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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. Happy Valentine's Day. We've got a special Valentine's Day episode in store for you. And later this week, like literally, y'all, in three days, we'll be gassing up Cinnamon Roll the bus to head out for That Sounds Fun Coast to Coast tour.

I can't wait to see your faces in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Columbus, and Greenville on this first weekend. If you haven't gotten your tickets, there are still a few tickets available at almost all the shows. Some are sold out, but you can probably still get one if you try.

You can grab those tickets today at Anniefdowns.com/events. Or if you can't make it to one of the shows in person or if you just want to do this, you can watch the live stream on February 25th. You can get virtual tickets for that awesome show in my hometown at the Strand Theater in Marietta, Georgia with our special guests, Sophie Hudson, y'all may know her as BooMama, and our favorite comedian Mike Goodwin, all will be there with us at The Strand and you can watch it too. Just go to compassionlive.com to get your tickets to that.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to take a moment and share about one of our incredible partners, [Epic Will](#). Here at That Sounds Fun we get to hear amazing stories that God is writing in the lives of our guests all the time. He's writing an amazing story in your life too. Happy Valentine's day. It is true. It's just what He does.

Even when our stories don't quite make sense, we can trust that He is a good author, and we get to make wise decisions about the legacy we're creating too. It's why partnering with Epic Will matters so much to me.

Epic Will is the easiest and most affordable way I know of to create an estate plan. The expert team at Epic Will has developed an efficient and user-friendly platform that helps you think through things like who you'd like to be your financial power of attorney and who you would trust to take care of your children.

And in a few simple steps, it can also help you designate who your belongings go to and create your advanced directives so that no one's left making healthcare decisions on your behalf without knowing your wishes. Basically, epicwill.com empowers you or you and your spouse to make these important decisions all with the guidance of people who truly know what they're doing.

And I love this, but the team at Epic Will is dedicated to caring for single moms and orphans. In fact, they provide single moms with kids under the age of 18 with access to a free will, giving them that security that they're covered and have one less thing to worry about. And they are donating 10% of their proceeds to organizations helping orphans find a home. That's the mission you're helping support when you use Epic Will to create your will.

Epicwill.com has built the most comprehensive self-guided early estate plan for you. And as little as five minutes and for less than you'd spend on a trip to Target you can create an earliest state plan with Epic Will. So go to epicwill.com and use the promo code TSF20 for 20% off. Again that's epicwill.com and use the promo code TSF, like that Sounds Fun, TSF20 for 20% off. Get the peace of mind that comes from knowing your belongings and your family and your legacy are protected.

Intro: Today on the show it's a very, very special Valentine's episode. I get to talk to my friend Jim Cress. Jim is an amazing therapist, a broadcaster, and a speaker. I actually met him at Onsite Workshops a few years ago when he was one of the counselors for the Living Center Program there. And he's become a trusted voice that I knew I wanted to keep in my life.

I thought it would be fun today to have a little relationship's conversation with someone who has counseled literally thousands of relationships and has trained in how to teach us to create healthy connections. Jim is the perfect person to hang with us on Valentine's Day.

And a quick heads up we do talk about being adults in relationships. So this is probably not a MiniBFF friendly episode as we are going to get very honest and very open about being in relationships with adults that includes your sexual life. So here is my conversation with my good friend and one of my favorite therapists, Jim Cress.

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Annie: Jim Cress, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Jim: I am so excited. I've wanted to do this for a long time. We talked about it a long, long time ago.

Annie: Yes. It's like I've been waiting for the perfect episode. And what better than Valentine's Day to have a therapist?

Jim: It is about to get cray-cray up in here. I'm just like, "Are you serious this is the one you want me on?"

Annie: Yes.

Jim: I'm honored to be on here.

Annie: If I think about my table of advisors in my life, of people who—I'm going to cry saying this to you—of people that I... if I could get everybody in a room on a daily basis to help me think through how to be better healthiest version of me, and there's about six seats in that table, and you're one of them.

Jim: Thank you, Annie. Thank you.

Annie: And I am very, very thankful for you. For our friends listening, you were my therapist at Onsite Workshops.

Jim: Right, 100 years ago.

Annie: 100 years ago, right.

Jim: It's been so long.

Annie: And you are generous and kind enough to remain friends with me after we are done with Onsite. And so thank you for being here and thanks for continued support in your life.

Jim: It is my honor. Any time we've had coffee or conversation, that's a level playing field. I'm not your therapist outside of there. I'm your friend. I know it's going to be rich and deep and authentic when we connect, when we talk of that. I love that.

Annie: I do too. I'm really thankful. So we're going to jump in on some relationship talk. We aren't going to do what you and I normally do, which is like name names and send screenshots from Instagram, but-

Jim: I kind of figured we were going down that path, so that's fine.

Annie: But you know, a lot of our friends listening, everyone listening wants to be healthier-

Jim: Yeah, hope so.

Annie: ...and want to be healthier in relationship. Will you back up and tell us a little bit like what's your history as a therapist? What made you get into this?

Jim: I have a background of 35 years as a Christian radio broadcaster doing about everything you could do including hosting talk shows. There was an old one called the Minirth-Meier New Life clinic. It lives on in the iteration of New Life Live, now with Steve Arterburn.

So I was at Dallas Seminary and was going to be a marriage and family pastor in the track I was in. Finished that track and in that a guy said, "You know, best thing you can do to help other couples is put yourself in counseling." I said, "Oh, okay."

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jim: I kind of knew I'm a nightmare behind the scenes but I said, "Okay, I'll go look at that". And Jessica and I spent eight years with a counselor in Dallas just kind of unpacking life.

And then as I hosted this talk show, I'm sitting there five days a week interviewing literally some of the top therapists, everything from psychiatrist to marriage family therapist. Did that for eight years, and then did two or three other talk shows, one for the American Association of Christian Counselors. So I'm just sitting thousands of hours—I quit counting—unpacking stuff that people would call in live.

Annie: And ask you live questions.

Jim: Live questions.

Annie: Jim!

Jim: I was the host at that time. I would comment but I was not the therapist.

Annie: Okay.

Jim: And then one day I said, "I think I would like to really sit and have meaningful conversations with people and I went to a guy who's now in heaven, Dr. Larry

Crabb, who really mentored me a lot. I mean, tons later. And I said I want to go out and study under him. He did more soul care than just shrink psychotherapy, and I'm all for psychotherapy.

So the number one thing a therapist ever does, if you're listening, you have a therapist, is make sure they do their work. You got to ask them that. And from Onsite, they won't let us work there unless we go do our work. So I continued it three and a half more years of therapy working on my trauma story and traveled with Larry Crabb for... we were putting on these weekend conferences all about how to connect individually and in small groups.

And then I was working at Bethesda Workshops here in Nashville where we are for people with sexual brokenness and heard about Onsite, Miles Adcox, and we... That's about 12 years ago.

Annie: Oh my gosh!

Jim: So I went out there to do my personal work and fell in love with Onsite. I call it... I don't know if this makes sense, but it's like the Disney World of the therapy world. Walt Disney monetized play and he knew to bring the adult and the inner child together. That's the whole magic of that place. And so Onsite says you're going to connect to your adult self. I remember even talking to you about little Annie and little Jimmy and-

Annie: I still keep the picture in my wallet.

Jim: Yeah. So we connect. And people don't think there's an inner child. They've never been in major rush hour traffic, they never watch a professional sporting event. It's about a four-year-old sometimes. So it sounds weird to people, but it's like, no, if you're going to come to Jesus, you have to come with a faith of a little child. And then Paul said, "Be childlike but don't be childish."

The whole love chapter. We're talking about love. In verse 11 in chapter 13, the love chapter, Paul said, "I got to tell you, when I was a child, I thought, acted, reasoned like a child. Of course I did. But when I became an adult, listen, I put away childish things." That's what I help people do is to really grow up. That's as much as anything.

Annie: It has significantly helped me. You have significantly helped me do that. You, my counselor here in town, my mentor, some people, you putting language to that, even... I mean, when people ask me about Onsite, I say, "I left with tools and

language." I didn't leave like a totally different person, which as you know, was my fear that I was going to be this-

Jim: Sure.

