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Annie: Hi friends! Happy Sunday. Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs and I'm really happy to be here with you today. I love getting to be with you on a Sunday. We've got a great show in store. It's day four of the 2021 Christmas Party where we're bringing you 12 days in a row of Christmas episodes.

Imagine we're all just like mingling around it, a fun get together, eating great food, listening to awesome music—you hear in the background right now. It's our friends for KING & COUNTRY with *Little Drummer Boy* from their album *A Drummer Boy Christmas*. And we're just chatting with old friends and getting to know some new ones. Don't miss our first three days with the guys from Deck the Hallmark, Porsha Williams, and Keatyn Klaus.

But usually on Sundays in our 12 Day series, I like to bring on some of my favorite pastors and some of my favorite leaders in the faith space to kind of have a Sunday conversation with us. So that's what we have done today.

Before we dive into that conversation, I want to take a moment to share about one of our incredible partners, [Stephanie May Wilson](#), and her new prayer journal. You may be familiar with Stephanie. She's the host of The Girls Night podcast and author of the *Lipstick Gospel* and she recently came out with a beautiful new prayer journal called *The Between Places: 100 Days to Trusting God When You Don't Know What's Next*.

And it's perfect for any woman who is navigating any sort of uncertainty about her future. It's for the single woman hoping to find her person or the woman who's dating someone and wondering if it's time to take the next step, the woman who's wondering if the career she's been in for so long is still the place she wants to invest her time and energy, and it's for the woman asking whether or not she's ready to have a baby, and a woman dealing with the complexities of trying to grow a family, and really any of us who are navigating uncertainty in the wake of the last couple of years that have definitely felt like our sense of security has been shaken up a bit.

Stephanie has written 100 beautiful guided prayer prompts in *The Between Places*, and they will help you live today with more contentment, step into the future with more courage and faith, and rest in God's peace knowing He's always with you.

To pick up a copy of this beautiful keepsake prayer journal, just head to StephanieMayWilson.com and use the promo code ANNIE, it'll give you 15% off. Again, that's StephanieMayWilson.com and the promo code for 15% off is ANNIE.

Intro: Today on the show on our first of two Sunday shows during the 12 days of Christmas, I get to talk with my friend Becca Stevens. You may remember Becca from Episode 117 when she was on the podcast before. It's a great one to go back and listen to today.

She's a speaker, social entrepreneur, author, a priest, the founder of ten justice initiatives, and president of Thistle Farms, which you've heard us talk about a lot. We rave about the good work that they do. She's been featured on PBS NewsHour, the Today Show, CNN, ABC World News, named a CNN hero, and a White House Champion of Change.

Drawn from 25 years of leadership and mission-driven work, Becca leads important conversations across the country with an inspiring message that love is the strongest force for change in the world. She has a new book out called *Practically Divine*. It is just beautiful. I find her so wise and inspiring, and I know that you will too.

Just a note to any of my MiniBFFs listening, because of the nature of Becca's work with Thistle Farms, we do discuss some themes that might be a bit grown-up for my MiniBFFs. So it may be one to listen to on your own. And honestly, if there's abuse in your story, I just want you to know the work of Thistle Farms and that that is what we are talking about today. So just want you to have that on your head so it does not surprise you. So let's find a quiet corner to chat in and spend some time with our friend Becca Stevens.

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Annie: Becca Welcome back to That Sounds Fun. Thanks for doing this today.

Becca: Gosh, huge honor. I'm so excited to be here.

Annie: I just absolutely love every time we get to sit down. So thank you for letting us record this conversation. Okay, you were on November of 2018. So it's been about three years.

Becca: Oh my gosh.

Annie: How are you? How's everything?

Becca: You know, I saw somebody in a stupid gathering last night who said, "Do you remember me?" And I was like-

Annie: Oh, why do people start like that?

Becca: And I go, "Did I meet you before COVID?" And they said yes. I said, "No, I do not.

Annie: No, I do not know.

Becca: "No, I do not remember. If it was pre-COVID, I'm out."

Annie: The kindest thing people can do in those moments is go, "Hey, we've met before. My name is Annie." Versus "Do you remember me?" Because "do you remember me" is-

Becca: It's a quiz?

Annie: Yes, yes, it's a quiz. And you're like, "No matter my answer, I'm wrong."

Becca: Or I need a multiple choice. That's fair.

Annie: Give me name options and where we met options, and I'll pick the right one. I'll pick one of the two correctly. I mean, you run Thistle Farms that our friends get to hear about a lot on the podcast because I love it and we're grateful that we get to partner with y'all. When a thing like COVID happens for women that you serve, how does it change their lives in ways that it didn't change my life?

Becca: I mean, it was so much crazy about COVID in the whole journey of the last 18 months for the whole community, individual women, all of it. I mean, I heard about COVID, I was sitting at an asylum-seeking camp in Mexico when they said, "We're shutting it down, the border, you know, March 12."

Annie: When you're sitting in Mexico?

Becca: I'm sitting in Mexico. So I left and I came home. And like you, Annie, all the gig shut down-

Annie: All of them.

Becca: Everything happened. Everything happened. And so I came home thinking, "My Calendar is wide open, everything's wide open. Thistles Farms did not have to shut down. We were considered essential work. We started manufacturing hand sanitizer, we were making masks, the whole thing.

And the very first thing I heard from one of the women is, "I don't feel trapped at home. I feel safe at home." And that's a huge difference. She said, "I've been trapped at home before." So there was this idea that we're going to keep people safe, so we started this whole food delivery system. That was the very first thing we did.

And then we just branched out into we're going to write 10,000 letters of gratitude. If everybody's sitting around, the cafe is closed, our shops closed, we have a bunch of justice enterprises, you know, that we were making-

Annie: Y'all have expanded. Y'all took over that whole block. I drove by yesterday with my friend, Kelly, and I was like, "Kelly, did you know that Thistle Farms took over the whole block on Charlotte?"

