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**Annie:** Hey friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. Happy, Happy Thursday. We've got a great show in store.

Before we dive in, I want to make sure you know that on February 17 a big group of us are going to be going through *100 Days to Brave* together. *100 Days to Brave* is a devotional I wrote all about stepping into things we face in our everyday lives with bravery.

This time though your kiddos or the MiniBFFs in your life are invited to get in on it too because my very newest book *100 Days to Brave for Kids* is releasing on February 8. It's available for pre-order right now. I am so excited to get these truths in the hands and the hearts of my MiniBFF. It's perfect for kids around ages 7 to 12. Though younger kids are totally invited, they just may need help with some of the reading.

We will start our 100 days on February 17. And then we'll all finish together right before Memorial Day. So all you got to do right now is grab your copy of *100 Days*

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*to Brave* or buy one anywhere you love to buy books and pre-order a copy of *100 Days to Brave for Kids* so that you've got them on hand for the 17th.

We've got this fun checkoff sheet for the kids that we'll get to you so y'all can keep track of the days you've done together. I'll post the first five days on my Insta Stories to give you plenty of time to get the books. And then we'll email you every 10 days to help you stick with it.

The secret sauce of *100 Days to Brave* is finishing it. So we'll do everything we can to help each other make it to that point together. So to sign up, be a part of this opportunity and get all sorts of extra goodies. Just go to the #100DaysToBrave2022 link in the show notes and claim your spot.

**Intro:** Today on the show, oh y'all, I get to talk to my friend, Pastor Ben Stuart. He's a bestselling author and the pastor of Passion City Church in Washington, DC. In his new book, *Rest and War: Rhythms of a Well-Fought Life*, he uses his personal life experience and decades of ministry experience to offer biblical and practical guidance to all of us who want to live well-thought lives.

He has got so much wisdom to instill in us and we get real honest. So we're going to really talk about this about what it looks like to win a battle, what it looks like to feel like you're losing. So wherever you are today, I bet we talk about that spot.

So here's my conversation with my friend Ben Stuart.

**[00:03:35] <music>**

**Annie:** Ben, thanks so much for joining us for That Sounds Fun. I'm so glad to have you here.

**Ben:** I'm so happy to be here.

**Annie:** It is going to be-

**Ben:** So many people I know love you like crazy. And I'm just so happy to be here.

**Annie:** It is surprising that we haven't met before. Did we live in Atlanta at the same time?

**Ben:** Briefly.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Ben:** I was there 15 months.

**Annie:** Ah, okay. Yeah.

**Ben:** So there's a high likelihood we overlapped, but it was brief.

**Annie:** Why were you there for such a short window?

**Ben:** That was always the plan. It was to go there and prepare to launch wherever the Lord would send us. So we were visiting cities all over America, praying about where will Passion City be. And it's a long, crazy ride. I never thought it'd be DC but we are in Washington, DC, and love it. But that was always the plan. Come, prep, launch.

**Annie:** Right. Okay. I mean, that has to be a wild faith thing to go like, "We don't know what city we're going to." I mean, how do you prepare your heart for that kind of stuff? That's very like Abraham of you.

**Ben:** It felt like that. Yes. You know, it felt like in the book of Acts, Philip was in some area leading this great movement, and then God's like, "Go to the desert road because I have plans there." And Donna and I were like, "That's what He's doing to us." We love what we were doing but we have to go to the desert road.

And you're right. We did it with our kids, moved three times, and landed here. So it's a crazy ride. But you know, once you make a commitment to Lord, "I'm yours," you go, "Okay, well, then I'm off my map a long time ago."

**Annie:** Oh, man.

**Ben:** It's a good ride. It's better than what I would have come up with.

**Annie:** Me too. Honestly probably in my lowest moments, one of the things I say back to the Lord is what Peter said of like, "Where else would I go? This ain't going the way I wanted it to, but where else would I go?" Right? Do you feel that sometimes?

**Ben:** I had a friend say that to me once. He was like, "What are you going to do? Like not trust God?" I was like, "Oh, well, that's not a better alternative."

**Annie:** That's right.

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**Ben:** You can tell him, "Hey, I don't like the scenery right now," but you know, sometimes you have to go from A to B through Ur. He just lead you on crazy routes.

**Annie:** Right. What do you know about God now that you didn't know when you were living in Atlanta? What's a big shift or a big thought or a small thought? What do you know about God that you didn't know?

**Ben:** Oh, man, that's a great question. I would say I'm more settled in my trust of Him.

**Annie:** Right, from doing it.

**Ben:** That He is guiding all of this. You know, I love knowledge, I love research, I love reading, and I've just realized there's limits to it. You're just going to hit, you go, "I don't know but you do. And you have strange, mysterious purposes and I trust you."

I'll give you an example, Annie. I wrote that book, *Single, Dating, Engaged, Married* as kind of like a swan song to like my sweet young crowd. I was like, "This is the best I can give you on such a complex issue." And then we moved to DC, which was a total surprise.

And when we first got here, I went to the Capitol, I mean, bought my suit, had the tie on, I'm in the Capital of America. And I asked the first Chief of Staff I met, "How can I help your people?" And he was like, "None of them know how to date." He's like, "Do you think you could talk about that?"

**Annie:** Wow.

**Ben:** I was like, "Yeah, I think so." And I was invited to speak to the Senate before the church even launched. I'm in the Senate chambers talking to this crowd, and I'm like, "I would have never thought, well, the way to get into the Capitol of America was to write a book on dating." And that's when I was like, "You know what? The Lord's driving. Let me not overthink that thing."

**Annie:** I'm really excited to talk about *Rest and War*, your new book, but can we talk about the dating book for a minute? Because-

**Ben:** Yes, we can.

**Annie:** ...when people ask me for resources, I almost always say that, your teaching series from when you talk through it. But you have a phrase that I use in dating, I use in

friendship, we use it at work. I said it today on Insta story: "Clarity is kindness." Clarity is kindness. Will you kind of expand on that? Tell me why that's true? It feels deeply true. But why is that true?