Annie: ...brand new... that the Annie I knew and love was going to go away because I had finally found this thing in my history. And I just left with tools and language. And as y'all say, it changed my life two degrees. But my life is so different now than I think it would have been without that interception point.

Jim: Our founder and CEO, Miles Adcox calls it human school. And that idea just how to be human, like who in the crud taught us how to be humans? It's kids.

Annie: Right.

Jim: Right. It's like, Oh, I don't know how to adult.

Annie: Yeah. Is that affecting our relationships? Is that part of this?

Jim: I think it is because what you don't work out, you'll act out. And I don't want to just throw out a bunch of corny quotes here, but it's true. Brené Brown says it this way. You either walk inside your story, all of it, that means all of it. Because she says we tend to want to orphan parts of our story. "I'm never going to tell you that part."

You walk inside your story and embrace it and own all of your story or you'll spend your life walking outside of your story disconnected from yourself and do what? Hustle for your worthiness. Just hustling. "Maybe I can be someone that God would approve of, or my parents still would approve of, or in romance this other person relationship. Can I hustle for that and maybe someone will finally love and accept me?" That's often looking for an external solution to an internal problem.

Annie: Lysa TerKeurst and you do a lot of podcasts together.

Jim: Yes, we do.

Annie: People have probably heard you and seen you with her. And in her book, she talked about your concept of if you connect the dots. Will you talk about that a little bit? Because I think that's really helpful when it comes to relationship.

Jim: Yeah. And I try to give credit. Steve Jobs said you have to connect the dots looking backwards. He was not even the original person who said that. Others have said it

this way: you have to connect the dots. That's what I do is say, what do you do in counseling? What do I do at Onsite when I go to work this week? Collect the dots, then I connect the dots. And then I've added my own that you have to correct the dots.

Because some of that is we're trying to connect dots left and right, including in dating, and we've not even connected the dots. Who is this person sitting across the table? We don't know. And then wait, I don't even know if I really know who I am because I've not done my own story work.

Annie: I'm thinking about our friends. We're just going to go through some different categories. We're going to step into everybody's Valentine's Day, Jim. Let's start with people who are dating. Let's start with people who are in a dating relationship. I would love for you to kind of tell me like... well, let me ask you this first. Should everybody be in therapy?

Jim: That is such a loaded question. So yeah. Here's what I believe. Absolutely. It doesn't mean it has to be with a professional therapist. The Greek word in the New Testament "therapeuo" means healing. Healer.

Annie: Wow.

Jim: And so to sit with a person and unpack your story. You already know statistically most people never go to a therapist. They're talking to their hairstylist, they're talking to a bartender, they're talking to sometimes wearing the ears and mind out of their friend.

One woman in my office said, "I've had an epiphany." I said, "What is it?" She said, "I've been trying to make my friends you." Because she paid and was able to sit and process. I said, "One level, don't make your therapist your friend and don't make your friends your therapist." But there are coffee cup conversations where we're sitting there and processing, yes, even our story. That level of therapy or coaching or mentoring, I think, pick your, you know, whichever level you want to be on.

Annie: So our friends that are in dating relationships that are with somebody now, maybe date three or year three, what are some questions we should be asking to make sure even to ourselves, am I the healthiest version of me in this and is this the healthiest relationship for me?

Jim: Let me take you to a place you may not expect.

Annie: Oh good.

Jim: I do a lot of teaching and Lysa's... said Lysa TerKeurst... This is the book you've been ready to write. I didn't see it coming. We'll see if I write that book.

Annie: I hope you do. You know I want you to.

Jim: I know. You've really been so much of a big encouragement to me. So here it is. In chapter two of Nehemiah, they're about rebuilding the walls, rebuilding your lives. Maybe you've had relational failures. I'm borrowing from that.

And there's four questions to the king, King Artaxerxes—this is going to get right to dating—that he asked. Nehemiah comes in looking sad. And question number one is... And it's important to know the context. If he's looking sad when you're the cupbearer to the king, food, wine taster, don't go into the king's presence looking sad.

The king with all the power looks at him and says, "Hey, what up?" He says, "What's going on? I see that you're sad. I know you're not sick. This could only be a sadness of the heart." So it's kind of like the question one is, "Hey, what's really going on here?"

Question two, number one question I ever asked in counseling, scariest question, the king says, "All right." Nehemiah says, "It's not pretty back home." Then the king says, "So what do you really want?" Minding that C. S. Lewis said we're far too easily satisfied. So he says, "What do you really want?" People come and say, "I want this?" Is that what you really want?

So question one is, what's going on? Question two, what do you really want? Question three, if that's what you want, how long is this going to take? Even in a dating relationship. They're going to rebuild the walls. And then question four, it's implied, not stated, is, what are the tools? You talked about coming from Onsite. What are the tools you're going to need as you're building or rebuilding?

So I can apply those to dating. I'm going to say there's two things that'll happen in a dating relationship. Somebody across the table, who is that person for real? And who are you? And a lot of people are thinking first, I wonder who this person is? Reading their dating profile, googling them, or whatever we do, all the social media accounts. And they don't even know their own story.

Annie: Right.

Jim: So what are you looking for in someone you would date? And who are you looking for? Just stop at ground zero and say, What am I looking for and who am I looking for? I do a little hamburger and this will wipe a lot of people out to go, You will never date if you do this.

The top bun is if you're going to be in a relationship with me, this is what I must have. You got to think through that. Don't be too strict on that, stricter than is normal. Top bun is, This is what I must have. The bottom bun is, This is what I won't stand for.

Annie: So my must-haves I would say are probably like believes in Jesus.

Jim: You know these.

Annie: A man who believes in Jesus. I mean, the older I get the shorter my top bun gets, Jim. As I'm sitting here like, "I want him to have a job"

Jim: You're fixing to have dating keto. There will be no buns. Just the meat.

Annie: That's right. I'm in dating keto love. I'm in ketosis.

Jim: Oh, man!

Annie: But I mean I feel like you're giving a real wise thing here because that hot bun doesn't need to be 18 things.

Jim: Right. Well, because the middle piece, the top bun, this one I must have. Bottom bun, this is what I won't stand for. Boundaries. Remember a boundary without a consequence is a mere suggestion. You got to say, "What are my boundaries?" The middle piece of meat that's always left is what's negotiable.

There are five disagreements that's been found by Dr. John Gottman in every marriage and that's really every relationship. Five disagreements you're never going to solve. They are not usually adultery betrayal. But we're trying to go in and almost have either no demands, no boundaries, or we have so many. Well, it's so microscopic, you're not going to be attracted or they to you.

But to define those as setbacks, maybe you go to a therapist, sit down with a friend like Annie and say, "Here's what I think that hamburger looks like. This is what I must have, will stand for. Here's what I'm willing to negotiate."

Annie: For myself I find that before a relationship starts when I'm in an in-between, between one ending and one starting, is a great time to draw the hamburger. Because you aren't swayed by who you just met and you aren't swayed by who you're trying to keep.

Jim: Well stated. And this is a dud right here. This is like a bomb in the midst of Valentine's Day. But the research would show when you enter a relationship, now, it's got to be a significant relationship, dating, long term, whatever, you're in that relationship you ought to take a year and do some therapy, do some inventory work on yourself, look at the... I teach this. You know the fact and the impact. The fact: this is what happened. Impact: what did it do to me?

I say divide that in half. At least take six months and date yourself. I mean get to know yourself. Socrates said, "Know thyself." I can tell you most people... I'm Ezekiel, the watchman on the wall. I warn. That's all I have to do. But you gotta do it. But most people I've counseled and work with are like, "No, I get to get onto a new relationship." Thank God some don't.

But autopsy, gross word, but autopsy the last relationship. What worked? What didn't? Where did I possibly cross some boundaries when someone showed me who they are? Remember Maya Angelou. "When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time." Someone showed you like the 20th time you like, "Wow, they're just having a bad day?" No, it's like, "No, I've got to believe what I see."

Annie: Yes. Do you recommend online dating?

