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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to a very special episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm popping into your Chai Day Friday with a surprise episode. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so excited to be here with you today to announce the newest show to join the That Sounds Fun Network. Y'all, we love it. We love it. We love to see it.

Today on the show I am so excited to get to announce the newest podcast to join the That Sounds Fun Network. It is the most fun getting to add new rides to this amusement park of podcast. That's how we like to think of the network. If you'd like one of the rides, it's likely you enjoy the others too.

We partner with all the shows on things like advertising and strategy and helping the host and their teams to build community with each other so no one feels like they are doing this podcasting thing on their own.

And here we are celebrating the That Sounds Fun Network's second birthday, and we're getting to add another incredible show to the mix. The show is called The Best of You and it's hosted by Dr. Alison Cook. She's a psychologist, a speaker.

She's a co-author of *Boundaries for Your Soul*. She is also the author of the upcoming book *The Best of You*.

She is fun and funny and wise and she unpacks mental health topics from a faith-based perspective and talks candidly with friends and experts about how they found their way through their own darkest times. Y'all know as we love talking about therapy and mental health so it made tons of sense that Dr. Cook joined our network.

You're going to hear on her show a wide variety of topics, things like boundaries, parenting, friendships, church hurt, codependency, narcissism, depression, body image, shame. Oh my gracious, she's covering it all. These are the topics that show up in her counseling office and she is bringing them to us. Go ahead wherever you're listening right now and go search for *The Best of You* by Dr. Alison Cook. The first episode is waiting there for you and the trailer. Her show comes out every Thursday.

Here's how today is going to work here. Dr. Alison and I are going to talk for just a little while about her show, about how it came about, and then we're going to give you a little sneak peek into the first episode. So here's my conversation with the host of *The Best of You*, Dr. Alison Cook.

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Annie: Dr. Alison, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Dr. Alison: Annie F. Downs, I am so glad to be here.

Annie: Oh my gosh, we are so thrilled to welcome *The Best of You* on to the That Sounds Fun Network. Okay, tell me why a podcast? First of all, I mean, you have plenty to do. You're a psychologist, you're an author, you're a speaker. You are not low on ways to spend your time. Why a podcast?

Dr. Alison: Good question. I've been asking myself that a little bit over the last few months. I'm like, This is a lot of work-

Annie: It's a lot of work.

Dr. Alison: ...and a lot of details. A lot of details. I had no idea about the details. I keep emailing Fallon. So most of my work is being in practice listening to people as a therapist, as a psychologist and writing. And those two things are primarily solitary number one, and primarily...

I mean, although writing is my voice, it's still very introverted, it's still very kind of to myself. And there's just this part of me. I'm a teacher at heart. I taught middle schoolers and high schoolers. But I love just kind of breaking down concepts. It's just a love that I have. So I got the idea.

And then honestly you. I followed you, I thought to myself, "I don't want to do one more thing alone-

Annie: Yes, I know.

Dr. Alison: I don't want to do one more thing in a silo by myself." So that was kind of a big stumbling block for me doing something like this. And then I started watching you and I started watching all these people I love and admire and respect joining you on this network to be honest. And I was like, "Oh, is there a shot that I can actually do this in community with other people? Because then it would be a no-brainer."

So that's kind of how I got started was just realizing, oh, you're creating this way for those of us who are like, I kind of want to do this. But for me, it was I don't want to do one more thing by myself, sitting in a room by myself.

Annie: Because even as a therapist, when there's someone in the room with you, you're still by yourself because it's not a peer.

Dr. Alison: And you still have to contain that. I don't get to leave that room and talk with anybody about what happened in that room. It's very solitary.

Annie: Yeah. Counseling podcast, therapy podcasts are really popular because people actually want to hear what happens in a counseling appointment. I mean, have you noticed that too, that there is a lot of need? I mean, one of the reasons you were an easy yes to join the network is there's a lot of need of mental health, but really therapy thought forward podcasts.

Dr. Alison: Yeah. I saw a huge need. Especially with a pandemic, I started getting on socials a lot more and just posting. I just couldn't believe how quickly that grew with people just hungry. Because all these buzzy words are out there. All these words are kind of coming into our vernacular. We hear these things like trauma and codependency, all these things, but we're not exactly sure what they mean.