**Ben:** Well, just broadly in life, you have to have information to make an informed decision. You know, like, if you're going to make a decision that best fits reality, I need to know the facts, I need to know data. And often we find that's hard to find. Proverb says, "An honest answer is a kiss on the lips."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Ben:** When someone can be honest with you, it empowers you to then make good decisions. So that's why a good friend will tell you, "Hey, that outfit is not working for you." You're like, That's an empowering thing. That may be a little painful but now I have the ability to make some wardrobe changes.

Or when it's a relationship, if someone can tell you, "Hey, I don't see this going anywhere," you're like, "It's nice, it's kind of you to tell me that." You brave the awkwardness, but you've liberated me from wasting time and money and emotional energy on the thing you don't see going anywhere. But I think for a lot of people that anxiety... They say it's about hurting other people's feelings. It's not. It's the anxiety about you not liking me as much.

**Annie:** Yes, that's what it is. Oh, Ben, listen, when someone says to me, like, "The reason I didn't tell you is I was afraid of hurting you," I'm like, "No, no, you're worried about yourself. You're not worried about me. Because you don't know how I'm going to respond. You're worried about you."

**Ben:** And the good friend who loves you will risk the relationship out of love for you. That's a good friend. And that's a good date that will do that. We'll say, "Hey, I think we shouldn't do this anymore." You're like, all right, well, I'll cry later, but it's good to know that information so we can do something with it.

**Annie:** Yes. We have about a half-half married single friends listening. And a lot of our friends listening are in their 30s and not married or even 40s. I'm 41 and not married yet. What's some dating differences that you see? I mean, I'm sure in DC you're like Nashville where it's not 22-year-olds necessarily who are single, it is a lot of older. And that's kind of nationwide. What do you see is the difference for people in their 30s, 40s that have never been married versus when you're talking to college students?

**Ben:** Well, there's a number of challenges. And particularly, broader cultural challenges with technology have changed the way we relate to each other and there's less of those communal moments where you can get to know people. And I think that's a tragedy. It's making it longer for people to meet potential, viable mates. It's just harder to meet now.

You know, back in the day, as flawed as the processes were back in the day, there was still a town dance every Friday night and there was still these places you can meet people. And that's become harder. So I sympathize with the difficulty of that. I think it's very hard. There's not the natural cultural places where we're helping single people meet each other in a safe environment.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Ben:** I would say the shift also when you get older that's maybe a good one is it tends to be more direct. You know, when you're in 20s, it can be a little sillier and flirtier. And most of my friends in their 30s when they're single are like, "Okay, look, are we doing this or not doing this?"

**Annie:** Oh, like third date we're having life decisions.

**Ben:** Am I going to get dressed tonight or not?

**Annie:** That's it. That's it. It's so different. You're like, "You're cute. Can we ask, are you in counseling?" Because I need to know before we keep going if you're in therapy.

**Ben:** What's the thing? What's the thing that's going to risk all this? Just go ahead and let me know.

**Annie:** That is how it is, Ben. That is a significant difference in dating in my late 30s and 40s than in my 20s, is you just kind of go, "Hey, I'm having a great time with you. Can we just go ahead and talk about some of this stuff, because I don't want either of us to put heart energy into something if it's just not going to work."

**Ben:** And there's value to compressing that timetable. That's the tragedy in a lot of modern dating of like, "Oh, let's fool around for..." You end up wasting people's time, which to me is not a kindness when you kind of mess around date for a year or two or three, and you go, "Where's this going?" That is unkind I think. I think intentionality about the evaluation process in dating is a way to love somebody rather than wasting their time.

**Annie:** When you're counseling people in your church or on the Senate floor or, you know, through the book, is there a traditional role for men and women that is still true? Is it changing up? Is it different in different cities? Like, what are women and what are men supposed to be doing in this dating world these days?

**Ben:** Yeah, it's gotten so confusing.

**Annie:** So confusing.

**Ben:** So many of the dating scripts, even when they were flawed, at least people sort of knew the rules. And now there's less and it's created more confusion. And yet in that confusion, almost across the board, even within Christian circles and non, women still want to be initiated with. All the statistics you see is they would prefer that. A very small amount initiates dates. They want to be asked.

And so we tell men that, like, "You should do that." I think it's part of love that God calls men to do is to initiate. It's a way to love. And you can do that and should do that. And most women want men to do that, are looking for them to do that.

I think a lot of men in the culture today have been made hesitant to do that for a couple of different reasons. But I see a lot of amazing women here... DC has a lot of powerful, driven, successful women, that you're like bro, "You just got to ask her out. You just have to risk it. Risk the No. You'll survive that. But go do it." And a lot of women want that. And that's true in DC and true anywhere I've been. I think women can ask men out. I do. I mean, you look at the book of Ruth and-

**Annie:** Certainly.

**Ben:** ...however you analyze it, Boaz is a good dude, that's not pulling the trigger. And so Ruth's like, "Hey, like, what are we doing here? We've been cleaning the fields, you seem cool. Are you in? Are you out?" I think she was willing to help Boaz in his hesitancy. And I don't think it's wrong for women to do that at all.

I had a young woman do that when I was dating before I met my wife. She just was like, "What are we doing here?" She's like, "I'll survive either way, but I just kind of need to know what you're doing." And it was a good conviction for me. I'm like, "Oh, she has more courage and clarity than I do. I need to get my act together." This poor, sweet girl had to be the one to help me. There was a lot of people that were trying to help me, she was the one-

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**Annie:** I was going to say, Bless her heart, and then you went on and got married. So I hope she got married too. Just tell me for my own sake that she got married too.

**Ben:** I have no idea. Now that you say that I need to know that. I don't know what happened to her in life. Let's assume something worked out.

**Annie:** I need to know that she didn't just fix you and didn't get to get married after that.

**Ben:** We'll pray for her. We'll pray for her.

**Annie:** We'll hope the best. If she's out there listening and she's single, call me, let me help you find somebody. We will publicly help you find somebody. Okay, so what's the journey from writing that to writing *Rest and War*? Honestly, as a reader, they go hand in hand more than I think maybe some people would see. It feels like you're telling... *Rest and War* isn't a relationship book necessarily but man, it talks about how to do relationship well.

**Ben:** Yeah. Yeah. Again, getting to live and move among people and minister to them, you see people want to be a part of something. They want to be a part of a purpose and they want to be a part of a people. I want to cause in my life and I want a community that loves me. That's everyone's heart. I want to be a part of someone and I want to be a part of something.