Jim: I don't recommend it or not recommend it. And here's why. Have I recommended it? Yes, in certain circumstances. Because it's a world we live in this Metaverse. And who knows what else is coming! And now through a global pandemic and people on Zoom, I'm a realist to say I don't recommend people get on Tinder. I hope I'm not being pejorative. I'm just saying, "Yeah, I met her or I met him on Tinder." Maybe you get a success story. Doubtful.

But I'm saying there are dating sites. And then go in into the dating side, you're going to have to do what Reagan and Gorbachev did, *Doveriyai, no proveryai* in Russian, 'trust, but verify.'

Annie: Mm, trust but verify.

Jim: People are putting their best foot out, of course.

Annie: Of course.

Jim: And as they do that and I think you can go in and you know... The biggest one I always do on the dating sites is, let's start with these concentric circles. How willing? What have you found? Truly the person went, "Oh, Jesus take the wheel." This is the person I want but they happen to live in Dubuque, Iowa and you're in South Florida. Are you willing? Why go even expand your circles out when you say, "I'm not moving out of Charlotte or Nashville?" That's just reality.

But I really will say to people if they say, "I'm in a really small church, I'm in a smaller geographical area," and I'll say, "The technology is there. Let's use it." And just for them to gain trust, but verify. And I've had a lot of people who have had success and others who have said, "Man, I got about three bites into the apple." First, but you didn't find the worm, and it was like, "This person is not who they said they were." Like, yeah, don't be surprised.

Annie: Right. A lot of our friends listening... we did a Q&A about singleness. We were really interested to see how many women reached out that had never been on a date, ever, but really desire it. What questions for those women listening, and some dudes too, that... Well, dudes maybe a different story, a different conversation. But for our friends that are listening that are female that have never been on a date but really the desire that, what should they do? What questions should they be asking? What is theirs to hold?

Jim: Teddy Roosevelt, of course, has a classic quote about the man or the woman in the arena. So I want you to be able to... There's this whole book on this topic called risking intimacy. It's not me recommending the book. But to take risks of intimacy because you can either go out totally blind, and that can be dangerous, or go out so risk averse in a dating relationship. Hey, it's human to human connection. Let the thing develop.

Again, trust in a relationship is going to be built over time, plus reliable experience. So if you're sitting there waiting for everything to feel safe, like relational anxiety, "I gotta wait till everything feels safe," no, encourage is moving in the midst of fear.

Have a personal board of directors, literally then say, "Okay, here's the person I'm wanting to date. Here's their profile. You can check it out." And then see, do I want to begin maybe with phone calls? I've had clients who've done that, they're

corresponding or texting. It's almost a little bit like courtship. Letting this naturally organically evolve.

And normally a person... I'll speak for dudes. We've been, I guess, at times pretty bad at this. We can only hold our breath so long. We will be putting off signs. And if you don't speak to that and say, "Hey, not cool. I'm not okay with it." You don't have to be mean. But just say, "I am not okay."

Because every relationship has a contract from the beginning. You cannot show me... even with a pet. Every relationship has a contract. That contract is being built. And so in time to have these deeper, meaningful conversations along the way. If you'll just have your eyes open and ears open and heart open, the other person will show you signs along the way.

Annie: What if they've never met someone? What if they desire to be married, but there isn't a single guy in their job or in their church or in their life? What's the next move?

Jim: This won't be that obvious maybe to some, but I want a person to do their story work. And I'd want them to look at their own story and say... Sometimes we say if it's hysterical, I've got some energy around that. If it's hysterical, it's historical. And say, Is there any other place in your story? I don't care if it was the mean girls in junior high? Was there a place where you risked a little intimacy and then that didn't work? You were mocked or shamed, or whatever else

And if you say, "No, I just never have dated. Didn't really want to..." I've had people say, both men and women, "Hey, I was getting through college. I wanted to make money. I wanted to get my degree because it was very practical." I go, "Cool. Good."

But is there an underlying reason? If I can get into their story and they say, "Well, yeah, there was a situation back here," or "my parents divorced," or "dad had an affair," or something, and say, "Is there a history back there where the idea of a relationship made you scared?"

If not, then I always asked back to Nehemiah. "What do you want? Well, I don't know. I'm not there to tell you what you want. You sound like you might want to date someone or risk intimacy?" "I think I do." "Okay."

I can even in my office, you can imagine this because you've seen stuff like this, I'll say... In my office, I've got 12 chairs stacked. And I'll say, "Let's say out that

door..." My door leads out to this grassy area. And I say, "Let's say out the door is you going on a date? Let's get back here and get four, or five, six chairs with three-by-five cards on them." You can do this at home, folks.

And say, What are the blocks and barriers? Every person will know this is what I'm going to have to face to step up and enter the dating arena, whether it's online, church, wherever it may be. Somebody is saying, "Hey, I want to blind date," and hook you up with a friend, whatever. There's a sense of what's blocking you from entering the arena. Every person I've ever done that with will show you three, four, or five things.

Annie: Yeah.

[00:23:42] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our incredible partners, [Modern Fertility](#). The more information you got, the more empowered you feel, right? That's what I'm hoping is happening today with this conversation. And when you know more you can make better decisions for your body, your health, and your future.

There are many decisions bigger than having a child, but for many women, their fertility is a big question mark. That's why Modern Fertility was created. It's an easy and affordable way to test your fertility hormones at home with a simple finger prick, mail it in with a prepaid label, and you'll get your personalized results within 10 days.

You'll get insight into your hormone levels, your ovarian reserve, aka how many eggs you have compared to other women your age, and other important fertility factors. The results go deep into what every hormone means. And you can also talk one on one with their fertility nurse to review your results and options for next steps. I think that was my favorite part of the process, getting to ask the nurse the questions I had regarding my results.

And here's the thing. Traditional testing with your doctor can cost over like \$1,000, but Modern Fertility gets you the same info at \$159, which is an actual fraction of the price. And if you go to modernfertility.com/thatsoundsfun, you can get \$20 off your test. Also if you have an HSA or an FSA, you can put those dollars towards Modern Fertility as well.

If you want to have children soon or maybe one day in the future, clinically sound information about your body can help you make that decision and make the one that is right for you. Right now Modern Fertility is offering our listeners \$20 off the test when you go to modernfertility.com/thatsoundsfun. That means your test will cost \$139 instead of 100 or 1,000 it could cost at a doctor's office.

So get \$20 off your fertility tests when you go to modernfertility.com/thatsoundsfun. [Modernfertility.com/thatsoundsfun](https://modernfertility.com/thatsoundsfun).

Sponsor: And I've got one more amazing partner to tell you about, [Chime](#). Here we are in the year of our Lord 2022, which means it's time to leave behind the things that don't serve you. Things like partners with bad boundaries, as we've discussed, and overdraft fees. Am I right?

When your checking account balance is running low, the absolute last thing you need is an overdraft fee. But with Chime, an award-winning app and debit card, you can save the hard-earned paper without paying overdraft fees.

Eligible members can overdraft up to \$200 on debit card purchases and cash withdrawals with absolutely no overdraft fee. Make your next good decision in 2022 and join over 10 million people using Chime. Sign-up takes only two minutes and it doesn't affect your credit score. Get started at chime.com/thatsoundsfun. That's chime.com/thatsoundsfun.

Banking services provided by and debit card issued by The Bancorp Bank or Stride Bank, N.A.; Members FDIC. Eligibility requirements and overdraft limits apply. Overdraft only applies to debit card purchases and cash withdrawals. Limit starts at \$20 and may be increased up to \$200 by Chime. See chime.com/spotme.

And now back to our conversation with Jim.

[00:26:48] <music>

Annie: I'm thinking about my own story and I'm balancing like, Jim, you know this is about me. And I'm trying to not do that just because you know counselor-level stuff about me. But the thing I am happy to say is I'm experiencing a version of this because I'm noticing in my own story that relationships with men that I'm dating always in about the same place. And so I'm having this like, "Oh, this keeps happening." Is there something too? Should we be paying attention to patterns like that?

Jim: I think so. Absolutely. Because often the pattern or what I'll even call a ritual, like I get to this spot, heading to another interstate, it's always that exit. Stop.

Annie: Jim, it's always that exit.