Becca: And we just bought another building.

Annie: Uh-huh. Right there?

Becca: There was no other buildings to buy there, so we bought just down the road a bit. But I would say that for us as a community and for individual women, COVID was, in many ways, very, very hard. There were people hospitalized all that, but in many, many ways, this huge gift.

Annie: Wow.

Becca: We did about 147% increase in sales online. People just stayed home and shopped. And I thought of Thistle Farms and what we were doing. We opened a safe house. We opened a brand new house. It wasn't that we shut down our residential program. Because of COVID we expanded. So it's been this crazy thing of, you know, we all got COVID, we went through all those journeys together. But it was a humbling, beautiful, deep, meaningful time for us.

Annie: I'm thinking about the shows that our friends have heard so far on 12 Days of Christmas. And yesterday, we talked about decorating, and we've talked about big houses with lots of trees and lots of decisions you have to make. And I'm thinking

man, this is the YES AND of life. That both these types of families have existed and everything in between it above and below. And I don't know who's the above and who's the below.

Becca: Exactly. And the fact that we're just better when we're together. When the above and the below, however you measure that and however you flip that, when we're together, I mean, that's when love is exchanged, which means that's where God's present. And without each other, it's depressing and scary.

Annie: Yes. And you also pastor a community here. So not only are you pastoring the Thistle Farms women in this time and your own heart and your own family, you've got a flock of sorts, you've got a community at y'all's church that you're in charge of. Are you all right? And you wrote *Practically Divine*. And you said it's the best thing you've ever written. Which I loved it, so...

Becca: Thank you. Yeah, I'm okay. I'm good. I was thinking... this is the crazy thing. Can I tell you a quick story on that?

Annie: Yes, of course. Oh, my gosh. Yeah, sure.

Becca: So the other day I was in the bathtub where I do all my writing and thinking and I hope that gives no one a visual. But I was in there thinking about I don't want to put up a tree this year. This is 2021 and I'm not putting up a tree. And I was like, "I wonder what that is about?" I've never done that. I have three kids, a husband of 34 years. And I was like, "Maybe this is the aftermath."

And I have seen when I've been on the road, and I'm sure you have this fall when you're touring and speaking, there's a lot of stress and there's something different in the air this year than even last year when people are pulling together. So what I was thinking is, could I give myself permission to not decorate? Like what would happen if you didn't? What if you didn't pull all the plastic stuff out, put it up? And it's nothing in the world. But it's something in your family, it's something in your spirit when you allow yourself to think it.

And I was like, "I think I'm just really tired. I think I'm not depressed. I'm still hopeful, I still have a million ideas. I think I just don't want to keep going pretending it's the same." And I thought, "Well, I'll only do it, I'll only decorate if one of my kids says, "Where's the tree?" Then I'll go get it. Then I'll feel guilty as a mom and go get it.

Annie: Are all your boys out of the house?

Becca: No.

Annie: Okay.

Becca: We have one still in the house. So then I got out of the bathtub and walked out the house for work. First got dressed, just so you know, guys, so everybody feels safe. And there was a decorated wreath on my front porch. AAnd an old friend whose son had just joined the boy scouts had to give out reeds and they decorated one and put it on the porch.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Becca: And I thought, "That's what love is. It's this idea of in community when you can't, someone else does."

Annie: Wow.

Becca: And when I felt like I couldn't, it took about 10 minutes and someone else did. Like the decoration was done. There was a wreath that's decorated, I hanged it on the front door. And I hope what people have learned in COVID and I hope what we're learning is like when I can't, maybe you can. And we can together do something and be there for each other.

So what I hope in this whole holiday season for everybody that's, you know, worrying about decorating or what they say there's a crisis now in America, it's an epidemic of depression among our youth, that we can step in for each other, and do for each other what we can't do for ourselves.

Annie: Yeah. That is incredible that the wreath was sitting on your front porch.

Becca: Oh, my Christmas came and it's like way early, and I'm done, and I can relax and just be there for other people and say, "You know, it's okay to feel all that. It's okay to grieve the last 18 months. And it's okay to hope. And it's okay to leave your crap under your bed and not pull it up for Christmas.

Annie: And just not do it this year.

Becca: Not do it.

Annie: If you don't want to do it, just don't.

Becca: Or do it different. Whatever.

Annie: Yeah. I said to a friend this morning. I don't know about this one thing in my life, I was like, "I just don't know how this is gonna go. I'm tired. And I just want to be found faithful. That's it." Instead of having my prayers answered, instead of it going just the way I wanted to, I just want to be found faithful. Because I feel like that's when you get the wreath on your front porch. And it feels like that's when I say to God, "I'm at the end of what I'm able to do, I think I've said everything I can say, I think I've prayed everything I can pray, what are you going to do?"-

Becca: Exactly.

Annie: ...that He puts a wreath on your front porch, right?

Becca: He puts a wreath on your front porch. The thing I love so many times in my life that has happened... You know, I'm old enough now that I can look back and I can see the pattern in the stars in the sky, you know, is that when I get in that place, it's a place of birth and not death.

Annie: Wow.

Becca: And I've always thought it was like, "Oh, my gosh."

Annie: Place of birth and not death. Writing that down. I mean, keep talking about that.

Becca: Well, because I think I let things go or I give myself the freedom to think a new thought and something is birthed. And that doesn't mean I'm letting something go. For me, you know, 25 years of putting the nutcrackers out on this huge display so my kids think I'm a good mom, or whatever I'm doing it for. I know that's such a tiny example, but there's many, many more examples that all of us have is like when you get to that place and you think it's death, it's probably birth.

Annie: Wow. That has to be true. I'm sorry to be this Biblely already on a Sunday. But, I mean, that has to be how Mary felt. I can't imagine getting that message from an angel that you're pregnant even though you've never been with the man. And now you have to tell your whole community. I've never thought about this story sitting here. That had to feel like a death to her. Because she probably thought Joseph was gonna leave her and she probably thought her family would throw her out. I've never thought about that, what that required of her where she thought there was a death when there was a birth.