So *Single, Dating* was a lot about that relational element. That longing is good. Let's talk about how to navigate it in a way that we respect and love each other. This book was that I just see so many people that struggle with a sense of purposelessness and powerlessness.

"I want to get further in my life than I am, I've got struggles I can't seem to get past, I've got addictions and setbacks that fill me with shame but I don't seem to move forward." And I just watched that sense of hopelessness set in. And for the people of Jesus. There's no room for hopelessness for us. It's a real struggle, but we have so much hope.

And so I wanted to give people perspective and then real practical means to advance in their life. That you're a part of a cause that's great, that's worthy of your life, and let's talk about the practical ways to uproot some things that don't belong in your life anymore, and to cultivate some things that are good.

And so this is a heart message for me—this book. Somebody asked me the other day, "How long did it take you to write this?" I'm like, "20 years." I mean, this is



my whole life of figuring out how to struggle well. If life's a struggle, how do I struggle well? And that's really what I wanted to do.

And again, to me, it's a labor of love. I was like, this is the best I can offer you to help you feel like you're winning in life. So we call this a field guide. It's a field guide to the spiritual. That's what it is.

**Annie:** I love that. I love the field guide feel to it. Has it always been true that people cared this much about having a purpose and doing something that mattered? Like in the 40s, were they talking about this, or was it easier back then? Or did people not care as much?

**Ben:** Well, gosh, they had both of those things in the 40s, didn't they? I mean, as horrible as war is, it's a real clarifier. I mean, when you're talking about the 40s, World War II, it's like we have a clear goal, and people marching out to war, knew each other so well. They could hear a cough and know what friend it was in the middle of the night.

**Annie:** Sure.

**Ben:** I mean, they just had such deep community. And it's really been the unraveling of a sense of a big story and the unraveling of a knit-together community that's caused so much anxiety in us. I mean, think, we live in the safest day in human history but we have anxiety at record levels. And there's a couple reasons for that. But some of them are: I don't know what life's about. I don't know where I'm going. I feel stuck and don't even know which way to run, or how to run successfully.

And so this book for me is that attempt to bring clarity to some people. You have a purpose under God. you are a complete mess. And it's helpful to acknowledge that. And not to let shame keep you from acknowledging.

I think shame keeps us from strategizing about our life and struggling well. But the Bible starts with that. You're beautiful image of God, but you're a mess. You're a total mess. And as soon as you admit that, you go, Okay, you're a mess that's dearly loved, dearly loved by God who fought for you. He fought for you because you're in a fight. This is a fight. It feels like a struggle because it is. But He fought for you, and He loves you. So pick up drooping hand, strengthen feeble knees and let's go to war together. And let's accomplish something good in this life. And I just want people to have that sense of agency.

**Annie:** Why was war the analogy you wanted to use?

**Ben:** That's a good question. I think it presents that way emotionally for us. I mean, if you just look at people, they're like, "Why do I keep struggling with these thoughts? Why can I get them out? There's a thing I want to do, and why do I not do it?" And so we feel that like, Man, this feels like a struggle.

And what I love about the Scripture is it affirms that. Like, yeah, it feels like a struggle because it is. And there's a sense of relief in that diagnosis. It's like going to the doctor. No one wants to go. But then when they tell you, "Yeah, you feel sick because you are. It's not just in your head. You're actually sick." Well, that's horrible but now that I know that-

**Annie:** It explains some things.

**Ben:** Yeah. And I'm empowered now to make some decisions. It's an empowering thing. And I think the Scripture uses that from the very beginning in Genesis. Like you are in a battle that's bigger than you, global, and deeply personal. And so it feels like a fight because it is a fight.

And so when you acknowledge that, now you're freed up to go, Okay, well, then, how do I fight well? Not beat myself up, begin to beat up these things that are coming at me."

**Annie:** One of the things that jumped out to me in the book is when you talk about how the enemy doesn't play checkers, he plays chess. Will you just talk about that a little bit? Because the more we can expose his ways the more we can identify them in our own lives. So will you talk about that?

**Ben:** Yeah, absolutely. He does push and pull. He push you with some resentments and discomforts and then pull you with allurements. And that's a game. I mean, if you think about it, he doesn't come to Eve in the garden and say, "Let's just, I don't know, smoke crack, kill Adam. Let's go crazy." He doesn't start with insanity.

**Annie:** Right. Right.

**Ben:** He starts with, "Let me sow some distrust between you and God. Looks like he's holding out on you, Eve. Looks like you don't get to do everything you want. Looks like you're being cheated here, Eve." He begins to distance her from God and then he can position her to find life in broken places. And he just runs the same play with all of us. I think it's helpful to have that awareness of going, How does he get me?

I remember listening to a young man tell us a story about him that he had a struggle with pornography. And they were asking him how he's fighting it. And he's like, Well, you know, all your standard like, accountability software, bah, bah, bah. But he's like, "But when I think about it," he said, "it starts months before."

He was in grad school and he was like, "I get the syllabus and I don't do the readings and I put off doing the homework. And then I feel ashamed that I haven't done the work."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Ben:** "And so I distract myself to not feel those intolerable feelings but then the work is still undone. So then I have to work late at night. And then I don't sleep. And then in that middle of being weary and fatigued and stressed, the enemy offers a sweet release, and I'm back into pornography. And you're like, Okay, that guy's doing the work of seeing "this is how the enemy comes at you." And there's an old book, *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu-

**Annie:** Oh, it's so good.

**Ben:** I read it and I thought it would be about fighting, like swords. It's none of that. It's all "Here's how to defeat someone before they even show up at the battlefield. Here's how to beat them long before they ever get to find a sword." And it's way back. Let me distort your sense of information. Let me lure you with treasure. And let me just mess with your head and you are completely unequipped. And you never even knew you're in a fight. You were dismantled before the battle even started. And I think the enemy loves to do that with us.

**Annie:** You talked about this in the book, too, but it's one of the reasons like taking care of your body, getting enough sleep, rest and war. I mean, we lose more... I won't talk about you or anybody else. I lose more often in the wars in my own life if I am tired.