Jim: And that was where I would gently drill down Proverbs 20:5, the purposes in a person's heart are deep waters." So a person of understanding goes down deep and draws them out. I'll say, let's not play therapist here, let's talk about this. What do you think is unique about that exit? Either he bails if it's in that type of relationship or you say, "I'm out?" What is the pattern? Where is that? And again, is there any history of that?

Annie: Patterns are scary to me.

Jim: Sure. Why are they scary? What do you think for you they're scary?

Annie: Because I can't figure out how to get out of it.

Jim: It's like in a loop.

Annie: Yeah. I feel like I'm in a loop. And every time I do my work and I get out, so the thing ends. And I do my autopsy as best I can. My friend Angie Smith had me one time say, "Write three things you loved about how that went and three things you'd do different."

And so I always autopsy like that. Here's three things I'm really proud of how I did that and three things that if I could do that, again, I would pay attention to this sooner, or I would say this ahead of time, or you know, whatever." And then I look back and I'm healthier and he's healthier. You always say water meets water.

Jim: It seeks its own level, it seems like it does.

Annie: Yeah. And yet I take the same exit or we take the same exit. He leaves at the same time or I leave at the same time. And so I think that's why patterns feel scary, because I'm like, "Wait, but I'm doing my work but the pattern still exists."

Jim: Are you open to a thought?

Annie: Yes, of course.

Jim: Trust your old buddy Jim here. I'm not going to go too deep on this.

Annie: Yes, of course.

Jim: Sure I've said this. If I haven't, it's going out now. As I've walked with you on the friendship level, what I've thought is, and you're in good company with others I know, is there is such truly, a, depth to you. You have done your own work. And do your own work. There is a wisdom to you, there's the Enneagram seven part of you, there's the fun part and all this.

And then I think I see with a lot of relationships, which could look like, well, that's a negative thing in this loop, in the cycle, but that a man could get to a point where he is getting further up and further in and further behind the curtain. And if that guy who could be... there's a lot of people, but they've not done their own work. And so they get to a point and they will know... CS Lewis said, if I saw Annie today I'd either go back aghast in horror or bow down and worship I really saw you.

And I think it's possible that a guy could get so far behind the curtain in a way and realize this is going to be authentic, a real relationship, wholehearted, messy, full of forgiveness. You're so full of grace, wisdom. And at that point, I don't think it's just about threatened by whoever Annie F. Downs is. That's not the point. But I see it with people and they're backing off if they're meeting someone.

And it takes time to know, boy, you're really deep. You've done your work. And I think there will be for a lot of other people. Sometimes that happens way later after years of marriage all the time.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jim: And they go do their deeper work. And at that point, healthy is only going to be able to long-term bond with healthy and unhealthy bond. And so you see it after a long-term marriage it's like this person says, "I'm divorcing. I'm out. I'm not. No, we're not. I'm not doing this anymore." That's not dating. That's way down the road a person says, "Yeah, this is not what I thought it would be." All because they're getting healthier and healthier.

Annie: Right. Thank you for saying all that. The win for patterns like that is to keep pursuing your own story in your own health?

Jim: That's what I mean by a version of the law of attraction. That I want to be as healthy as I can be. If you're married today, let's say, great. Same for you. But in dating, show up in my authentic self and don't be incongruent world, there to pose

and hide there. We've been doing that since Genesis 3 with the fig leaves, hiding our inadequacies.

Annie: Right.

Jim: It's like no. And don't be a relational exhibitions by... it's the first date we have and I'm going to take you into my story and knock you out with a... That's too much reality for a Friday night. There's a natural progression.

Annie: Remember when I did that one time? And he and I were too emotionally intimate too fast. And you were like, "This is not going to work out."

Jim: I call that a relational exhibition is just like open the kimono.

Annie: That's what we did. I know. I know.

Jim: But there's a level I think, again, not just dating, but in marriage and then people say, "I've really done my work and continue to change." And it's like, wow, see the contract is changing.

Onsite, remember we chat often, you won't go back, the world won't feel like Onsite to you, but you will feel like Onsite to the world. And so you're there and you hit the spot and you're in the cycle. Maybe the cycle is a good thing for others listening too to say, "I get so far in and then I'm out."

The thing is I work with people, again, not overdoing Onsite, and guys will say, and other clients I've had say, "You know, you think I've done my work?" "Yeah." I say, "You're a good man. You've had some problems, but you've done your work." And guys will say, "You know, do you think I've changed?" "We don't believe they are healthy women out there because a lot of women haven't done their work." Also, it's not just a female thing.

Annie: Totally. Totally.

Jim: And so you say, What do you do about that? The law of attraction is I'm going to show up and be who I am, not arrogantly, and see who's attracted to me. Now, unhealthy people can be attracted because they don't know you. But you will not bond with it unless you lower your standards down. You won't be able to.

Annie: The water meets water has helped me so much. Because when I zoom out and look at the breadth of my dating experience, I go, "Oh, yeah, he the current, he is getting healthier than the he from eight years ago," right?

Jim: Yeah, right.

Annie: So I see in my experience with them at that point that oh, we were both at this level of health, whatever this is and now I'm higher and he is too, I hope, in his life wherever he is. But I'm interested for our married friends when one of them has a spiritual awakening-

Jim: Big time.

Annie: ...or an emotional awakening. What do you do to stay connected when you've made this commitment, you've made a vow but now he's spiritually awakened, she hasn't, or she spiritually awakened, he hasn't?

Jim: Well, what we're caveat in here obviously is we're not talking about someone who has been betrayed sexually or otherwise.

Annie: Okay.

Jim: But if there's that growth, I don't think any marriage I've ever thought of, known, or could imagine they're on the exact same page emotionally and spiritually.

Annie: Ever?

Jim: And Oswald Chambers, the great devotional writer said, it's impossible to be spiritually mature and emotionally immature. So a lot of this is growing on. People say, well, the man is the spiritual leader. I wonder where you get that from? I got some thoughts. I went to cemetery. I learned a few things. Seriously.

But it's like by default the women are far more spiritual leaders in real relationships. I don't know that that's necessarily a bad thing. So if that woman goes on and she's getting spiritually healthy, and yes, I work with a man where the man is getting emotionally and spiritually more healthy. The idea is some people say they're not settling. They say, as Jack Nicholson's famous theologian and therapist said, What if this is as good as it gets?

They say I can live in that level of a gap in my hands right now about an inch apart. If they're a foot apart, I don't know how it will happen. And usually the person

who's not as spiritually mature and emotionally mature, maybe doesn't do their work, they will be the one that they won't be able to stand the gap. Sometimes they say, "Okay, we're not on the same page," and that's okay. But I'd be trying to at least connect and not be perfectly. Progress, not perfection, right?

Annie: Do you feel like that "men should be the spiritual leader" has crushed men in the church?

Jim: Yeah. I mean, I guess we're going there. I have evolved in thoughts in certain books and certain women who are writing books. And I think there's a lot of patriarchy and things that I have grown up and believed and yeah. You asked... you always ask great questions. I think the average person would not ask that question the way you did it.

Do you think men have been wounded? Do you think otherwise we theorize should man be the leader, the women or what? But men are sitting there going, "I feel ill equipped. I don't even know what the spiritual leader is." My dad was not the spiritual leader. I had no mentor." You know, this person's done 40 Beth Moore Bible studies, read every book Annie has written, Lysa TerKeurst's Bible studies and they're sitting there. And the guy comes in and we struggle usually within significance. Even our bodies, yeah, I said it, are wired that way for men.

The idea of impotency versus potency. Potency is, do I really feel like the man? And that idea of going, "I'm lost. I mean, I love Jesus," but to say, "Am I the spiritual leader?" You know, those pastors, they know it. There are pastors, some who lead big churches, they are far more able to speak to 10,000 people and do a great job breaking word of God. But to pray with their wife on a couch holding hands is the scariest thing.

Annie: Really?

Jim: And not because they're frauds.

Annie: Right.

Jim: That spiritual into me see. And like, "Do you really think, honey, I'm the man? Do you think..." I see it all the time.

Annie: Wow.

Jim: It's like a spiritual impotence. It doesn't mean it's real but it's perceived by these guys.

