normal college. I majored in theology. There's a long story but I'll shorten it up. I was a missionary for just a year after that time in Central America teaching at a school. And it was a gift. It was such a time of conversion.

I was dating this gal and just absolutely loved her. And then I was in prayer. And I had been wrestling with it. I mean, it came back up when I was down there in Central America. And it just became really clear one day that after 10 years, essentially every day of saying, "God, just let me know. Whatever it is you want, I'll just do it. But just let me know." One day it was very, very clear.

And it was an incredible experience of God giving so much clarity and so much freedom. Meaning this is what I'm calling you to do. If you don't, I still love you. And that was just like, "Mmh Huh, okay, Lord." But I've been saying for 10 years every day, "God just let me know and I'll do it." And so not only was it a tension or good balance between clarity and freedom, there's also this incredible experience of sadness and peace.

So I was absolutely in love with it. We had planned on, okay, I'll come back from this year of being on mission and then we'll get engaged and next summer we'll get married. Like this is the whole plan. I just had been accepted to grad school already to get masters and hopefully PhD. I'll teach in college, and then it was really clear that that's not what I was being asked to do. So I remember just bawling my eyes out.

But at the same time in the midst of that sorrow, having a depth of peace and joy of going "Oh my gosh, Lord." So my image was always... if you've ever been scuba diving, I remember—I've done like twice—sitting on like the gunwale of this boat and you have this tank on and mask on. Just everything. The way it's going up and down and up and down on these waves. But they said, "We just fall over. Just go back." And you sink two feet under the water and it's just calm.

And so you know that on the surface, yeah, there's all these waves, but deep down there was this, "No, this is right and this is good. I have peace and joy even in the midst of my heart being broken."

So long story long apparently, my parents came down and visited me while I was down there. I had already applied to seminary back home, and I hadn't told them. We're hanging out in this porch outside in the jungle and my mom says, People stop on the street... someone asked, "What are you doing next year?" I was like, "Oh, yeah. Well, I think I'm going to seminary." Like, "Oh, okay? What about Melissa?" That's her name. "What about Melissa?"

Well, I told them and like, "Okay, what about this?" What will you study?" Here and there. And they're like, "Okay, wow. Okay. Well, we're not surprised." That was it. So it was just very low pressure. For the next four or five years, I think my mom never said anything positive or negative at all about it. Just like, "Oh, how is school going?" or "how seminary? How's this?" But she never said anything positive or negative?

And I thought, "Does she not even care? What's going on?" I realized after the fact that she just didn't want to unduly affect me in one way or another. Like push me away. Because I remember thinking, "Mom, when was the last time I did anything just because you want me to do it? Much less break up with this woman of my dreams." That kind of a thing.

But the whole point of that whole story really was I think there's an element of here's some support. Like, "Great. How's it going? We're present to you. But our hopes and dreams aren't hanging on you." And I think that's probably just good parenting, right? Where there's that sense of we have...

I remember my mom years ago, I mean, while me being a kid, I remember being a kid and her saying something along the lines of "I don't care what any of you kids do for a living? I just want you to honor the Lord. Like whatever it is, I just want you to make sure that it's for the right reason and that it honors God." And like, "Okay, great. There's a lot of ways a person can do that." So yeah, I think that could really help is just this "I'm not pushing away, I'm not pushing you towards. Just how can I help?" That's all needs to be said sometimes.

[00:37:04] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, [Redeeming Love the Movie](#). You guys, the movie. Now listen, y'all know I'm a big fan of getting swept away in a big love story. And if you're like me and enjoy a good romantic film with beautiful cinematography, then you're going to love *Redeeming Love*. It's in theaters January 2022.

Find me another woman around my age who grew up in church who didn't adore reading the international bestselling novel by Francine Rivers also called *Redeeming Love*. I mean, all my friends are in it, guys and girls.

The movie based on this beloved novel takes place during the California Gold Rush of 1850 and follows the story of Angel, the most notoriously sought-after woman in the Sierra Nevada foothills town of Paradise. Y'all, the drama, the drama.