**Ben:** Yes. Yeah. And I think that's a good analysis. That's one of the things I'm trying to advocate, Annie, is that being a student of yourself, being curious about yourself. David taught us that in the Psalms. "Why are you downcast O my soul." He's like, "Before I just go there and believe it, let me ask myself why? What's under this?"

And often shame keeps us from that curiosity. But it's when you get that information that gives you insight, then it breeds innovation. Now I can make

changes. And I have noticed that. I'm like, Donna and I were laughing about earlier today. I was like, When everyone around me seems stupid, then it's probably me, that probably need a nap.

And if I take one, there's less to apologize for later. So sometimes it's like, hey, the spiritual, physical, emotional wires are all crossed. Sometimes it's not a demon. Sometimes you just need to nap.

**Annie:** You just need a nap. Yes, that's right.

**Ben:** It's that awareness.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**[00:23:30] <music>**

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And when it comes to skincare and really all of life, let's champion progress over perfection and spread positivity by celebrating our simple wins, y'all. Curology offers realistic skincare goals that you can actually achieve for clear-looking skin.

I've used Curology for, gosh, like over a year now after hearing about them on a podcast ad. And y'all is this inception! Anyway, I began to notice a difference in my skin's clarity and tone which, as often as I like to talk with my face on the internet, it's a thing I'm in favor of.

Here's what you need to know about Curology. It's game-changing custom skincare made for you by a dermatology provider. They'll create a custom prescription cream for your specific goals. Whether that's tackling acne or clogged pores or skin texture, dark spots, fine lines, or something else.

You start by taking a short online skin quiz—y'all know we love quizzes—and then you upload photos. And if it's a good fit, they'll ship you your formula right to your door. I got a box yesterday. And it even has your name on the bottle which I love.

Since I'm looking to address some fine lines, my Curology formula specifically addresses those with prescription strength retinol. I love the way it's improved the tone and texture of my skin as I've continued to use it. Their cleanser and moisturizer are awesome too. And I love the convenience factor of getting everything I need for my skincare routine in one easy box at my doorstep.

One of my favorite things about receiving my free trial last year was the little spot treatment patches that came in my box with the products. So handy for that, you know, occasional flare-up like I showed you on Instagram on my eyelid. Good-gravy!

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And now back to our conversation with Ben.

[00:27:07] <music>

**Annie:** If everybody around you is stupid, mine is, if my brain thinks they are so weak, if that's the word that comes to my mind, then what I actually know is that I'm significantly tired. And I'm pushing myself too far because I'm not letting other people not push themselves too far. Right? Does that make sense?

**Ben:** Absolutely.

**Annie:** And so when that narrative starts, I'm always like, "Oh, they're not weak. Everybody's fine. You're asking too much of yourself."

**Ben:** Yeah. Yeah. That was one for me, realizing I don't acknowledge my physical tiredness first. I tend to overwork. That's my thing. I like working. And then I realized that the danger will be when I start to not care I little become an emotional numbness. And when I realized that, like, I don't care about people the way I want to, I need to take a break, I need to adjust my pace. Because I want to live out of my heart. And I'm not doing that.

**Annie:** It is embarrassing. I mean, the clarity is kindness is even coming back to my mind. Because even as talking about it, I'm having this moment of going like, "Oh, this isn't just me and Ben talking. There are going to be a lot of people that hear me say that I'm a kind of a monster." Right? That when I am tired I'm not a great person.

But for me, even that own clarity in myself is being kind to myself and going, "When you start to hear that the enemy is catching up with you because you are tired, or because something is wrong." But if we don't tell ourselves the truth, how will we ever know when we're at war? We won't even know. We won't believe ourselves.

**Ben:** Well, that's one of the things I love about recovery circles. And this isn't strictly speaking a recovery book. But there's so much in those circles that it's helpful, that brutal honesty at the beginning. I mean, I remember sitting with some circles of guys and just what they're confessing you're like, "Wow, most people are scared to admit that to themselves, much less to a room of people."

But they had managed to do that without burying themselves in shame. "Oh, no, I struggle with this." "Oh, you don't struggle. You're perfect. Oh, so we're all imperfect. Surprise!" So here's how he gets me. You know, James talks about that. Each one is lured and enticed. We're all lured by some broken things. It does not

help you to not acknowledge them. But if you can acknowledge them then you can find the way out.

**Annie:** And tell people. I mean, you talk so much in the book about true spirituality is about community.

**Ben:** Yeah, 100%.

**Annie:** And so keeping that to yourself is not going to get you very far.

**Ben:** No, absolutely not. I don't know anyone that has found substantial victory over whatever their besetting sin is without having a small group of people who they are brutally honest with and who will love them and love them too much to let them stay there.

Hebrews talks about that, right? Or excuse me, Paul to Timothy. "Flee youthful lust and pursue righteousness, along with those who call unto the Lord out of a pure heart." He's telling Timothy, Get away from some broken things in your life, run towards the beautiful things in your life, but do it with some people who have a sincere desire for growth. And they may or may not be your best friends.

**Annie:** That's right. Oh, yeah, my aren't. I mean, the people that I confess the stuff to are not the people I see on a daily basis. But also, I'll tell you, when I'm walking towards sin, and I go, "You want to do this? Because you know you're going to have to tell. If you're willing to tell, live your best life. You do what you want to do if you're willing to tell, but you just don't not get to tell." And 8 out of 10 times it stops me. 1 out of 10 it slows me down.

**Ben:** Exactly. I know I'm going to feel awful tomorrow, I know I'm going to have to call this person. Like, what a hassle! Never mind!

**Annie:** I can just walk away right now.

**Ben:** I can walk away right now. Yeah.

**Annie:** It saves me so much work tomorrow.

**Ben:** That's one of the best things. James talks about it again where he says, "When lust is conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it's fully grown brings forth death." What he's doing there is he's telling you, Hey, look downstream. Before you

participate in an action, look downstream and see: is that where I want to go? And if I don't like that outcome, let me change it back up here in the input.

Alcoholics talk about that. Think through the drink. You know, because when you experience intolerable feelings, I want these feelings to go away. If you're an alcoholic, you go, "I know how to make them go away." This will obliterate these feelings.