Annie: So for those of us that are female, what can we do to help? What can we do today to help either our husband, the guy we're dating, our brother, a friend? What can we do to release some of that pressure? Is that ours to hold? Or is that his to do his work?

Jim: You know, when you say that, again, I love the question, my mind goes to both ends. So little Hebrew, tiny, tiny bit. The word for wife or woman in the creation account, Ezer Kenegdo. She is the strong, suitable helper. Same word used of God.

So if you want to look at it, this is almost God's Word says who is really stronger in the relationship, by God's design is the woman. The Ezer Kenegdo. So with that is, I already know because I spent so much time with you and the energy you would have, to sit and say, Can you invite and, quote, 'make it safer' for the guy you're in relationship with? And say, 'Look, I'm going to go to Jesus for there is no mediator between God and man, but Christ. I lead myself. So what am I coming to a guy saying, "Spiritually lead me?" Fine if you want that. I'm going to lead myself spiritually.

And could we talk about this, Joe, Bill? If it's a guy, whoever. And say, "Tell me about your spiritual life and I promise to make it safe as your girlfriend or your wife. That I'm not going to be here and shame you for that or try to tap into an adequacy? Why don't we lead each other? Just a verse and share something or we'll get a devotional and let's talk about it." Because if you say, "You're the leader, you've got to lead spiritually," the guy is like, "I am so inadequate here." But you could invite him into intimacy and say, "We're going to lead each other. We're going to come to the table and share."

Annie: That idea, even you communicating like that, sparked so many thoughts in me about growing up in purity culture, and that the man's the leader, and you're looking for a spiritual leader. I mean, I just think, man, I must have accidentally crushed a thousand guys in my 20s. Just being like, "You're ready? Are you stronger? Unless you're stronger..."

And now as a more mature person who dates better than I did in my 20s, I'm like, "Oh, man, I'm not looking for you to be on a public stay." No, no, I want to know, do you love the Lord and can we talk about it?

Jim: And when you say that, I think of you and other authors we've talked about. It's just reality. Who is going to be around Annie Downs, male or female, and not feel the energy of Christ, watching you preach at your church, seriously, and the fun? I don't want to say you've made Christianity fun, but quite frankly, you have.

And it's like that it's not just a dud thing, and be there. And they may say the energy you put off spiritually, relationally, emotionally, with the energy of fun and all like that and creativity, someone could of course be intimidated by that. And I think what you've said, even in this last segment of just saying, ""Hey, I got to be me I'm not on the onstage." You're congruent. Who you're on stage... I've seen you backstage and see you right now.

Annie: Yeah, you've really seen me backstage.

Jim: Well, I know. But it's true. It's like to say, "I want to be able to step in." And I'll use the word 'invite' the guy to say, "Let's connect down here on a level playing field. I need to be me." The internet, a podcast, a book. Say, "Hey, why don't you just read some book or read the word and Joe come over and share one thing that God's teaching you like that?" But it's not he has to bring a four-hour devotional with commentaries in Greek and Hebrew.

Annie: Right. And for me, it's been a change in my thinking of what I'm looking for. So it's the invitation opportunity, but it's also just like, Hey, Annie, those things that were on that top hamburger bun, some of those things were never God's invitation of what you were looking for anyway. It was what the Christian world said I was supposed to try to find.

Jim: Can I add to that for a moment, please?

Annie: Yes.

Jim: At least you trust me and things are allowed to be edited. This is so profound where you went. This won't be too weird. So every man I've ever talked with, it's a heterosexual man, he says, "I want to be with a woman," he wants to have power with her, a healthy power. He wants to have an impact. But he says like in the sexual arena-

Annie: Yeah, talk about that.

Jim: ...he likes at times for her to initiate and say, "I want to be with you," versus "Hey, do you want to have sex tonight." "Okay, we'll do it." Every man I've ever talked with in that level says, "I want her to say, 'I really want to be with you.'"

Now watch. That's part of the truth that is there of how a man is wired. And then in the way of respect, if a woman's able to communicate, "I really want to be with you," and go deeper. We don't have to go 50 feet deep but let's at least be moving. "And I'd love to hear whatever you bring." And she can go, "Well, that's not biblically accurate, Charlie."

And then watch. Now here's where it could get weird, but not really. The pole for men in pornography is Jackie Chan at the end of a movie stood on a car with amnesia and said, "Who am I?" with his hands up. Who am I?" The pole of pornography, and you know, I do a lot of work in that area as a certified sex addiction therapist, the pole of that is the women are telling these men—men will tell you—they're telling these men who they are. You are something.

Annie: Wow.

Jim: You are not impotent. You are powerful. If you take the lust where the woman in porn makes him think she just wants him, she's waiting from him, it's a corruption of the Ezer Kenegdo. It's a corruption of it.

Annie: Wow. Pornography in general, for men and for women is a corruption of what was meant to be.

Jim: For women too. It's a place with all this sexual stuff. No, it's a place that people feel wanted. That finally someone wants to be with me. And in that with porn, I can be who I want to be with whom I want to be and do anything I want to do. That's a whole nother 50 podcast down the road. But it is the sense of tell me who I am.

And Blaise Pascal, the philosopher said, "All of our problems as people I perk up." What do you mean all of our problems? He said, "All of our problems stem from the inability to sit alone with yourself quietly in a room?"

Annie: Wow.

Jim: Who's in that room when you're there? Don't sit there and go in a rabbit hole and be there by yourself. But who are you? And what's really going on in your soul, including back to dating and if you're afraid to date or don't want to date?

Brené Brown has this other thing I use called permission slips, is I give myself permission to date, to risk a little and see. Or I give myself permission to say, "I'm no weirdo. I'm not in a cloister or something over in a convent." And if you're in there, that's fine. I'm here saying I give myself permission to not be dating and to have a family of friends and pursuing career. What do you give yourself permission to do?

Annie: Right. Our staff is reading *Soundtracks* by Jonathan Acuff. And it's that idea. It's permission slips and the law of attraction saying what you say. You know, I'm not a manifest believer necessarily-

Jim: Right. I know.

Annie: But I do think how you carry yourself is reflected.

Jim: Absolutely.

Annie: And so I said to my friends recently, we were talking through the Soundtrack, and I said, "Okay, here's my new dating soundtrack. I am fun to date and easy to love."

Jim: Wow.

Annie: And I was like, "I'm going to walk in the world thinking I'm fun to date and easy to love." I don't feel that because of relational baggage-

Jim: Which you're speaking that I believe like into existence. And I know you. I can say I know you. I absolutely believe that's congruent with who you really are. Sidebar real quick. So what if that's true? And let's say it is true about you. Then some guy were to date you and to get deeper and deeper into you. It's like, maybe he's had a history of dating other people, the women, for example, weren't easy to love and they had a trauma story. God bless them.

And they're like, "This is too good to be true. This is too easy." Funny the Word of God says, "The person who is forgiven little they only love a little." Implied hermeneutically, the person who has been forgiven much loves much. So someone says, "I'm easy to love. I will love you. I'm fun," or like that, I could see some guys going, "I'm not used to this. I'm used to drama. I don't know how to handle this. Can I trust it?" You go, "Yeah, you can trust it."

Annie: Yeah, because if you dated Annie in 2002, you'd have gotten drama. You wouldn't have gotten easy to date and fun to love. I mean, that's-

Jim: That's part of your story.

Annie: Yeah, that's growth. And so I think. So talk to us about we're in relationships or we want to be in relationships. How do we come up with soundtracks for ourselves like that? How do we come up with the language of who we want to be and how we get through our story?

Jim: This went to the second part there. How do I get through my story? I will start with that. Get to your story. If you don't want to go to a licensed therapist, hire a life coach. Sit down with a person. They don't have to have written books. A safe person. You have to have someone or it is a clap show if you share your story with someone who's not safe.

Annie: Right.

Jim: And say, "Let me tell you about things." List 10 things in your life that were kind of messy if you have 10. "Here's the facts. This happened to me. I impact. What impact did it do to me." Share your story there.