So one of the things I started trying to do is just demystify some of this, demystify, pull back the veil, you know? Because it's all just stuff we deal with in everyday life.

Annie: So tell me the difference... I just don't know. What's the difference between a counselor and a therapist and a psychologist and a psychiatrist? How do y'all sit in a room together? What do y'all get along about and what do you not get along about?

Dr. Alison: There's really no difference virtually between... No, the biggest difference is between an MD where you've got people like our friend, Kurt Thompson, who actually... he went through medical school and can prescribe medication.

Annie: Got it.

Dr. Alison: A psychologist has a PhD. A different sort of training. But at the end of the day, it's all about your degree, whether you're a therapist, whether you're a psychologist. You're doing therapy and there's really virtually no difference if you didn't go through the medical school path.

Annie: Yes, yes. Okay. I have a dear friend in Nashville who's getting ready to jump into school to be a counselor. As an Annie, I cannot think of a thing I'd be worse at, Dr. Alison, than being a counselor. Why do you love it? Why do you love being involved in other people's mental health journey?

Dr. Alison: It's so interesting you say that because part of what has drawn me to you and to this podcast is your love of life. Because that is so much a part of what it means to be healthy. And I need you. I need Annie's in my life. And that's part of why I want to be part of the That Sounds Fun. You don't understand what a service you provide. And it's different, you're right, than the service I provide.

You know, I looked through and I'm like, "Let's talk about our wounds. Let's talk about our pain. Let's talk about our emotions." I love this stuff. I am like a moth to a flame with anything psychology-related. Whether it's, you know, the Body Keeps the Score or whether it's the Bachelor, I am dissecting all of the psychology nuances to my poor husband's detri... He's like, "Can we just watch the movie?" I don't know. I've always been that way. Always observing. I have memories of being in fourth grade, watching the group dynamics, and knowing exactly what was going on with-

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Alison: ...every single human. So it's just something that's inside of me. And it's both a blessing and a little bit of my kryptonite, right?

Annie: Yeah

Dr. Alison: There's high empathy, high intuition, high awareness of others. And that also became my detriment because I had no clue how to know myself.

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Alison: I could know other people really, really well and I could know God, even. No clue how to turn that back into my own soul.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Dr. Alison: So when you talk about this why, a lot of this is my own journey of, oh my gosh, I have to figure out how to turn that around and learn about myself, I was almost finished with my doctoral program and essentially had to take a three-year pause. I don't like to call it a breakdown because I was still functioning.

Because I was so busy producing, pleasing, performing out there for others and in the name of also being a good Christian. So there's that overlay. I was an empty shell inside my own soul. and I had to learn how to become a self, I had to learn to become an Alison. So a lot of this comes out of my own journey in addition to and learning that actually when I do that work I am a better person for other people and I'm actually honoring God. You know, that's not honoring to God to bypass myself.

So there's a lot of passion behind what I do because of my own story. I was trained in many ways, both as a therapist and as a Christian to only focus externally. By that I mean focus on others.

Annie: Yeah, of course.

Dr. Alison: I always talk about the three. You know, Love the Lord your God, love others as yourself. That as "yourself" for me was just non-existent for so many years, well into my 30s. So this was life for me. I had to learn this. So it's so fun for me to now get to turn it around and say both through my practice, but really, also that teacher part of me. There's a listening aspect to me, but there's also this... I get so excited at the end of the session, I'm like, "Oh, I just learned something and that I want to share it."

Annie: That's what I'm so stoked about your show because it is a learning show. I mean, it is as close to getting into a therapy session with you as someone's going to get for free and from distance and anytime they want. You said a really interesting thing, though, that I'd love for you to stop on for a second. Because you said, "I want to call it a pause, not a breakdown because I was still able to do all the things."

I mean, to me, when I'm looking at Christian culture particularly when men have a breakdown, they blow up their lives. And when women have a breakdown they just keep going or disappear. Like we're not seeing big loud explosions of women's lives happening on Twitter, right? We're seeing Christian men do that. But women, when their mental health breaks down, they keep going.

Dr. Alison: It's really amazing. What I would describe mine as is I downshifted all the way down. I took a break from graduate school. I'd never taken an incomplete in a class. It was my very last class. I took an incomplete, I moved... You know, I did a lot. It was a dramatic pause. But I mean, I was still working. I took a break from being a therapist in that I switched to sort of a consultant, which is a little bit low key.