Becca: I think that whole story is filled with that over and over. I was just sitting with a man two days ago, and I just flown in from this event. We're sitting at the cafe at Thistle Farms at 5122 Charlotte Avenue if anybody wants to come in and eat. I like to do random plugs as I'm telling sweet stories.

Annie: I want you to. Everybody needs to come see the... the food's delicious, but the chandelier made of teacups is one of the most beautiful things in the city.

Becca: Oh, thank you, Annie.

Annie: So I love that.

Becca: Thank you. So I just flown in, came in, sat down two days ago and this man started talking to me about his story. And it was a horrible story. And he said, "You know, I've waited months to have time with you. I've requested this time so I could sit here and tell you this thing."

And as he started talking, I was realizing that I was kind of drifting and not paying attention. I was thinking about some of our projects, I was thinking about families, thinking about whatever. And then I have to do that really put on your listening ears where you lean in where you just focus.

And at that moment in the cafe, the music felt louder than his voice and it was *What Child Is This?* And I was looking at him listening to kind of blah blah, blah, you know, horrible. Not blah, blah meaningless, blah, blah, blah really sad thinking, "Oh my gosh, you're the child. What child is this is you. What child is this is me. What child is this is us? And it was really beautiful to hear the whole story of Mary again about what child is this. Mary was thinking or holding... Was this man in front of me? And I hope anybody out there remembers what child is this is you if Christ is in us. We are the child. We are part of that.

Annie: So will you tell us about Thistle Farms, how many women you have? And I have what child is this question to follow up.

Becca: Sure. Thistle Farms has been around for 25 years. We started in Nashville. It's a National & Global network now. It's about women's freedom who have suffered from being prostituted, addicted, trafficked in the United States and other countries as well. And we started with just one house but then we started to manufacture bath and body care products and grew justice enterprises from there. There's about 105

employees. About 70% are women who are either residents or graduates. This is our busy great season where we ship all over the world.

Annie: Wow.

Becca: It's amazing how much fun it is to sit with somebody that's been in prison for the last four years to watch their first Christmas.

Annie: And how many women live in your safe houses?

Becca: We have in our residential homes about 30 women. In any given time we probably have three to five women in the safe house. And then what we're all about too, though, is now as we refer women all over the country. We are a network and we're able to hook women up from North Carolina to Nebraska to wherever, you know, bring them together to do that.

Annie: I was literally thinking Omaha when you said Nebraska. So okay, Lord, if there's somebody listening in Omaha that need some help, Thistle Farms can help you

Becca: Amen.

Annie: They can find a way to find a place for you.

Becca: It's called Magdalene Omaha. Magdalene Omaha is our sister program there. We helped start it probably four years ago. So it's a beautiful place. It's a great place for people to go.

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, Mercy Project. As we're in such an important conversation with Becca who leads so beautifully to restore women out of trafficking, I love that we have the opportunity to also partner with an organization that's fighting a different kind of trafficking halfway around the world.

See, in Ghana, there are thousands of children trafficked into the fishing industry as a result of the desperate financial situations their family finds themselves in. They feel it's their last chance to try to ensure their child will survive, to sell them into doing grueling work for 12 Long hours a day. It's a poverty cycle. The sad reality is that many of the fishermen were trafficked when they were kids.

Mercy Project takes a creative and holistic approach to this system. And reading about the amazing results brought tears to my eyes. They're forming ongoing

partnerships with the villages and teaching new fishing techniques that are more lucrative and they replace the need for child labor. This allows the children to be released and reunited with their families. Isn't that incredible?

More than 200 children have gone home to live with their families as a result of Mercy Project's efforts over the last 10 years. And they want to keep going. This is where they can use our help. There are currently 50 formerly trafficked children in Ghana needing a sponsor. You can empower a formerly trafficked child to receive education and experience freedom for only \$45 a month. And we are chipping away at those 50... I would love to see all 50 of those kids cared for by That Sounds Fun friend.

This month, Mercy Project is also going to randomly select a new child sponsor, that could be you, to travel to Ghana with their team in 2022. This will be an all-expenses-paid trip where you get to meet your sponsor child and their family, see the amazing work you're supporting and experience the beauty of Ghana.

Let's help all 50 of these kids start 2022 with hope. Simply text THATSOUNDSFUN to 74121 to help today. Imagine how much this gift will transform communities for good. Again text THATSOUNDSFUN to 74121 or visit www.mercyproject.net/thatsoundsfun.

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Jemar: Hey, my name is Jemar Tisby. I wrote the book *How To Fight Racism*. And my favorite Christmas song is *We Three Kings Of Orient Are*.

Annie: Why do you love that one?

Jemar: If I belt it out. I just love singing it. I'm not a good singer but I love singing, much to my wife's chagrin. So I'm going to sing. And I'm at the age where I don't get embarrassed so I don't care who hears me.

John: Hey, I'm John Eldridge, author of *Wild at Heart* and my favorite Christmas song are the opening movements of *Handel's Messiah* because the beauty of it and the hopefulness, right? Comfort ye. Like, comfort my people. Are you kidding me? I love that.

Annie: And now back to our conversation with Becca.

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Annie: Back to the what child is this question, I'm thinking about the women that y'all partner with and serve and employ. The longer they're with you, the more Christmas has to change in a good way for them. And so how do we talk to people who haven't experienced healthy Christmas or loving Christmas about them being part of the story, the "what child is this?" story? How do we bring hope back to Christmas for people who have not experienced that?

Becca: Annie, seriously like five days ago, this woman said to me how wild it was to experience Christmas in color.

Annie: Wow.