Then as you're looking at dating, is to say, and this seems so simple, not simplistic, get a plain sheet of paper and say, "What are the qualities..." Google if you need to? "What are the qualities I think, watch, not Annie of 2002 or whenever, me today, what are the qualities I would like in a person I'm dating?"

Annie: Like make a list?

Jim: I would make a list, yeah. Why not?

Annie: That's what they told us to do in youth group, Jim.

Jim: This is different. This is to sit in adulthood and say, "What am I looking for?" If you do that little hamburger, you know, I gotta say today that may change tomorrow. But this is a non-negotiable. I have to have this.

"You have to be a Christian." Someone says, "Online dating. There's been some good experiences. They again, live in California. I'm not leaving Nashville." That's okay. A person says, "I want someone who would want to have children." I have even women coming in saying, "I have never had children. I'm at the point, no fence, I do not want to have children."

Get down what those non-negotiables are. Boundaries. Like if a guy says, "Well, we're dating," and he says, "I'm being honest but I'm into porn," or "I have something else or whatever else," decide, are you willing to say, "Well, we need to go to counseling and work on that."

And then look at what are the things you'll be... Yeah, put them on paper. What am I willing to negotiate? And remember the contract is being formed from the first date. Really first point of contact. I would list it down. Sit with some good friends and go, "Dude, that's a little over the top there." Have your closest besties say, "Yeah, are you sure? "Maybe I need to move that into negotiable."

Annie: Can you still do that once you're married?

Jim: Oh, I think it's not could be but should be, because things change. Things change with Jessica and me. You've met Jessica.

Annie: Oh, I love her so much.

Jim: Jessica says hi. Last night I'm coming over here, we ended up making amends to each other. And it was just something over me finding a suitcase. I get stressed the night before I come because I'm really detailed about packing.

And she said, "It just felt like you kind of snapped at me." I said, "I don't feel like I did snap at you." I know I can't. But I've worked so hard to not come across a lot out of my past with just an edge of anger. And I thought we're kind of back and forth and I went, "Man, she's going down to my daughter in law's, her baby shower. I'm in here, she's flying to Houston. Like, man, we're under attack. What's going on?"

But we looked at it and said, "You know what?" Oh, here it was. We had a breakdown in communication. I could've just blown that off, but I said, "I think my face did look angry even though I wasn't feeling angry." So we have to look and say, "There was a lot of not healthy behavior for me she tolerated for years, including me being a pornography addict."

So things keep changing. Kids leave the nest, something else in life happens. I mean, my gosh, if there's cancer or something.

Annie: Sure.

Jim: But along the way, person reads a book or says, "I've realized that's gaslighting," or "that's not healthy how you talk to me," or "we do coarse jesting," or "you use sarcasm," which is that tearing of the flesh with each other, "I'm no longer okay with that."

And I think it not only might change when we study the passages of marriage, passages of relationship, whether you're married or not, you can't stay where you were. It should be changing. And talking. Just get on the table and say, "Hey, this is changing for me. I need to have a new contract with you."

[00:48:36] <music>

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And now that's finished up our conversation with Jim.

[00:52:36] <music>

Annie: Is there a line of how long you should be dating before you get engaged? Is there a line of how long you should be engaged before you get married? What's the contract there?

Jim: I think for me, and this is nothing but anecdotal working with a lot of people, I would not—I don't care if you're 40 and divorced three times, 20, never—I would not date anyone where you're in a relationship less than one year.

Annie: You're going to say that to me? You're going to tell me I need to date somebody for a year?

Jim: Before you get married. Here's why.

Annie: Jim!

Jim: When you're bored Google the word "limerence." It's this woowoo love addiction. There he is. Breaking news. There is no such thing as love at first sight.

Annie: Sure.

Jim: There's a hot wiring and hijacking connection. You need about that time. In the newness of a relationship neurochemically it takes about 90 days for the ready woo woo factor to die down clear up to a year to let people have their versary as we call them and anniversary, a monthly, a weekly verserating, this holidays, this... give everybody a chance to say, "Okay," and then see what happens. People say, "Well, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to..." If somebody meets someone and tries to get married within 90 days, I think that's...the woowoo is guaranteed to be there that long.

Annie: Jim, a casting person for *Married at First Sight* reached out to me last week.

Jim: Really?

Annie: And I was like, "In no world. In no world. In no world." I can't imagine God would love that idea for me, maybe for others. But I was like, "No, I don't know about a year though." So let me just do some caveats. Let me ask you some caveats.

Jim: Sure.

Annie: The last couple of guys I've dated have been strangers before we dated. Like we meet and start dating. So, okay, I can hear you, you want a year for that. Maybe. We will argue about that if it happens again. If it's a friend, if it's somebody you know, and then it turns from... can it turn from friendship to love? Can that still happen?

Jim: I think it's awesome when it does. Contract has to change because you were... I don't know if it's quick. Our contract was we were friends, platonic buddies, whatever. That's fine. And for it to move into that, one of the great things of that is a lot of people who are married they've really never had a friendship. They just got married.

Annie: Wow.

Jim: There's research that shows the average person who most people who marry should never marry the person they married. That's a whole nother show.

Annie: Oh.

Jim: No, it's okay because they're not-

Annie: It's okay.

Jim: They're spending a million dollars on a wedding and they've not even done counseling to know who's standing there. And it's often a tick on a dog mentality. You're from Georgia, I'm in North Carolina. Tick gets on a dog and does what? Sucks the life out. The problem in these relationship is there's two ticks and no dog.

Annie: Wow.

Jim: So that piece is if you've got a friendship... and in the end, you're going to do whatever you want. Don't listen to me. But if there's a friendship that goes in then but it's changing now, now we're moving to romance or that type of relationship, I'd still say give it at least... you want even there move it I would say at least 90 days and see what gives. Because that's a big change. It could be really good or it can be like, "I don't know, we did well as friends, but you know."

Annie: Yeah, I've heard a soundtrack from other people that is stuck with me that once a guy puts you in friend zone, you can't get out.

Jim: I'm the eternal optimist and realist and I like a good challenge. People say, "You can't do this," and like, "Bruh, bruh. Let's go after it." I'm serious.

Annie: Oh, I'll get him out of friend zone.

Jim: Well, yeah. But I mean, I'm like, screw the statistics. I'm like, "Let's see what happens." Trust but verify as you go along. But I think it is hard for men. It's experiential with me that a lot of men say we bonded on the buddy level. You can be buddies with a girl, a woman and then that level to take that to a new level, no. Easy here.

I want to be mindful, especially for the guy with inadequacy and insecurity. Is the woman in that way, wait, leading him and trying to take it to the intimate level, the romantic level first and then verify, is he really ready for that to go? Or is he like, "Crap, I better go..." I'd want to see, is he really ready to go there?"

Annie: Can men and women just be friends?

Jim: Well, there again. For me, the standard in the field, especially along a lot of sexual infidelity that I deal with with people is they'll say, "No." I don't believe that because I'm sitting across the table with someone who's a friend. And you know what I got? Just because you've been with her, I've got my wife's complete blessing. And I go back out to Onsite with a lot of female therapists. We are friends. But I think it needs to be incredibly boundaries and know your own vulnerability. That's the idea.

If friendship is there and begins to, especially in a physical way, cross a line, like, what are we doing here? But I think they can be friends. I think, usually the research in my experiences—do with this one what you want, folks—one person usually will cross the line first this way. I want a little bit more than just friendship. And then it changes.

I think it's hard for them to be long-term friends. Not impossible, but I think it can be difficult, especially if somebody else enters... they're married and then they're with a married friend. A lot of nuances. But I think it can be done with good boundaries.

Annie: But I'll tell you, I'm not sure I've had a friend, a single man friend in my life that's been age-appropriate that I didn't raise an eyebrow about.

Jim: What do you mean?

Annie: Like that I thought, "Hmm, could we?" I don't know that I've had one friend. I mean, I've had friends that we didn't ever date. Of course, I'm not dating everyone I've ever met. But I've sure tried. I've sure tried. Not for lack of desire, but for skill. I just don't know that I've had a male single friend that's age-appropriate through my years that I haven't at some point wondered if we should be more.