And the thinking through the drink is like, That's true, but it will also have all these consequences that I've experienced I didn't like. So let me find a different path out of my intolerable feelings. Let me call a friend who will say, "You are a monster," and then laugh with you and then go watch a movie and just do other things that doesn't compromise your integrity.

**Annie:** Right. One of the young women that I am in a mentor kind of relationship with, she just decided anytime she started to say something that wasn't unkind, she was going to text me a gorilla. And she's like, "I'm embarrassed every time but I'm sending you the... it's just the emoji of a gorilla. And I'm always like, "Okay, tell me what happened?"

And so she's like, "I know, I'm about to have to send Annie a gorilla if I do this, or if I say this thing." And sometimes it stops you and sometimes it doesn't. But having a gorilla emoji to send to me is one of the input changes you make when you're looking downstream.

**Ben:** 100%. Yes. We would joke about it with my students. You know, just how sin looks far less sexy in the light of day. But when it first comes to you, it's alluring and in the dark. So you have to turn the lights on and go, "I don't think I want to make that choice. I know where this is going, and I don't want to go there."

**Annie:** Yes.

**Ben:** I read Johnny Cash's... one of his biographies. It was wild, his autobiography. He talks about how much he loves drugs. He's like, "I missed them. I love it. Amphetamines are amazing." He's like, "But it almost killed me. I wrecked every car. He almost wiped out an endangered species of Condor." Like there's a whole chapter about all the cars he wrecked and fires he started.

**Annie:** What?



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**Ben:** Yeah. I mean, it's just craziness. And he was like, "And so I just remind myself of the crazy and go, 'Nope! Nope!'" He admits, like, "I'm attracted to this thing, but this thing leads to some crazy I don't want." And that kind of thinking process is part of what I'm trying to advocate.

**Annie:** Yeah, I want to chase after that kind of maturity. I want that in my life. You know, the maturity that says, I care more about what's downstream than feeling better right now.

**Ben:** Yes, yeah. And we live in an instant society that doesn't support that. And so we need some help.

**Annie:** I'm thinking about some of my friends who, and I'm in this a little bit myself, but you know, you've been praying for something or someone to be healed and they passed away. Or you were in a relationship and it ended. Or you got fired from a job. Or you just been praying with a friend through this thing and the actual opposite thing happens. And it feels like I've been in a war and I just lost.

What do you say to the people who are like, "I'm not ready to go back to war," or "I didn't want to do that in the first place, or "This is harder than I thought it was"? What about the people who aren't winning the war right now?

**Ben:** You know, what I love is there's a moment in Jesus ministry where it says He looked at the crowd and He saw that they were harassed and helpless. You know, harassed meaning they're just being constantly messed with. And helpless is they don't know how to fight it. They don't have the tools to stop it. And it doesn't say, And so he chided them. Like, "What's the matter with you people get your act together, folks?" It says He had compassion on them.

I love that. That God doesn't shame you for being disappointed, He doesn't shame you for being hurt. He doesn't tell you to bottle that in, stuff it down, eat those feelings. All through the Bible He invites you. "Pour out your complaint to me. Cast your cares upon me. I can handle all that."

And that invitation for me was really freeing. I mean, when I injured my back and I was laid out on the floor for a month, I resisted doing that. I thought it would be disrespectful. But to just pour out my anger and frustration, I'm like, "None of these pairs are going to be pretty, God. But here's the deal." And I just was so mad.

But once I emptied all that, perspective can now come in of like, "Yeah, and the world is broken, Ben. Your tragedies, as significant as they are, don't even land in the top 10 of human tragedy in the world.

**Annie:** Right. Right.

**Ben:** And yet God has done something decisive about it and He will do something decisive about it. And you can make some positive changes. This is not a cul de sac; it's a tunnel that has another side. And I think it begins with honesty with the Lord. And then on the other end honesty He often grants us perspective if we have ears to hear it. So that's what I would encourage people is, don't be afraid to beat on His chest and then you fall into His arms and trust Him.

**Annie:** I tend to find in my own story that the angrier I am at someone else is just a protection of not wanting to be angry at God.

**Ben:** Yeah. Well, that's insightful.

**Annie:** Do you feel that ever? I realized that when I won't forgive people it's because if I forgive them then I actually have to go to where I have the problem.

**Ben:** Yeah. Yeah. Lord, I don't like how you're running things. If I was in charge, I would run it differently. If that is what we're saying, I think it helps me to go, "Oh, I don't know. I actually don't know." And you know what's helped me a lot too, Annie? I read a lot of biographies right now. And just seeing how frustrating all their lives were.

Like every biography I've read, it's like you are constantly being messed with. And I'll tell Donna, I'm like, "I'm so encouraged. Did you know this guy? I mean, this person tried to kill him. These people are coming out on this guy slandering him." I'm like, "It just helps me feel not so alone in the world. You know, to read about all this human suffering of other people, you go, "Oh, okay. What seizing me is common to man. All right, well, okay. We'll just keep going then."

**Annie:** How do you decide which biographies to pick up? Who are you reading right now?

**Ben:** Well, when I moved to DC, I decided to start reading all these political ones, which was not my interest before. I'm a big church history guy. So I read a lot of church history books my whole life. But now it's you have to be the book someone said was the best ever on the subject. I can't suffer bad writing. So I'm like, "Who's the best writer on this guy?" And then I'll read it.

I think being in DC helps with that. So I fell in love with Ulysses S. Grant. I didn't think I'd like that guy. But I'm like, "I get this dude." That dude couldn't stop losing his life. I mean, everything went opposite of that guy. And I mean, before he ever did anything good, you're like, "Your life is just an unending tragedy." But all those tragedies were forging him into someone who could handle great strain.

And when I saw that, I'm like, Because that's what God does. He beats us up, but He does it like a good parent, not to destroy you, but to discipline and shape you. Okay. Okay. Well, I wouldn't trade my problems for His but you're working for my good.

**Annie:** It sounds to me like when you're reading these biographies, your brain just kind of is naturally doing that curiosity thing of like, "What's God doing in this person's life?" But are you purposely asking that? Are you reading those trying to find God or is it just happening?