Becca: That there's so many bright colors over at Thistle Farms, and she's dealing with these products, and it's busy, and there's residential parties, there's all these things. And she had been in prison for the last four or five years because we criminalize women who have been victims. That's what we do.

And when she said that, I thought, you know, we don't necessarily have to bring hope to somebody that hasn't felt it, but it's like providing the time and the space for people to see the color of Christmas again. It feels like a big gift. Like who wants Christmas in black and white? Nobody.

Annie: Nobody.

Becca: And for all of us, we think we have to be some kind of hero or do something amazing so people can feel the hope or feel the joy or have to come up with the right words. And it's like, no, just be a good host.

Annie: Just be a good host. Yes.

Becca: Just send a Christmas card, do whatever, say kind thing to somebody, like "I see you. I love you. I hear you." And it's like maybe it'll come into colorful color for them because of you. I just think people basically want to be the hero of their own story in many ways as a servant, and as somebody that's part of a faithful community. But we don't have to be each other's heroes.

Annie: Wow.

Becca: It's not your job to bring me hope. It's not my job to bring you hope. But it is my job to sit across the table and see you and love you and say, "I want to be with you as you figure out what makes Christmas in color for you."

Annie: Do places like Magdalene Omaha and Thistle Farms need volunteers?

Becca: Oh my gosh, yes.

Annie: Okay. Okay.

Becca: Yes, for sure. I mean, that's one of the questions people always ask is, what can we do to help? And my answer is do whatever is on your heart, because all of it matters. Whether it's like today, all I can muster is a social media post, perfect. Social media advocacy, positivity on social media, that's huge.

If you want to just say a prayer, huge. I mean, huge, huge. Say prayers for each other. If you want to look it up on a website and figure out volunteer opportunities and see where you are and what the closest sister program is, awesome. Do all of that. And anybody can DM me, Becca Stevens, on Instagram anywhere, or Thistles Farms. Just message us. We check that stuff every day

Annie: And then you can say, "Here's how you can help."

Becca: Or if you need help.

Annie: That's what I was gonna ask you, Becca. As people are listening. I know a lot... I mean, kids are home from school for the next couple of weeks. Kids were home for all of last year. I don't even know how to phrase this question correctly. But I feel like there are people listening who don't know if they need help or not. "Is this just how marriage is or do I need to get out? Am I being abused or am I bringing this on myself?" So talk to the women who are listening. How do we know the line of "I need help"?

Becca: Well, I think you probably do need help if you're asking that question. Just so you know. And nobody brings it on themselves. I mean, if somebody is abusing you, if you are in an unsafe situation, if you feel anxious and scared, just reach out. And honestly our biggest, biggest source of referrals is social media.

Annie: Really?

Becca: Yeah.

Annie: People DM you and say they need help.

Becca: Yeah.

Annie: Wow.

Becca: And just so everybody knows, you can email me if you feel comfortable with email Beccastevens@thistlefarms.org. We will get you help. You can direct message me if you don't want to do email. However you want to do it, we will get you in touch with the right people in a safe and beautiful way.

I don't like to put a hundred numbers out there, I don't like to put referral programs out there because I really think people need human to human contact for this kind of thing. And it doesn't help to send you to an app where you feel this void of human contact.

Annie: "We'll get back to you in 24 to 48 hours." Right.

Becca: So I'm saying if you are in that space, go ahead and direct message, email, do whatever you want to do to get in touch with us and we will not let you down. That's the truth. Because here's the thing is like it's probably worse than the women are letting themselves think not better.

Annie: Wow, it is probably worse than you're letting yourself believe.

Becca: Mm-hmm. Ain't that crazy?

Annie: Women are so extraordinary. I love men too. I would like to live with one. But women are so extraordinary that they will just put their heads down and get it done. And not say it's as bad as it is.

Becca: My whole life has been about creating really safe communities of women to sit together and do the circles. Like we do crafts or whatever the task is we're doing because women start sharing stories, and they start going, "You too? Oh, my gosh, I thought it was just me." I mean, global issues of sexual assault individual women bear on their backs in shame.

Annie: Yes, yes.

Becca: That's crazy.

Annie: It's crazy. It's crazy. I don't have a lot of friends who have told me that they've been abused in their marriages. I don't have a lot of friends who have said that I've seen it once. And I remember hearing her say it's probably like this in every family. And I just would say back, "I don't think it is." It wasn't in my house growing up, it wasn't in your house growing up. And you saying it's probably worse than they are telling themselves is the one experience I have of that is it was worse than she was saying.

Becca: Well, and the other thing is that people have so much shame and guilt around it that they can't let themselves think it sometimes. Not even just a marriage. I'm talking about in relationships and all kinds of other relationships.

Like for me, my very first experience of sexual abuse happened before I knew the language of it. I didn't know the words for what was happening to me. And because I didn't know, you kind of grew up thinking "maybe that does happen a lot" or "maybe I did something wrong." Like you don't know.

Annie: Right. Right.

Becca: You don't know what you don't know. And that's what I think part of what we do when we tell the stories and we say, "You know, you might not know, but we know that that's not right. And we want to be there for you and we want to help you. We want to help you." There's a whole community, thousands of women rallying and cheering for you that want to help you to say, "You can do this. You can make it better for you, and if you have any kids, for your children.

Annie: I'm thinking even for a woman who's like, "I'm not sure," just email Becca and let her tell you.

Becca: Absolutely.

Annie: You can decide, Becca. You can tell them "this is abuse," or "this is not." But if you can email... and I'm sure the answer is gonna be yes. But I'm like, let someone else assess it with you.

Becca: Yes. And we can especially get you in touch with the right people who can help you walk through to find out what the choices and the options are for you. The main thing I want to say is that, you know, for everybody out there listening, you are an advocate, you are a friend, you are sister. You don't necessarily even have to just

email a stranger. I'm happy, happy to take your email. But also, the best thing you can do is run to safe community. Run, not walk.