Jim: Let's just ask this question. What's wrong with that? The idea of hmm, the holy hmm hmm, I wonder about that. But did you, on all of those men, wonder about move to try to lead into a deeper relationship?

Annie: Not all of them. No. Some of them.

Jim: So the idea of "wow, this is interesting."

Annie: And I think something important to say, too, is there have been times where a married man has advanced toward me in ways that I was uncomfortable with.

Jim: Right.

Annie: Or a time when that hmm raised my eyebrow and he's married. That's not the problem. The problem is when you act on any of that.

Jim: And you all have, so I've been told, as women, a sixth sense. And I really believe it. Most of the women, I would bet nearly all that I've ever worked with, they know. Their gut or the Holy Spirit. But even non-Christians I've worked with, I'll say, "Come on, let's talk here. Let's talk. Did you?" "Yeah, I knew that he was trying to make a play or move something without being clear."

What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. We got to clear the Vegas up. And then I had a boundary and he's kind of flirting with it. What are we doing here? And I want to clear that they said, "Yeah, I saw that he definitely, quote, was making a move." Now, they can have a woman with a deep trauma story, man with a deep trauma story. And you got to watch for trauma bonding, which is a whole nother podcast of like, why am I hijacking or hotwiring a connection here?

But usually women they know. And just say hey, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, what's going on here? What is that? What's that sound? What's going on?"

Annie: What's that sound? That's right. What's that sound? That's a new sound.

Jim: That's your gut. Your stress is when your gut says no and your mouth says yes. It's like you know, like, "No, I'm not. I shouldn't not."

Annie: Stress is when your gut says no, but your mouth says yes.

Jim: Yeah, it happens a lot.

Annie: Wow. Okay, it's Valentine's Day. There are so many feelings wrapped around today.

Jim: Sure.

Annie: What do we do with them? What do we do with the feelings of... this day is not going to meet anybody's expectations, right?

Jim: I think so. It wasn't created by, well, whoever it was created by. And then a lot of times like in history it can be the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. You know, people saying, you know, going in and... And there are a lot of people who are really not originally connected in this to stay in a marriage or dating. I think far more in marriage. And they're bored.

They're just in a rut, and a rut as a grave with both ends knocked out of it. And then let's just fake it, and we'll go to Applebee's on a date night, whatever. And it's like, "Let's do that," and flowers and all that. And then surely we're going to have sex. And it's like that's not a real representation of the quality and timbre and tone of the relationship.

I've never been a woman; I wonder if it's worse for women. But for guys it can be like, "Okay, I'll just go and kick and hijack and hotwire connections." But this isn't organic. So I think it stirs up a lot of stuff for people and others it might not. They're saying, "No, we celebrate this."

Annie: Yeah. Okay, let's finish here. Let's talk about sex for a minute. Sure. In Christendom it is so challenging to know what's purity culture and what sexual integrity. So for our unmarried friends... Well, I mean, honestly, it's something I'm walking with some couples toward their weddings that I'm doing for them, and we talk a lot about sexual integrity of how everyone sitting at the table has to be, and has to pursue sexual integrity of being fully yourself.

So for our married friends, there's a sexual integrity there. But will you talk for a minute to our single friends about how we identify what we believe? I don't know if

even that's the right word, Jim? Like, how do we know what sexual integrity is in 2022 as a Christian person?

Jim: Well, there's one second left on the clock, and you have given me the ball to throw a Hail Mary and win the Super Bowl. Appreciate it.

Annie: We have more than one second but it will be our last big topic.

Jim: I have 13 seconds. Okay. Here's what-

Annie: Tom Brady this. Let's go.

Jim: That's right. So here's what I believe about it. And practice in my beliefs around that have evolved. And that is, just again, mental health, spiritual health that we want is a commitment to reality at all costs. It is my anecdotal experience that most Christian couples are out there, if they're dating longer term and they're in a relationship, are doing certain things sexually to be with each other. It may not be intercourse they're doing. So I'm a realist around that.

What I do is I say—I'm telling the truth—I say, Let's set the Bible aside here for a moment and be this. If I go to the Bible, Bible says if a man and woman are having sex, the two become one. Paul later said—What do you do with that—"If a man have sex with a prostitute the two become one." Science has come along and said there is a bonding that goes on sexually. I believe often one person will bond more with the other.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jim: Oh, yeah. An oxytocin is there to bond together. So I want to be aware of all-

Annie: I have never thought about that, Jim. One bonds more than the other.

Jim: It's very much. I've counseled women who do the same things. "I just want the sex and we do this and we move on," I go, "You have to remember the bonding." All the neurochemicals plummeted at orgasms since we're talking sex. One thing left is oxytocin. Mom, baby to the breast, skin to skin. So if couples are doing that, and they just go their separate way.

Or I believe that, and others do, that sex will often keep bonding the relationship where it is. If we're disconnected, here we go, you have not yet explored the

geography of my soul and my story. Why am I letting you explore the geography of my body?

Annie: Wow.

Jim: So to be there and say, "Is it a sin? all that, I'm going to send everybody back to your prayer closet with God. I know Hebrews 13:4, the marriage bed is undefiled. I'm a realist. There's also a lot of polygamy in the Old Testament. That's another show. What do we do about that?"

Annie: Right.

Jim: So I think you have to decide where you are with that, but be very, very alert. And with men especially, and never been a woman, but there is a bonding that can get there, hijacking hot wiring connection. And a lot of us, a lot of men we have shut down once you give us the goodies. At any level of sexuality, just to be aware, just pay attention.

You know, we begin to do some sexual things together—right, wrong, or indifferent, you all decide—and then he began to kind of... emotionally that's all he wanted. Let's get together and do what... Even Christian guys. It's like, you know, the emotional thing I would want talking about the Lord or Jesus calling or reading a book, that began to go.

And then I notice one time he's like, "Hey, let's go put some moves on each other," and I said, "No, not tonight," and he was ticked. Even a fancy word called eroticized rage or erotic range. It's like to go, "Give me my..." That's a sign. You're going to be bonding more and more. I would just say be very, very aware.

Annie: I think that's very good advice. The one person bonding more than the other is interesting because I'm thinking about times when my friends have said or I have said or assumed that the level of bonding I was feeling emotionally, sexually anyway was equal. Which may be downplaying is bonding or accelerating his bonding.

Jim: Very well put.

Annie: And I'm going, "Oh, I wonder if there are times where I have assumed..." Not I wonder if. Better say this. How many times-

Jim: Yeah, I get it.

Annie: ...have I assumed that his bonding over any of the relationship was equal to my bonding?

Jim: Here's a little trick. Dead serious. It's in 1 Corinthians 7. "Stop depriving each other sexually in marriage except for a mutual time of prayer and fasting." I don't know, it's in the Word of God. So even in relationship, if you were to say, "Hey, wait a minute," we know statistically, I know experientially, it is hard the more you move together in a dating relationship being sexual to pull that back. It's very, very, very difficult. No wonder in the Bible, they were arranged marriages and they were getting married young.

Annie: At 13, yeah.

Jim: Very seriously.

Annie: So the idea of saying, Are we willing to say at a point, either one of us in a relationship we're dating to say, what it'd be like to take... we're dating, there's been some sexuality going on. To dial that back and say, let's take like dating keto or something. Let's take a month or let's just take two weeks—people can hold their breath that long—and during that time, let's go over here and really be intentional about our emotional, relational, spiritual, connecting to each other's stories, to go deeper there and see if the relationship begins to go south, something's happened, someone begins to ghost or back up.

And so we're doing this intentional to say, Let's make sure that we're still working on the emotional, and spiritual, and relational part of our relationship. It's a concept of just fasting.

Annie: It's fasting concept, isn't it?

Jim: I don't think it's just guys. I think people can say, "Oh, my word." And that's why remember there's also... This is not far afield. It's in the marital research. There is a gatekeeping that can go on. Sometimes the guy says, "Well, your boundaries, we're just doing this sexually but you're not doing the real thing." I call it EBI, everything but intercourse.

So couples are doing that. And then that level, the contract is set up that though sometimes the woman would say, "If I would let him go further, he'd go way further." She is set up now as the gatekeeper. And then sometime-

Annie: Just so unfair when we do that to each other.