**Ben:** Well, so part of my process with, you know, even we're talking about resting and warring, I had a friend encourage me. He had a bull's eye he did in recovery. And the center of the Bullseye was, here are all the activities that constitute a breaching of your sobriety. So the center of the Bullseye is never do these things again.

And then the outer ring was what are the things that leads you to do those things? What are the things that when you start doing them, you go, "I'm in trouble"? And then he had this other ring. And he was explaining it, I'm like, "Dude, what's the other ring?" Is it going to be like the things you do before the things you do, before you do the thing that you're not supposed to do? I'm like, that's really intense.

But he was like, "No, the outer ring is: what do you do for fun?" He said, "Because if you don't prioritize positive fun, the enemy will always introduce destructive fun." And then he asked me, what do you do for fun? And I didn't have an answer. And he was like-

**Annie:** Really?

**Ben:** He was like, "That's the most pathetic thing I've ever heard." And he was like, "I don't want to talk about your inner ring. I don't want to talk about your second ring." He said, "You need to figure out how to have fun. And I had to think about it.

And then I just realized the nerdy part of me likes reading biographies. So I didn't read them for sermon illustrations or to further my understanding. I was just like, "I

don't know. What did Greg do?" And I read and I'm like, "Look at this guy." And they turn into sermon illustrations, they turn into leadership lessons, but I don't read them for that. I mean, I read books on fighting and bizarre things that sound interesting, survival books. I'm like, "This sounds cool." But I did it to keep me sane.

**Annie:** Well, you've come to the right place. If you want to talk about fun, listen, I can help you.

**Ben:** That's what I hear.

**Annie:** I can help you.

**Ben:** That's the word on the street about you.

**Annie:** Yeah, I got you.

**[00:40:24] <music>**

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Rasa Coffee Alternative](#). Y'all know, I'm pretty dedicated to my morning routine, and that my cup of tea is a staple to getting my day kicked off just right.

I know tons of you are coffee drinkers and you're also always paying attention to how different things affect your mind and your moods and your energy during the busy days. Me too. Which is why I'm excited to find out about Rasa, an adaptogenic coffee alternative with an incredible selection of [lens?].

You can use it either in place of coffee or in an effort to cut back on your caffeine and take a little bit. And Rasa provides more sustainable energy without the jitters because I mean, who's wanting jitters anyway? Instead of caffeine, Rasa energizes from adaptogenic herbs and mushrooms with all their blends formulated in-house by clinical herbalists.

Their ingredients are organic and sustainably sourced and fair trade or direct trade. Y'all know we love those words. And seriously, y'all, Rasa is fanatical about responsible sourcing and creating positive impact through supporting their growers and farmers which I love. Don't y'all?

Adaptogens are most effective when consumed regularly and consistently which means you're getting your daily dose of adaptogens while enjoying a beautiful morning ritual that can help set the tone for your day. And with 10 different rasa flavors and functions. There's a Rasa for everyone.

The cacao bland is a crowd favorite with a chocolatey tastes like healthy hot chocolate. And there's one called Well, Well, Wellderberry. That's formulated to support a healthy immune system, something I feel like is on everyone's mind right now. And that's just naming two of them.

We've had some samples of Rasa here at the office and the team has been giving it a try. Even our biggest coffee drinkers have been happily surprised and are thankful for that calm blend when the afternoon coffee craving hits.

You can add in some frost oat milk or your favorite creamer and maybe even a little honey if you like things sweeter, which you know I do. Each blend is formulated to support your nervous system help you stress less, and give you balanced energy throughout the day and get better sleep which we all could use.

I'm excited for you guys to try Rasa. They even have a quiz—you know how I feel about quizzes—on their website to recommend the perfect blend just for you. Right now to get you started, you get 20% off your first purchase. Just go to [Wearerasa.com](https://wearerasa.com) and use my special promo code THATSOUNDSFUN20. That's promo code THATSOUNDSFUN20 for 20% off at [wearerasa.com](https://wearerasa.com). And that's Rasa.

**Annie:** Hey friends! I'm so excited about heading back out on tour in February and March of 2022. That's right. We're taking the That Sounds Fun podcast on the road. Not only will there be an awesome special guest at each stop who I'll be recording a live podcast with, but we'll also have comedy, new friends, fun coaching exclusive content, confetti, and dare I say it, fun. So much fun.

I can't wait to see you at one of those tour stops. So be sure to grab your tickets at [Anniefdowns.com/events](https://anniefdowns.com/events). The only thing that will make it more fun is when you're there.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Ben.

[00:43:28] <music>

**Episode 360: Ben Stuart + Rest & War      That Sounds Fun Podcast with Annie F. Downs**

**Annie:** I just find it really interesting like... this is why the Bible is helpful too is that neither biographies you're reading, none of the people in the Bible, none of them knew how their story was going to end. But it always feels like they have more insight than we have.

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Annie:** They have no idea.

**Ben:** No. And it's helpful to have that bird's eye view of them. It started for me in college. I read Martin Luther's biography. It's like he changed so much of our understanding of Scripture, like this enormously successful figure, but his experience was constant struggle.

And then one of the last chapters in this book was how he wrestled with depression his whole life, and it never went away. And I remember when I read that, I was like, I wouldn't say I was depressed, that feels too strong. I told people I was prone to melancholy. But I realized, Hey, God used him even with this.

And over time he realized, "Hey, there's some things I can do to mitigate this feeling of tragedy." And that was so empowering to me of going, Look, life is hard. We have some struggles that will go away, we have some that won't, but we're not left without agency. And our life can have a purpose." And so that really freed me up to start working on myself of going, So what can I do to mitigate the tragedies?

I'll tell you just one that was fun for him is he married a woman that made him laugh. That was a big part of it for him is Kat could make him laugh. She'd make fun of him. Everyone else was scared of him. She wasn't scared of him. She's making fun of him. And he needed that.

**Annie:** So thinking along those lines, where does prayer and fasting land for you as far as warring? Like, where do prayer and fasting step in as part of the warring or resting part of life?

**Ben:** That's a great question. You know, it's funny because Martin Luther said, "Don't fast when you're depressed." He used to try to fast to get out of depression. He was like, "That's the wrong tool for this moment."