And that might mean 2 of the 20 friends that... you know, two of them you trust. And you sit down with them and you say, "Hey, I'm scared. And this is why I'm scared. I don't want to be judged. I don't want to be asked to make huge decisions that I'm not ready to make. I just need to say, This is my truth. And I want to speak it. And I want you to hear me."

Annie: Yes. And we can just be that. So talk to the people who are going to get that phone call. The ones who are deemed 2 of the 20 safe. If I got that phone call tomorrow, I would be like, "We have to get you out." I would panic. So what's the next move for the one who gets that phone call?

Becca: The move for the one that gets the phone call is to sit down and be a discernment committee. Honest to God, we are capable of that. We have been together, we know each other and we're trying to say we are going to work... It's not up to me to make your decision about what you're going to do. It's up to me to hear the story and say together, let's figure the next step out. You know, it's not on you. It's not on them. The idea is community is the strongest and oldest entity for healing the world knows.

Annie: Wow.

Becca: Period. And when two or three women are gathered, Jesus is there. Amen?

Annie: Amen.

Becca: It's a Sunday morning. Preach it.

Annie: That's right.

Becca: So it's like you don't have to know the outcome before you gather. We don't have to know how the Spirit is going to move us. There are tons of resources out there. If the Spirit is moving towards resources, absolutely. If the Spirit is moving towards 911, absolutely. If the Spirit is moving towards calling the pastor and saying, "Now we need a more formal meeting in a place where, again, that silence is honored."

The reason the whole anonymity of a 12 Step program works is because people have to find spaces where they can feel I can share the story, but you're not going to out me to my whole community.

Annie: Right.

Becca: So again, these are smaller steps. If it's like somebody's life is threatened, you know, immediately... well, of course, as a friend, your discernment is going to be "I'm calling 911. We're done." If it's more of a gentle, graceful process, great.

But the women that we are working with at Thistle Farms, I mean, it's mostly criminal history of trafficking, of horrible addictions, of horrible abuse, women who were prostituted beginning at the age of five and six by their own mother.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Becca: One of the latest women coming into the National Network who's referring people, she was impregnated at 14. And I say that because it was a rape. And then her mother sold her to a dealer and her child at 15 for \$5,000.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Becca: And those situations.... that's so extreme, but I'm trying to say that's basically-

Annie: I mean, if that's happened once, if you know one story of that, that's not probably as extreme as it feels like to me, right?

Becca: Yeah. And so I'm saying I think there's a whole spectrum of what it looks like. And the idea of sometimes you can take it slow and sometimes it needs to be 911, I hope people have that kind of discernment and we can trust each other in this. But I will say, for us, the women that come in and that are in our community, they need a good two years just to understand what the trauma is they've gone through. They don't even know.

Annie: So you spend the first couple of years with them, they're working and they're going through the program and you're not even expecting them to have real answers yet.

Becca: No. It's almost like I remember slowly.

Annie: Wow.

Becca: Annie, I've come to learn truly and it's so humbling that our bodies and our minds and our hearts don't heal at the same pace.

Annie: Our bodies and our minds and our hearts don't heal at the same pace. Who's fastest? Your body?

Becca: Your body. And your heart is the slowest.

Annie: Yeah, that feels true.

Becca: We have women who are functioning, looks like it's all great, and then they go back into a horrible relationship because that's the hardest one. And their heart is still tender. So all that to say like to any listeners out there, you know, be gentle with your heart, be there for a friend and know that you can find safe place in community.

[00:32:39] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to share about one of our incredible partners, [Christian Parenting](#), and their Read, Ask, Go! advent devotionals. Did the holidays kind of sneak up on you this year like Becca was talking about? Do you feel a little like you're missing the Advent season with your family? It is not too late to get your hands on the Read, Ask, Go! interactive family advocate devotional from Christian Parenting.

Read, Ask, Go! includes 25 days of family fun, like a passage of scripture to read, questions to start awesome conversations, and going to spread Christmas cheer throughout your home and community. This devotional is super fun and most of all a meaningful way to gather as a family and celebrate Christ's coming each advent season.

For all our That Sounds Fun friends only, you can download a one day free sample to try out with your family and use the code TSF5OFF to get \$5 off your purchase today. Visit [Christianparenting.org/tsf](#) to download your free sample and redeem this offer. And if you order today, you will receive the Read, Ask, Go! Advent devotional before Christmas Day. And you can celebrate the season with your family and use the devotional to usher Christmas in every year.

Sponsor: And I got one more incredible partner to tell you about, y'all, pretzels.com. We take snacking pretty serious around this office. It is often the topic of conversation around here. But there's one snack situation we are all agreeing on and we are here for pretzels.

[Pretzels.com](https://www.pretzels.com) has got us covered. They have an amazing collection of over 50 Gourmet flavors you're going to love. And these make the perfect holiday gift too. When I tried the Garlic Red pretzels and they were so good, I immediately went to the website to see what other flavors there are. Y'all, there's a Salt Meat Vinegar. That is top of my list to try along with the pizza one. And the Apple Strudel Flavor is calling my name.

And I cannot wait to get these as part of some gift baskets I'm putting together. The packaging is so cool and the prices are super reasonable. Pretzels.com bakes micro batches of their 50 Plus gourmet flavors. Makes a huge difference. With so many options to choose from, these will really make the year's best gift.

And if any of your people have a sweet tooth and check out [licorice.com](https://www.licorice.com) as well. They have over 50 premium gourmet licorice varieties from around the world. They've got licorice candy canes, green apple shorties, watermelon sour twist, just to name a few.

Order these amazing holiday gifts for your family and friends or just for yourself, treat yourself pretzels.com today. Check out [licorice.com](https://www.licorice.com) today as well. And if you go right now, I have an awesome deal for you. You get 20% off your order, but only when you use the code THATSOUNDSFUN. So don't wait. Go to [pretzels.com](https://www.pretzels.com) today, use the code THATSOUNDSFUN and tell me how those pizza pretzels are because ours have not arrived yet.