And just as she's about to give up on finding freedom, Angel meets Michael and encounters a love that's unlike anything she's ever experienced. But shame about her past causes Angel to run away from the very thing she's always wanted. Michael won't give up on finding her and as a result, Angel discovers there's no brokenness that love can't heal

Redeeming Love features Abigail Cohen, Tom Lewis, Nina Dobrev, Eric Dane, and Famke Janssen. And it's rated PG 13. It premieres January 21 in theaters nationwide. So gather a big group of friends or just pair up with someone you love to go see *Redeeming Love*. For more information or to find tickets to a theater near you, visit redeeminglovemovie.com. Again, that's redeeminglovemovie.com.

[00:38:38] <music>

Christy: Hi, this is Christy Nockels, the author of *The Life You Long For*, and my favorite Christmas song. I'm going to go with *O Holy Night*.

Nathan: I'm Nathan Nockels. And I would say my favorite Christmas song would be *The First Noel*.

Annie: And now back to finish up our conversation with Father Mike.

[00:39:00] <music>

Annie: I think it's really profound that in your story of being unmarried and choosing this life that the thing you felt the most at the end of this year is more loved.

Father Mike: Thank you. Because I do want you to ask what the experience was. So one of the things that held me back... not held me back. Two things I was afraid of about seminary and being a priest is one was I thought it was kind of like a giant nerd factory where you go in normal and you come out very different.

Annie: Very uncool.

Father Mike: Very uncool. I thought, "I don't want." And then, of course, I got there and realized that "Oh, maybe I'm the nerd here. Maybe I'm the one with the oddball" because there were some incredible men that I studied with. And the other fear was I thought it'd be really lonely. I think anyone hears about, okay, so celibate priesthood, you're not married, don't have kids.

The picture I had in my head was there I am in northern Minnesota in this drafty old rectory. I'm sitting in my rocking chair with an afghan on my lap and pet stroking my cat, looking out over the winter tundra, and just rocking back and forth and hearing the clock tick, tick, tick. That's how I imagined it. I thought that's what my life is going to be like.

And it has been the opposite like. I sometimes wish I was lonely. At times, I'm like, "There's so many people and there's so much goodness. And as you've reminded me, I've been loved really well. The Lord has given me, especially in my role, I've been on this campus for... this is my 17th year.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Father Mike: And He has given me so many spiritual children who He has given me the chance to love—I haven't always done it perfectly—who have loved me back. The opposite, I would never describe my life as being lonely. It's so full.

Of course, obviously, every Christian experiences the cross. We all experience pain. I remember a priest once saying, "If I had 100 lives, I would choose to be a priest every one of those lives. And I probably would say the same thing. It's been a gift, and a huge gift.

Annie: I said to some friends recently that I've decided that loneliness isn't going to be a bar that I make decisions off of anymore. Because I think everybody feels it.

Father Mike: That's so good.

Annie: And so I'm just like, "Who cares?" Because I'm not married yet either. And so I'm like, loneliness is going to happen no matter who's in your life. So that's not going to be a bar anymore that makes me decide how I feel about the rest of my life. That's just part of the gig I think for humans.

Father Mike: It is. It is. And that maybe that's why I would say that I've never described my life as lonely because I just know, like, oh, that's normal. I know people who are married and like happily married who get lonely. People who have a bunch of kids who get lonely. People who have a lot of friends who get lonely. And like, yes, it's just a normal part of life. So I'm glad you highlighted that. When did you come to that realization or conclusion?

Annie: Probably in the last three months. I just was like, "Wait, I always feel this." I started being like, "I feel like I've made a lot of decisions about how I want to do things based on whether it made me feel lonely." And there are times where I still... I think we're allowed to do that. We're allowed to listen to the loneliness and make decisions off of it for sure. But also, I just went like, "Oh, that's not going to be a success factor to me anymore. "Well, I wasn't lonely" or "Oh, I'm lonely." I just took away loneliness' power to write the rest of the story for me.

Father Mike: That's awesome. I love that. How has that happened? Or how is that like been lived out the last three months? Has it been difficult to remember that or is it been more...?