For me, what I did was, at that time... I mean, this is 20 years ago, before we really understood... And I don't want to get too much into this, but I myself couldn't go to a therapist because I knew how to please, produce, and perform for a therapist.

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Alison: I didn't even know how to let a therapist in.

Annie: Oh, man, mine gets onto me all the time when she's like, "Are you done entertaining me? Because I'd love for you to..." And I'm always like, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Dr. Alison: And that's a good therapist.

Annie: Oh, she's awesome.

Dr. Alison: And I kind of knew. I was like, "I'm just going to give them what they want." Actually, what I did is I signed up for... Annie, this is a funny part of my story. I signed up for an acting class.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Dr. Alison: And that was my therapy for three years because... and I was terrible at it. I was awful. But it was the most profoundly changing thing in my life because what I had to learn... the guy was brilliant. He was just brilliant. You know, you've got friends, right? This is Broadway actor, and he assigned me roles. He'd be like, "I need you to play this person who's angry." Which means you have to find anger inside of you.

That is what I needed. I needed someone to help me connect not to my rational brain, not to my... I could solve the problems all day long. That was an

over-functioning part of me. I needed that opportunity to find the creative parts of me, the feeling parts of me. That's what I mean by "I was functioning," but I was definitely going off the path-

Annie: Yes, I do too.

Dr. Alison: ...that was laid out for me.

Annie: Absolutely. And I grieve both of them. I grieve how men and women both break down emotionally and spiritually. One is not prettier than the other. I mean, they are both detrimental to families and churches and lives if we don't pay attention to our mental health.

Dr. Alison: And the other thing about women is I was single for a long time. My husband and I met when I was 37. I think instead of blowing up relationships, we more... I mean, this is generalizing, but I just stayed out of them.

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Alison: So then I hurt myself, right? Just this extreme loneliness that I didn't know how to name or wasn't even in... I look back and I would say my biggest sort of is this chronic sense of loneliness that I was not... It wasn't that I didn't have friends. It wasn't that people didn't... I wasn't letting people in to see me. It brings tears to my eyes. I didn't know how to... it's still hard for me. I did know how to let others see parts of me that were hurting.

And that's a really lonely, lonely way to live. I see that with a lot of women, they're pouring out and they're just dying on the inside. And they don't stop pouring out. But they're the ones who are hurting and lonely and not knowing how to let God's light shine. That's the thing I'll always say is I sort of knew how to shine the light on others. I didn't know how to let that God's light and the light of others shine into my dark places, into my vulnerabilities.

Annie: Yes. I'm going to tell you one of my thoughts and then I'd love for you to tell me what you hope happens with The Best of You podcast. Because what I hope happens with The Best of You podcasts, I have a lot of hopes, but one of them is, I would love for it to be a bridge. We talk about being a bridge here a lot.

I would love for it to bridge people and be this safe place that bridges people to therapy. That they go like, "Oh, now that I heard Dr. Alison talk about that, I can have some language going into a first appointment with a counselor or I have some language going into my next appointment with a counselor." So what are some hopes you have for Best of You?

Dr. Alison: Exactly that. I do feel like every single episode I am saying, "If you notice this, then this is what you will be..." And if one of your things is "I don't trust anybody," that's what you tell your therapist.

Annie: Yes, yes.

Dr. Alison: Including you.

Annie: Right, including you. That's right. That's exactly right.

Dr. Alison: Or I don't let people in. Which is if I had known that back in the day, I could have said, "Listen, I'm not going to let you in and I need you to call me on that." You know, that way of advocating for yourself.

Annie: Yes.

Dr. Alison: I would love to be a bridge between faith... In my mind, they go hand in hand, faith and psychology. My degree is actually in both. I have a degree both in psychology and theology. I wanted to study the psyche, which used to mean soul. Psyche used to be translated as soul. It's now kind of come to mean mind. I think that's too narrow. But you need both. They go hand in hand. My understanding of my soul goes hand in hand with my understanding of God. I think that's changing. I think people like you are changing that. When I hear people talk about "my therapist," I'm like, "Oh." And it's not that therapists have all the solutions. And that's the other side of it. We need both. We need both.