Bubba: Hi, I'm Bubba Watson, author of *Up and Down*. My favorite Christmas song, that's *Bubbaclaus*.

Annie: That's a real song?

Bubba: I knew you're gonna say that. Yeah. I just touch down in my hovercraft. It's *Bubbaclaus*. You never heard that?

Annie: No. Who sings that?

Bubba: Oh, this guy!

Annie: Oh my gosh, it's your own Christmas song?

Bubba: Yes!

Annie: Bubba Watson! What a dream! I did not know that.

Bubba: Are you serious?

Annie: No. I'm sorry, I didn't know that.

Bubba: Go on iTunes and start typing "Bubbaclaus". I knew you're gonna say it. That's why I paused because you're going to say that.

Annie: I'm glad you did. Because I usually don't interrupt but I did.

Bubba: No, it's awesome.

Annie: *Bubbaclaus*. 100%.

Kate: My name is Kate Bowler and I'm the author of *No Cure for Being Human: (and Other Truths I Need to Hear)*. And my favorite Christmas song is *Good King Wenceslas* because I can't pronounce it and no one knows the second line.

Trillia: My name is Trillia Newbell. I'm the author of *The Big Wide Welcome*. And my favorite Christmas song is *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*.

Annie: And now back to finish up our conversation with Becca. Right now the two loudest court cases that we're hearing on national news, they involve children and sexual abuse.

Becca: Yeah.

Annie: For people who that ring so personal and for every woman you're working with, when these are the loudest things in the news, does that feel justifying or does that feel heartbreaking? Or neither?

Becca: I don't know. I mean, I think media brings out the cynical part of people that are have gone through and live through it. Sometimes like you don't know, or sure, you're saying that it's not heartbreaking. But sometimes it's not heartbreaking for sure, but it's definitely sometimes like...

I believe that a lot of us were very excited about Me Too and the idea that people's jobs were just to listen and hear the story, and then say, "Me too." And I hope that as people are hearing the big, sensational stories they remember there's another thousand quieter stories back there. And just to be compassionate to each other and

be kind in this season, because there's a hard season for people who while resilient are still survivors.

Annie: Yes, yes. When you were writing *Practically Divine*, I mean, you're writing it in the midst of Me Too being so out in the midst of the pandemic and the lockdown, in the midst of the racial unrest. And you serve a lot of different women from different backgrounds. Socio-economic, racially, all sorts of differences. How did all that play into *Practically Divine* in a different way than your other books?

Becca: I mean, it was an amazing time to write. You know this. It was an amazing time to do-

Annie: We didn't have anywhere to go

Becca: Nowhere to go. We could just, you know, sit back, write, write, rewrite, and rewrite. It was a huge gift. I had an amazing editor. I loved the whole process. And I walked through the year with it. I mean, it's 25 years of gleaning stories from women and figuring out all these beautiful ways that we are both practically divine in the sense of almost divine and enough I think kind of being where we are.

But I take a lot of the stories and the through line of that book from what was unfolding that year. And I specifically remember one of the women African-American leaders at Thistle Farms, who was a survivor who was getting married in the middle of COVID. So there's only six of us.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Becca: And she looked at me one day and said, "I know you want me to be grateful, because you got me off the streets, but I'm mad as hell."

Annie: Really?

Becca: It was in the middle of George Floyd protests, all of that, and she was mad as hell about a lot of things. And I was like, "Well, I believe you and I want to hear you, but also this is really going to be awkward because I'm marrying you to your husband with six people present in two weeks. Like now I'm not sure what to do.

Anyway, got to the wedding and she had this dress and her maid of honor... So there's six of us there and her maid of honor was trying to tap her dress. She had gotten this, I don't know... You know, sometimes it was like this princess dress with probably 25 lace things that you had to-

Annie: Oh, right. Like a back of a corset kind of thing.

Becca: Yes. Yes.

Annie: Wow. Those are intense.

Becca: Intense. And she couldn't do it alone. And I came in, she's like, "I need help." And we had to sit down on our bottoms pulling on this like 25-yard silk ribbon, trying to tie that. And we all ended up laughing so dadgum hard. And it was like all this stuff, the tensions that the world wants to make you feel, and the intensity of it and the media, keep making it, keep going. And in the end, there was three people in the back room of this little chapel trying to get her butt in this wedding dress. And the grace of laughter saved us. And it was perfect.

And we did a beautiful ceremony, hug, she was bathed in light and beauty. And we have continued our friendship and our love. But it's like sometimes I think in the midst of some of those really hard months when there was a lot of stress, laughter was the gift. Did you feel that?

Annie: Yes. And just being with anyone was a gift. Being with anyone. I started to go like, "Man, my community and my bandwidth for the amount of people I saw in a week... Well, first of all, went down to zero for a bit, right? But then when we started opening back up, I went, "Man, these four have been enough for me this whole time." And so I'm working on being compassionate toward why I do what I do so I can understand why I do what I do a little bit better. So I would be like, so what was it about needing to see that many people in a week before?

Yesterday, I had to confess that I was gossiping about someone. I called someone back and said, "I was gossiping." And when I'd asked myself the question, "Why do you have to do that?" I said, "Because I want someone to tell me I did a good job." Oh, you just want someone to tell you to get a good job.

And that was for me after COVID I thought, "Oh, you just didn't want to be lonely. We're always going to be lonely." Loneliness is no longer a bar of success or failure to me. It is just something that cohabitate with me on and off. So that was probably my biggest takeaway was, why are you so scared of being alone? But laughter with those people was the gift.

Becca: You know, loneliness is the other epidemic. Besides depression among our youth, loneliness is the other one they're talking about. And I love that my mentor... not

that I ever met, but the one that have modeled all my ministry and life after in many ways was a woman named Dorothy Day, who started the Catholic Worker Movement. She started a whole community. And her autobiography was called *The Long Loneliness*.