Jim: Because then they get married and it's like you can just go nuts and do whatever you want. And suddenly she's gatekeeping there in the guy. How many times in my office I've heard... I know you've had to hear this. I always finish the line. "The best sex we ever had was before we were married." And I go, "Yeah, there's all this neuro chemistry going on that always won't be there during a marriage." So be able to say, "Let's just pause this for a little bit," and say, "how are we doing relational, emotionally?"

Annie: Wow.

Jim: Yeah. And by the way, one more little freebie you didn't ask for. If you're dating, you've been dating three, four, or five months, please go get a professional therapist and just sit down and say, "Help us, we want to unpack our stories together. What's on already? Why not including our sexual history?"

I've had a lot of women, but I'm not telling you, there are so many ghosts in a marriage already. Don't build your marriage over a poltergeist over a cemetery. And had I known that, watch, buyer's remorse later in a marriage, had I known you'd also had three other women or two men, or whatever else, I wouldn't have done. I really try to ferret out buyer's remorse and say, "Let's know. If we're four or five months in, yeah." Don't call it premarital. Relationship counseling. Let's meet two or three times and tell our stories. And a lot of couples never thought of that.

Annie: It's that balance you're inviting us to of it's not opening the kimono on day one and saying, "Here's my sexual history that we should probably cover." But it is, "Man, I think this is going to go somewhere and before it does, I need you to know how I feel about kids. And I want you to know how I feel about my teaching career that I used to have, and I want you to know about my sexual history, and I want you to know about my family." It's not for them to say yes or no, or leave or stay.

Jim: No. Right.

Annie: It's for them to have all the information to go to the next level.

Jim: And to be able to say, if it's intimacy, again, into me see to say, "I want to show you who I really am. I don't want any Wizard of Oz, of a man or woman behind the curtain." Frantically pulling the things. As therapists we're good todos. We just gently pull the curtain back and say, "You can be free."

And to know who you really are. Because you're going to know in years of marriage to come or if you're in a partnership and you don't marry and you stay together for years to come, it's just natural organic we begin to let more and more of the external go down and I'll show you who I really am. Just try to limit the surprises.

Annie: Yes. Jim, I'm going to ask you what everyone's already asking in their heads. Would you ever make a podcast about relationships? Have you thought about doing this?

Jim: I just did.

Annie: I'm talking about like a whole series. You just did a whole series?

Jim: No, with you. We just did one.

Annie: Yeah, we did. I'm saying like, can we talk about you having a show about this.

Jim: On your network?

Annie: Yeah, that's what I'm saying.

Jim: Yeah. The main work I do is just relationships, having done my own work and Jessica and I as a couple. But we just didn't learn how to do relationships. I don't care if you have screwed up royally a thousand times. It's a new day to say, I got to start learning what it means to be an adult, what a healthy relationship... And you got to unlearn some stuff. So, yeah. I would love to do that.

Annie: Okay, let's just keep talking about it because I think this has been so helpful. I am more hopeful every time I talk to you, but I'm walking out of here hopeful today.

Jim: You know that I'm more hopeful every time I talk to you.

Annie: Ah, thanks.

Jim: Dead serious. Just you exude life. My big thing for you is, which may scare some people away, and there are some other people I'd say this about, but you're as authentic and real like the Velveteen Rabbit becoming really... you lose an eyeball and had to go just hide worn off. But you're as authentic as any person that I've ever met.

That's why in our relationship I really trust you, that I know too on my side that I can say, "Hey, let me tell you some things where I am. I have some fears and I'm worried about this. I'm one of the most insecure guys I know but I can embrace my inadequacy instead of running from it. Yeah, I've kind of wondered here." There's an authenticity to you. It's what we want in relationships. It's just gently show up and say, "This is who I really am."

Annie: Wow, thank you. We have a last question that we ask everybody that I can't wait to hear your answer to.

Jim: Does it start with how much wood would a woodchuck chuck?

Annie: No, not this time.

Jim: Okay.

Annie: Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you. Well, as is duly noted, including by your producer, we are in a Mickey Mouse band on my Apple Watch. Going to Disney World.

Annie: Overland. Are you a Disney world...?

Jim: Well, yeah, because we were in Charlotte. I can bob down in eight hours. To go there. And it makes up for a lot. We didn't have one vacation as a child growing up. So to go there and usually almost always with our family. More fun than that, though, if anybody follows me on social media we'll see is playing with my three grandsons.

Annie: Oh, you love them so much.

Jim: We had them all last weekend. And just to play and razzle, as I call it, and spending time with them. That's my therapy. I mean, I can literally unload all of the burdens of the world and I might absorb from other people I'm sitting with. And to play with them, yeah, best thing ever.

Annie: Have you taken them to Disney yet?

Jim: Oh, several times. We're annual passholders. That's not a commercial.

Annie: Are you in Club 33 though?

Jim: Oh, no. I know people who are in that, but that's a much higher level than I am at.

Annie: Me too. Join the network. Let's see if we can get you there.

Jim: All you need is a friend. A friend will get you in.

Annie: I've never even seen one. Have you been inside one yet?

Jim: I've been outside one. I have someone who said, "I will take you in if you will tell me and I'll meet you there and take you in."

Annie: That's my dream. I want to go into one in Disneyland that says the OG Club 33.

Jim: Yeah, of course.

Annie: But I would love to see the one at Disney World right there. And as you're walking into Frontierland. Is that where it is?

Jim: Yeah, yes, it is there.

Annie: Oh, I just want to.

Jim: There's a rumor that if you go in as a guest you never come back.

Annie: A worthy loss of life. I would love to see it. Jim, thank you.

Jim: I also have fun, I gotta say, hanging out with you.

Annie: Ah, thanks. Mutual.

Jim: And doing this and just talking and we're not on microphones. Just being real. I come away so much better. I do. I want you to know that and I hope you receive that.

Annie: Oh, that's amazing.

Jim: You're just fun.

Annie: Oh, thank you. What a gift this is to us today! Thanks for helping us be healthier. I hope it's not the last time.

Jim: Me too.

[01:13:07] <music>

Outro: Oh, friends, isn't he just the best? I'm not kidding, I leave every conversation... I hope you're leaving today's conversation so encouraged and so hopeful. And even though I am staring very wide-eyed at some patterns in my own life, I am not discouraged by them. I'm encouraged to sort them out and to figure out what it's about. And that's the magic of Jim Cress.

Hey, be sure to follow Jim on social media so you can tell him thanks for being on the show. Yell at him about writing a book and getting a podcast on the That Sounds Fun Network. Okay, just say it to him. Yell at him nicely. You know what I mean.

Also, you can hear a lot more of Jim over on Lysa TerKeurst podcast. She has a series called Therapy and Theology. That is her and Jim sitting down together. I think you'll really enjoy those.

And there's still time to get your copies of *100 Days to Brave* and *100 Days to Brave for Kids*, so that together we can go on this 100 day journey towards being braver. We're doing it all together, thousands of us. We don't want you to miss out.

We kick off on Thursday, this Thursday, the 17th. Sign up the link in the show notes and we'll send you some encouragement through the process. We have found that we finish better when we finish together. And I cannot wait to see how we all grow together over the next 100-ish days. So go ahead and order your copies of the book.

The good news is for the first five days I'll be posting those devotionals on my Instagram. So while you're waiting on your book to arrive, if it doesn't get here by the 17th, don't worry, I got you. I will post them. So you've got a couple of days to get your book in the mail.

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. Happy Valentine's Day. I cannot wait to hear your thoughts after meeting Jim today. So go out or stay home and do something That Sounds Fun to you. And I will do the same.

Today what sounds fun to me, we are recording this a couple of days before Valentine's Day as you can imagine. We can't record on the day we release. So I'm going tonight to see my friend Mary Kate Morrissey and *Mean Girls*. If that *Mean Girls* tour is coming your way, you need to go see our girl Mary Kate. So that's what sounds fun to me today is seeing one of the most talented people I know on stage. I cannot wait.

Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday with the amazing artist and author Morgan Harper Nichols. Happy Valentine's Day, friends. You are very, very loved and we will see you on Thursday.