**Annie:** That is a wrong move. You got to feast your way out of depression.

**Ben:** There's different tool. Yeah. Whoops, nope, no, not that one. Keep that one in the holes. So I don't do it to be less sad. Fasting for me helps when I know I want to think seriously about an issue in my life and I'm just prone to distraction. You know, because the world is distracting. And then when you have an anxious feeling, you distract yourself on a screen, you start cleaning all the rooms in your house. You're like, "What am I doing?" I'm avoiding a thing.

And so for me, I'll just eat a bunch. Like, let's eat these feelings. So, fasting for me helps to go no, "I'm going to put all this down. I'm changing the rhythm and repurposing that time to really seek the Lord." And it helps me stay focused on the issue at hand rather than avoiding it. So that's why I do it is like there's an issue. I may not get clarity, but I want to be the me that's bringing all of me in this issue before the Lord.

I gratefully live near a lot of trails in the woods. And so for me, when you say fasting, I think woods. Like it's hard to fast next to your fridge, it's easy to fast on the woods where you're probably not going to eat any of this stuff anyway. And I just like to go walk in the woods with God and go, "You and me are going to deal with this issue out here." And the clarity it brings is helpful.

**Annie:** With your back injury, are you in pain all the time?

**Ben:** I have discovered the ways to mitigate it. Same thing. When I realized like, Oh, this is a thing we may live with for a bit, what do you do now? I can be sad. I can be mad at God. I avoided it. When I first had it I probably watched like hundreds of movies when I was laying on the floor. You know, I just kept watching movies.

And I remember watching Teen Wolf Too starring Jason Bateman. And I was like, "We've gotten here. We've gotten here. This is so pathetic." And that's when I was like, "Me and God gotta go to war. We got to figure this out." And then after that, it was like, "All right, you go to physical therapy, and you do these workouts. It was me and these little old ladies. They were all like, "What are you doing here?" And like everyone's over at and then there's Ben with a cane.

So now I've just realized there's about a dozen... Everything in my life changed, Annie, to be honest, physically, food, exercise, all of it, bed. I changed everything. But I think for me it's the Lord touch my hip to make me walk with a limp. I've realized if I don't have a healthy rhythm with my back, I pay for it. And so it's forced me to have healthy rhythms with my life.

So I thank God for it. It's one of those bruising blessings. I wouldn't wish back pain on anybody, but God has used it so much to help me have a healthy rhythm in life that I'm oddly grateful.

**Annie:** Do you ask Him to heal you?

**Ben:** All the time.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Ben:** So before the pandemic started, I got bulging discs in my neck too, and was losing the use of my right arm.

**Annie:** Jeez.

**Ben:** It was numb all the time, it lost strength. And then no one was going to hospital. I'm like, "Well, this is a problem." So I'm like, "Lord, I'm in pain and angry all the time." So I was like, "Look, we may need to do surgery, I'm going to do these stretches, but will you please make this pain go away, please." And He did.

You know, with the lower back pain, I've had to mitigate it for years and years. But with my neck, it's still an issue, like I don't do CrossFit, but I found just the pain decreased. And I'm enormously grateful. But before there was a sense of entitlement, and now there's not.

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Ben:** There's such humility and that gratitude.

**Annie:** There just seemed at some point, on my best day, so this is not often, on my best days I can look at the places I see God move like I asked Him to and look at the places that I see God move like opposite of what I asked and figure out to be grateful for both.

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Annie:** That's hard, though. And when you got two things that need healing and He only hits one of them, you're like, "Gosh, I want to be so thankful. And also, like, move your finger down 19 inches."

**Ben:** "Seems like we're on a roll here. Seems like you could knock this out."



**Annie:** Right. "If I was already on your to-do list, can you ta-done this thing."

**Ben:** "While we're here. Before you go."

**Annie:** Right. Right. When that's what happened, how do you lean on thankfulness and not bitterness?

**Ben:** I think well, one, when I injured it really bad I had a month on the floor to have it out with God. And I was reading a book at the time-

**Annie:** Laying on your back or on your side or what?

**Ben:** On my stomach. Annie, it was so dramatic because I was on all these drugs, so I couldn't sleep. So I'd sleep maybe three hours a night-

**Annie:** Oh my gosh!

**Ben:** ...and was always in pain. When the air conditioner would kick on in the house, it would shake the floor and cause the disc and the muscles to hit the nerve and send waves of nerve pain. I think the Lord just let that go until I was like, "I'm so over it!" You know, and just had this huge blowout with God about it.

And then it surfaces a lot of others and I'm mad about you for a million things you're not doing in my life that I want. And He just made me vomit all that up. Let's get it all out, all of it. All my disappointments of how you're not managing life up to my expectations.

But then I was reading a book about the history of the church. And you just see pain is the common denominator in the human story. An enormous pain is the common denominator in everyone's story. I remember crying on the floor, just reading about the pain of so many people on so many different continents through history. And I started begging God to move in their life, not just mine. And it kind of connected me to the broader pain in the world.

And then, in that moment, it was very powerful moment for me, I felt like the Lord was like, "I have done something about it. And I am doing something about it."

**Annie:** Wow.

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**Ben:** And that was really centering for me. So I dislike the inconvenience, but I don't really shake my fist at Him anymore. I'm like, "Okay, I trust you."

**Annie:** I mean, that is a literal, "I won't let go till you give me a blessing and He touches your hip and bless it up."

**Ben:** 100% what happened. Yeah.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Ben:** And now you know, I have to slow down, I have to do stretches and all this stuff that makes me go slower. And He's made me a better person. I think I'm a better dad, I think I'm a better husband. I think I'm a less sufferable human as a result of it all. Unfortunately, it took that. You know? You're like, "It's a bummer it's required that."

**Annie:** Right. Right. My brain kind of malfunctioned in 2019 and I had to get put on bed rest for a couple of weeks because my brain stopped working right. And it was a very similar experience of feeling like when your body stops doing what you are forcing your body to do because your mind is going and your life is going, when your body is the one that gives up, you kind of go like, "I don't actually don't have any power here. I thought I was running this thing and now my brain is broken." So it is a wild wrestle with the Lord when your body is not right.

**Ben:** And unfortunately, that's the place He has to get all of us to get our attention because we will continue on a suicidal attack of what we think matters. And he's like, "I'm going to have to put you on the ground." I never thought Psalm 23, "He makes me lie down in green pastures," was a particularly violent verse.