Annie: Wow. Is it a good read? Should we read it?

Becca: It's good. There's a better book than that that she describes. Anyway, but I thought, you know, I loved knowing that community is not the antidote to loneliness. That you can still be lonely and you can still have it. And that community for me is this idea that I can be lonely with other people, which feels very safe. It was the very first concern of God.

Annie: For us not to be alone.

Becca: Not to be alone. And it's like, it didn't cure loneliness, but He made it where we didn't have to be alone.

Annie: Yes, yes. That's beautiful. The very first concern of God. Yeah, that's right. Becca, I've just decided that I had to remove loneliness from the filter of how I decided my day was going. I just had to remove loneliness. Because I was like, "None of us feel understood all the time. None of us feel understood most of the time." And so to use that as my scale of how the day was going was not serving me.

Becca: And it's also probably one of the biggest gifts you've been given is this lonely heart. One of my other great mentors is Howard Thurman who was a mystic. He was probably the grandfather of the whole Civil Rights Movement. He said, "There's loneliness in another key. It's the loneliness of the truth seeker that is willing to go beyond borders."

Annie: Wow.

Becca: And really, Annie, what you've done is you've gone beyond what people understand the borders of ministry are or the borders of book authors are or the borders of a speaker are. And you've gone into a new space. And of course, it's lonely. And of course, it's compelling you because you are a truth seeker.

Annie: And it's okay that it's lonely.

Becca: For sure it's gonna be lonely.

Annie: Do you feel lonely when you write? Like when you're working on *Practically Divine*, is that... That's when I feel the most lonely is when I'm working on a book that nobody else is seeing.

Becca: I used to explain it this way. So my husband had a record deal with Sony Records for a while. He's Marcus Hummon. He has a beautiful career of writing.

Annie: He's unbelievable. Yeah.

Becca: It's awesome. But his record deal went south pretty quick. And we still had to go to all the parties. We still had to go to all the events, knowing it wasn't going that well. Do you know what I mean? So like he was showing up and it wasn't going well. And I literally, it was like, I felt like I was gonna cry. I felt so lonely at those events.

And then I would go to prison for my work and go visit women who would start to share story. I would come out of prison fired up, ready to go, ready to start a new program. And I said, Marcus, "How is it that I'm so lonely at the record business parties and I'm so excited at prison? What's wrong with me?" My husband was like, "You just got to follow where you get your energy."

Annie: Wow.

Becca: Like, "Stop going to the record parties. Just don't go. It's depressing and lonely."

Annie: You're right.

Becca: And other people go to that stuff and feel like, "Ah, I'm so excited. I'm hanging with the big dogs." I think where you find that feeds your soul is, you know, not that you have to live only in that space. But you have to know that space so you can fill yourself back up.

Annie: I'm thinking about our friends who are going to be grabbing *Practically Divine*, reading it. Like this is the kind of one you want to like... We're both drinking tea. You want your cup of tea, you want your blanket, you want... I told you, before we started, *Practically Divine* reminds me so much of some of the cadence and the skill of Lauren Winner who's... I know you aren't friends with her yet, but she's one of my favorite writers. She made me want to write a decade ago.

Becca: Yay.

Annie: But this book just has such a sweet... you feel like you're friends with you? It feels like the sweet cadence. What do you hope people get when they read this? When they're wrapped up in their blanket, they're home from work, they're home from school, it's between Christmas and New Year's, it's dark, what do you hope happens when they read?

Becca: I hope that they never feel like procrastination is something that they live into anymore.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Becca: Really. I mean, I feel like there's so much like people admire problems or people dissect problems or people study problems, whatever the thing is, analyze, and they think that's all the reasons you don't want to do something. And I hope when you read this book, it's like, "Oh, yeah, I need to do something."

Annie: Yeah, I need to do something.

Becca: I'm done. I'm not gonna wait, you know, till I'm out of debt. I'm not going to wait to lose 10 pounds. I'm not going to wait until the kids are off at college. I'm not going to wait until I get the promotion. I am going to live into my fullest potential practically divine now. I'm not going to just think I have to do something big or it has to be perfect. You know, it's all these chapters about creativity and about just the idea of perfectly imperfect, all of those things and how just you can see the beauty in a quartz as easily as you can in a diamond. So go look.

Annie: Wow.

Becca: Go look.

Annie: Becca Stevens, how do you do that? You can see the beauty in a quartz as well as you can in a diamond. You're right. Oh, you're right. I love books like this that make me want to change but aren't giving me the shoulds. "You shouldn't be doing this. You should be doing that." This isn't like a get ready for 2022. This is like just hear some stories and see what your next right thing is, what your next move is.

Becca: It isn't it saying like, Today when you walk out your door, what do you see? What do you see? And where is God in what you're seeing? Let's figure that out together and train ourselves to have practices that help us see it, help us see it all around us in each other.

Annie: Man, I can't wait for our friends to get to read this. Today is Sunday the 12th, can we still get stuff from Thistle Farms shipped in time for Christmas? Which y'all's cut off date?

Becca: Definitely you can get stuff. Call today. Get a book, get a candle.

Annie: Oh, yeah, cuz they have these at Thistle Farms.

Becca: Oh, yeah.

Annie: And you can get *Practically Divine* from y'all?

Becca: Yes, for sure. For sure. For sure. I'll sign them. You can make a request. I'll go in there on Monday and sign them all.

Annie: You are too nice. You're too nice. You better mean it. Becca, I know you mean it. But we may be about to ruin your hand. Yes, I know you mean everything. I know. That's why you're wonderful. But I'm like, "Gosh, there's a lot of people who want this book."