Annie: I think it's both. I think the answer is yes, as you said earlier. I think the answer is yes. It is difficult. It just is a different conversation I have with myself when it's happening of like, "Hey, remember, this is okay. Hey, I bet that does feel that way. What doesn't that change and what does it change?" You know, I think it just is a little more permission to let it be a wave that washes over versus a wave that knocks me over.

Father Mike: Yeah, yeah, that's good. Love it. What a grace!

Annie: Right. It is a gift from the Lord. Right? Because the other option is the other thing I've done a lot, which is let it kind of be a directional thing. And I don't want that to be the case. We got too much life left to live and I have no idea what happens next. So I'm like, "Okay."

Father Mike: Honestly, you can't. No one can.

Annie: Right. Right. Okay, Father Mike, I want to really honor your time. So now is when I'm going to cry and tell you how much this year has meant to me. Are you ready?

Father Mike: I'm ready.

Annie: Okay, I'm getting a tissue. I have no idea why I found your podcast. I like starting things in January and I like finishing them. I did not know that... And I've read the Bible for a long time. I have never experienced it like this. I have never felt connected to the Bible like I did when you've actually read it to me. I have never felt changed by it consistently, but in small ways, versus running into a scripture and it being this big, mind-blowing moment. That's happened a lot and I'm thankful. But it's like you tweaked my robot life every day, right? Like you change the screw over here and you change the handle over here. So you changed me every day.

So I brought you all the way here in front of all these people to selfishly get a chance to say thank you. Because every day when you've asked us to pray, I've prayed for you. And I thought, "Father Mike pray for me too. It's what he does." So I just am so thankful that you put your time into this and that you let Protestants listen along. And you shared Catholicism with me in a way that made me feel closer to God, and to my Catholic friends, not more separated.

I thought, We are one group of people. We are one group of people. There's some things that aren't the same about our church experiences but the idea that we get to be in heaven forever together is very exciting to me. And I will be way more chill when that happens. I will not cry every time I see you there. But I just cannot thank you enough.

Father Mike: I don't have any words. Thank you so much. I don't know if you can respond to a thank you with a thank you.

Annie: Not here. I'm just kidding.

Father Mike: Nope. So earlier, maybe it was six months in, five months in, and things get kind of where it can grate on you waiting to do something every day. You know, just kind of, "Okay, this is good." But gosh, I feel weird saying it's hard. I feel weird...

And at one point, I remember just a grace being able to say, Okay, I can acknowledge that this is a burden. I can acknowledge that recording every day is a burden. And at the same time, not only is it a burden worth carrying, it is an honor that I don't deserve.

So Annie, for you to share that I think that is something I don't deserve. I'm just so grateful. It's something I don't deserve. I don't even deserve to know that it helped you know that the Lord loves you and know His heart even better than you already have. I don't deserve to know that. I already can be part of it. And so I'm just so grateful for you telling me that and so grateful to the Lord Himself for, oh, gosh-

Annie: This morning I just was journaling and I was like, "God, who would we be without your word?" Like, who would we be? I would be so lost. I'd be so lost."

Father Mike: Me too. I wouldn't even be me.

Annie: That's it, Father Mike. I would not even be me. That's it. I would not even be me without God's word. So it has been an extraordinary year for me in a lot of ways, good ways and hard ways and all sorts of things. And when I think back on this year, I think of you as one of the most consistent pastoring voices that has walked me through a year that you didn't know. It's wild.

You've done that for probably... I don't know your stats. I did not stalk you that hard. I would imagine that the podcast has reached millions. I mean, I'd imagine it's

reached millions. And it's just wild to think you're now every Protestant, Catholic priest. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know if you're ready for that.

Father Mike: I hope so. I hope that, you know, through that, I think you mentioned, I hope that there's that sense of... I know sometimes some non-Catholic Christians can think like, "Well, Catholics aren't even Christians." So I hope that that hopefully broke that idea. Because the Catholic Church says, Yeah, we're separated, but we're separated brethren, meaning that we're still brothers and sisters. There's some divisions but we're still brothers and sisters. And it's an honor to have you, Annie, as my sister.