But then I was like, "Oh, sometimes He just makes you lie down because you need to stop. The direction you're running, the pace you're running, the damage you're doing, I have to stop this now." And that's not why all pain happens, but that's one of the ways it does. And one of the blessings that can come from it is perspective.

**Annie:** Yes. It may not be why the pain happens but it certainly could be one thing God chooses to do with it when it is in our lives.

**Ben:** Yeah.

**Annie:** This is a miserable conversation, Ben. I'm very sorry we just have... I'm just kidding.

**Ben:** I was like, "This is interesting. Well, let's do this." No, this is great.

**Annie:** So *Rest and War* is out by the time people are hearing this. So they go grab it and read it. I mean, the more we understand that we are in a battle, the less we're surprised that we're in a battle.

**Ben:** Yes. Yes. And I think it's wonderfully encouraging when you go, "Oh, it's not just me. It's not just me." We're in a fight and it's hard. But we're not without hope and we're not without resources. And that was so life-changing for me to realize, Okay, life is a struggle but there can be substantial healing. Things that feel huge now can feel smaller later. You can advance. And there are ways to do it. And God wants to help you do that. And He loves you and is not shaming you in that.

That was so empowering for me. And some things that I thought would always be huge in my story are smaller. I just want people to experience that. I really do. And so that was my attempt with this, and you know, I hope it helps people.

**Annie:** I loved it. You're right. I felt like it handed me permission and it handed me tools. So I'm really thankful for it.

**Ben:** I'm glad you do.

**Annie:** So the last question we always ask, Ben, is because the show is called That Sounds Fun, get ready, tell me what sounds fun to you? But you cannot say reading biographies. You got to give me one other answer.

**Ben:** That was my pathetic... that was my only thing.

**Annie:** It's a very good answer. Don't say pathetic. You're not allowed to judge your fun around here. It's something we do not allow. If it's fun to you, it is fun. I'm cross-stitching cities that I've lived in. So that is fun to me.

**Ben:** There you go.

**Annie:** Yeah, it's beautiful. I'm using a black fabric so that it looks like nighttime. I'm very happy with it. So I do not judge my fun and I will not judge your fun. So it is not pathetic. It's awesome. But what else do you do for fun?

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**Ben:** I do love it. I do love a good book. What do I do for fun? Well, tonight is Movie Night with the kids. That is fun. I'm looking forward to that. Friday night is a whole thing. We order pizza, we pick a movie. It's all very exciting.

**Annie:** What's the movie tonight? I don't know. We're letting them pick it. Dad has veto power. So we give them a selection. They often tend to be movies from my childhood.

**Annie:** Team Wolf Too, Jason Bateman.

**Ben:** Probably not that. Lord help us. No. But anyway, so I don't know. It's a mystery. It's exciting. I love time with my kids. They're bizarre, strange, fun, wonderful humans. So that's a lot of fun for me.

**Annie:** How many are they?

**Ben:** I have three. Two girls and a boy.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Ben:** And we have breakfast and dinner together almost every day. And I love it.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Ben:** That's probably my most fun part of the day. And we talk about that every dinner. What's your best, worst, and weirdest? What's the best part of the day, the worst, and weirdest?

**Annie:** Best, worst and weirdest.

**Ben:** Yeah. And the weirdest is always kind of fun. So that'll be fun tonight. And then, you know, I just realized, I have to prioritize fun. And for me, I realized I miss my friends. So I've got a speaking event coming up, and I just booked a few extra days because it's back in Texas. And I'm like, "I'm going to go see some buddies. We're going to go sit around a fire, we're going to go... I don't cause some trouble in the mean streets of Austin. We're going to do something. So seeing people who will make me laugh.

These are guys that don't listen to my sermons. They don't care about what I'm doing, but they love me. And I'm like, "I need to be around these guys that love

me." And so it's worth the money and the time and the energy to map it out. So I'm going to go see some buddies. And I'm really looking forward to that.

**Annie:** I say this, and I do not say it lightly. I'm going to pray for your fun because I believe so highly in it that I'm just going to ask the Lord to double down on it for you. It'll be more than you ever dreamed of.

**Ben:** You know, there's a chapter about positive release in the book. Like how you have to... and it was about three times longer because I just included all these stories of all these Christians through history what they did for fun just to keep them in the game, to keep them from discouraged to keep... you know, guys that had horrible problems found the silliest ways to have fun. And I just put them all there and they're like, "This is way too long. You have to cut these down." Like, "Okay, well, fine."

So we cut some out, but... You know, anyway, I am a big proponent of that. And so I love that that's a priority for you because the world needs more fun. You got to laugh to keep from crying, Annie.

**Annie:** That's it.

**Ben:** That's the way the world goes. And there's much good in the world.

**Annie:** Hey, we're in a battle.

**Ben:** You come home.

**Annie:** That's right, Ben, thanks for being on here. I can't wait for people to read *Rest and War*. I'm so grateful for you. And you're welcome here anytime. So come on back.

**Ben:** Oh, man. Thanks. It was fun to talk to you. The rumors were true, you are a delightful human being.

**Annie:** Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I like that the rumors were true.

**[00:58:21] <music>**

**Outro:** Oh, you guys, don't you love him? I hope he comes back on the podcast 100 more times. Oh my gosh. I had so many more questions for him. I love the way he deep dives into his research. I'm so into it. Hey, get your copy of *Rest and War* wherever you love to buy books. Be sure to follow Ben and tell him thanks for being on the

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show. And if you're interested, make sure you grab his relationships book as well. It's awesome.

And go ahead and preorder *100 Days to Brave* for kids and grab your copy of *100 Days to Brave* if you don't have it so that you and the young person in your life are ready to get started on that special 100-day journey we're doing together starting on February 17.

If you need anything else for me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that is how you can find me. And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home. Do something that sounds fun to you. I'll do the same.

Today what sounds fun to me is packing a suitcase. I'm going on a little trip tomorrow. And I cannot wait. So 24 hours and then I'm back and I cannot wait. Y'all have a great weekend. I will do the same. We'll see you back here Monday with country star and new author my friend Lauren Alaina. We'll see you guys then.