Becca: Oh my gosh. So here's what I want. I want folks when they're listening to your podcast and when they're thinking about these holidays is to remember they are practically divine. That they're darling angels. That you have hopes, you have grievings, all of that stuff and all of us too. And just to see the holiness wherever you are and feel God's love in some new way that you forgot to look under a rock and find it or someplace in that you feel like the child. I hope that for everybody.

Annie: That's beautiful. Thank you. One of the questions we're asking everybody. We've been doing this all year, it was a surprise to our listeners. Every guest we've had for the whole year we've asked them their favorite Christmas song. So sprinkled in all these episodes are every guest they've heard all year talking about their favorite Christmas song. So what's your favorite Christmas song?

Becca: Well, definitely this year it's *What Child Is This?*

Annie: Yeah, I bet. I bet that one is on.

Becca: That is my whole theme song this year. And I never even thought about it. The answer is you, Annie, Downs. What Child is this is you. It's you Johnny out there.

Annie: That's right.

Becca: Doing our sound, it's me, it's all of us. What child is this is? Us.

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

Becca: What sounds fun to me is a really, really rich, thick hot chocolate. I have been waiting for it to get cold enough in Nashville, Tennessee to say this warrants me melting a big thing of hot chocolate. I have this snowman already in the shape of one and I haven't done it yet. But somehow to me that sounds so lavish, so decadent. And I really don't even know why. I don't know that I've ever craved like just this.

I was out in the field doing some work with women and it's like a \$30 Snowman that turns into supposedly the best hot chocolate you've ever had.

Annie: Oh, it's like one of those hot chocolate balm things that you put in the milk or whatever.

Becca: Yes. And it serves six people. And I haven't even been around six people. But I'm going, "I am craving it." And that sounds so fun to me and ridiculous that I can't wait.

Annie: Listen, don't hold yourself to share that with five other people. You make it drink as much as you want and then you share it with as much as leftover. To send us out today, would you mind praying for us?

Becca: Gracious and loving God, thank you for the gift of this podcast, for its faithfulness when we were separated to keep us connected. Thank you for all the words that keep us hoping for things that sound fun and bring us joy in our lives, even in the midst of what can be struggles.

Be with everybody in this holiday season so they never forget the healing power of love. So that we can continue to serve you all the days of our life. We pray this in the name given to us under heaven and on earth, for all our hope and healing, for how it is that love was made flesh, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Outro: Oh, y'all, don't you just love her? I just... ah... I just can't. It's too much. She was so good. And I took so many notes that will be going directly into my journal. I'm so thankful for her. Remember, you can go to Thistlefarms.org and you can order a copy of her new book, *Practically Divine*.

You can also grab all the other things. You need to get all the other things. But remember she said she'll sign it for you. So if you want an autographed one for you, for your people, like, let's go. She's ready. She's ready to sign them tomorrow. So go to thistlefarms.org and go to the "shop" tab for all the things you haven't bought yet that you need.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find 24/7 during the 12 days of Christmas. I am here. It's also 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. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I'll do the same. Today what sounds fun to me, well, my feet are cold, so I'm going to put on my glitter slippers. That sounds fun to me.

Have a great day. We'll see you back here tomorrow for day five of our 12 Days of Christmas. And what we all need on a Monday morning is some laughs. So tomorrow meet us here with our friend comedian, Nate Bargatze. He is hilarious. We're gonna have a blast. Y'all are not gonna want to miss it. See you tomorrow.

Okay, we are back with our Enneagram ones, Brad and Fallon. Let's talk about your favorite Christmas song. Fal, what is it?

Fallon: So my favorite Christmas song... technically, is this a Christmas song? You guys can let me know. *Auld Lang Syne*. Is that a Christmas song?

Annie: Sure. It can be.

Fallon: I think it's a new year song.

Annie: It's a holiday song.

Brad: *It's A Wonderful Life*, right?

Annie: Oh, you're right. You're right. You're right. Why though, Fal?

Fallon: Well, it brings tears to my eyes every time. I don't know. I don't know if it's the melody, the notes put together. I don't know what it is. I just get real in my feels when I listen to it. And I just think it's one of the most beautiful songs.

Brad: And the title of the song. Like it just sounds good.

Fallon: And just what it means of like camaraderie and companionship, and we're all in this together and reflecting on the past year and here we go moving forward. I don't even know what *Auld Lang Syne* means.

Annie: I don't either.

Fallon: I'm just translating what I think it means.

Annie: Brad, you tell us what your favorite song is. I'm gonna look up what *Auld Lang Syne* means.

Brad: Yeah. Man, so many choices. I have to go with probably *O Holy Night* for mine.

Annie: Who do you like hearing sing it?

Brad: I feel like I just turned into more reverent or something.

Annie: No, that's beautiful.

Brad: That was not the intent. Like too serious.

Fallon: I was like, "Oh, he went spiritual."

Brad: That's exactly what I mean. I'm like I didn't mean to do that. But I think for whatever reason when I think about Christmas songs, that's the song that gets me... Christmas is so hard to get to a place... I think it's unbelievable I fight to get to a place where I'm remembering what it's really about. That song for whatever reason, you know, on the spiritual side of things, that one just puts me somehow in the manger. That kind of gets me where I need to be to kind of get in the right headspace.

And so I think I'm just thankful for that. So every time I hear it from whatever artists it always puts me in the right place. And then I think even about that line too, that when he appeared, and the soul felt his worth, it's like whoa. I'm still even processing what that means, but just like what Jesus does to give our souls weight. It's just like, I love when I get even in the words of that song it doesn't want to leave.

Annie: Who do you love hearing sing it? Is there one version of it that you love?

Brad: For sure. So 100% Joe Phillips. They've got a version... I mean, I'm massive fan of theirs for a lot of reasons, but their Christmas album is phenomenal. I love their rendition.

Annie: *Auld Lang Syne* is a Scottish phrase "auld lang syne" and it means "days gone by" or "old time." So when we're actually singing it we're singing for the sake of old times. Like thinking back on the last year.