Annie: I feel the same. The thing you don't know is that when you become friends with me you're like super stuck with me. I like don't go anywhere. So if you need anything from Nashville, from me, from... you know, this is not our last time chatting I hope. That would be my hope-

Father Mike: I hope not. I hope so.

Annie: ...is that you'll come back. So the last question we always ask, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, Father Mike, tell me what you do for fun. What sounds fun to you?

Father Mike: So I was talking with some brother priests maybe five weeks ago, and they were saying, "What do you do for fun?" Because I was kind of talking about some things in my life." First of all, I don't really know. Like, okay, that's a problem.

But kind of like, well, I love so... so stupid. Well, I'm not going to judge myself. I really like CrossFit. And I like exercising. It is one of those things where not only do I like getting better and I like pushing, every day gets to be competition. Because there's a strength component of "are you getting any better?" There's also this metabolic conditioning. And you're competing against yourself and against the people next to you. I love that.

I start every day off with a competition and trying to get better. And also the people that I've met at the gym, I just really... like there's some days, as I said, I get up like 4:15. And I'll get up because like, well, if I'm out there, Eric's going to miss me and Josh is going to be there. That sense of like I need to be there because I need to see my crew. It is a fun thing that some mornings I dread doing, but I always am glad that I did.

Annie: Yeah, that's a great answer. Your fun is allowed to be fun. And a CrossFit person always tells people when they do CrossFit. So you are about to get in.

Father Mike: Oh my gosh, okay, so yes. I was like, That's why I didn't want to say it. Because I'm like, "I know this stereotype. I have to mention it at least every conversation." And you gotta give me the chance at the end of this one.

Annie: Hey, you've really done it. Is there anything we didn't talk about you want to make sure we say. Is there anything left?

Father Mike: I don't know. If there is, we should save it for the next conversation.

Annie: That's right. There we go. Thanks again for all you've done. I'm very very grateful. And thanks for being on the show. That just means the word.

Father Mike: Same. That was so great. Gosh, so grateful. Yes.

[00:50:01] <music>

Intro: Oh, you guys, isn't he awesome? I know, I'm sorry about all the tears, but I just can't help it. Someone who has walked with me through this entire year and didn't even know. I mean, he's just been a part of every day that's mattered to me this year. And I am so thankful for him, for the Word of God. And yes, for sure we're staying friends with him. Don't worry. He will be back. I have like eight other conversations I want to have with him. So it is going to happen.

Hey, make sure you follow Father Mike Schmitz on social media, tell him thanks so much for being on the show. And if you've been listening to the Bible in a Year, tell him how much it's mattered to you. I mean, he already feels so love this year. Let's be a part of ending that strong. Yeah.

And if you want to start listening next year, if you want to start over, remember he said they're starting a new feed and they'll start releasing it every day. I'm telling you, I cannot recommend it enough. Listen to Father Mike every day or most days. Listen to Father Mike as much as you can in 2022.

I will definitely share the link when that goes live. But you can also probably find it. Wherever you are listening to this podcast, you can probably find Father Mike's Bible in a Year for 2022. If you need anything else for me, you know, I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me.

I think that's it for me today, friends. I've got to stop crying. So I have to move on from this. So go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Thanking God for Father Mike and all that he and the word of God have meant this year. I'm just so grateful.

So today what sounds fun to me... You know, speaking of Israel, I get to eat at a Middle Eastern restaurant tonight. So I'm going to have some hummus. I'm looking forward to it. That sounds fun to me. So y'all have a great day.

We'll see you back here tomorrow on the last day of our 12 Days of Christmas. You know who it is. It's time for that Q&A with Santa Claus. He's answering your questions tomorrow right here on That Sounds Fun. We'll see you then.

Francis: My name is Francis Chan. I'm the author of *Until Unity*. And my favorite Christmas song, and it's going to sound so cheesy but it's because of the memories and everything else, it is the entire Amy Grant Christmas album from like 30 something years ago.