Church isn't necessarily supposed to be where we get therapy. Therapy isn't where we go to find community. We need both of them. We might need therapy to learn how to be in community. We might need therapy to learn how to heal from a community. So they really work together. I want more and more and more and more. I think it's coming. But just to bridge that gap.

Annie: That's why you are such a great fit for us is you combine psychology and faith which matters a ton to us. And in That Sounds Fun Network and a thing that's around me, people are not surprised we're talking about counseling. It is a normal thing. A lot of my friends... I mean, you can throw a rock in our office and hit somebody who goes to counseling. And very often someone says, "Hey, I'm going to be an hour late this morning because my counseling appointment is at 9:00." And we all go, "Great, we'll see you when you get here." Like it serves everybody when we work on our own mental health.

Now, let's talk to the people who are still with us, but aren't maybe counseling fans, because even the other side of my brain can say to you people survived on Earth a whole lot and a long time and survived through a ton without having counseling appointments. I mean, no one in the Wild West had a counselor, Dr. Alison. So tell me why mental health... Are we just spoiled? Is this a privileged spot to be in that we get to even think about our mental health? Or is this something that God has needed us to think about forever and we just have new resources for it?

Dr. Alison: I think there's a little bit of both ends there. I do think that we live in an age where there's an embarrassment of riches as far as resources on both sides. From how we can examine the Scriptures, how we can study theology-

Annie: Oh, my gosh, having Google for Bible study, I'm like, how did they do it 100 years ago?

Dr. Alison: My husband and I were just talking about that. Literally, we have a question and you pop it in, and you have five really good answers.

Annie: That's right.

Dr. Alison: It is the same with psychology. I think as the world has gotten more complex, as we live longer, you know, we are married... So you talk about people lived whatever the average age was that they lived in the early centuries. So they're getting married for, you know, I don't know, maybe 10, 15 years. Now if you get married you gotta live together 50 years.

Annie: That's true.

Dr. Alison: That takes some different skills.

Annie: I had not thought about life expectancy requires more mental health. I've not thought about that. Dr. Alison, that's hilarious. You're right. Because if we're going to be 100... I'm shooting for 120, I want to get 100% on the support card, I'm shooting for 120, I'm a third of the way through my life. That's a lot of mental health to go.

Dr. Alison: You've got a lot more life to live.

Annie: Yes.

Dr. Alison: It's complicated. And then we bring in technology, and we bring in globalization and we bring in... I realized I was part of that era where I went off to college and none of my friends lived in my same town. And this was before people talked about

this. It was before social media really. I kind of barely was on the front end of that. And I was like, "How do you make new friends? I lived in four major cities growing up after I left college and I did make new friends in each one of them.

If you don't have someone... and that's different. That is new. Back in the day, you know, maybe you grew up in a village and there's a sense of community. And it's not to say that it was easy and it's not to say that there were problems. But there were sort of inherent structures I think. Some of these structures are good. Some of them are hard. We lived far apart from the people we love. And we got to have people to stand in the gap. If you move, we call it, in psychology, adjustment disorders. Well, I don't think it's a disorder. It's just-

Annie: Adjusting.

Dr. Alison: ...when you adjust. And a therapist is someone who's trained and safe to stand with you in that gap. Now, hopefully, the goal being to help you then get into healthy community.

Annie: So when we start this week with The Best of You, you're doing a six week series on psychology buzzwords. Why was that how you wanted to kick the whole thing off?

Dr. Alison: Well, in part because I see them everywhere. Literally, you'll see a headline, gaslighting in this situation, or narcissism, and people are dissecting all these big public things that happen. You see them online. I see them misused. I see them weaponized.

So I thought, well, let's just hit the ground running. Let's talk about it. So I want to talk about these things with nuance. I think knowledge is power. I think when you understand something you're less likely to misinterpret it or misuse it or be hurt by it.

And I wanted to start with narcissism in part because the irony of narcissism that a lot of times people don't understand is it's actually the absence of a strong sense of self. People think narcissists are full of themselves. In a way they are because they don't have connection to their real self, their God-made self. And so they have to puff up all these external protectors to be bigger.

So I wanted to kind of start there to paint a picture. The first two episodes are painting a picture of "here's what it looks like when you're out of alignment with yourself, with your true self."

Annie: And listen, if anybody misbehaves, we call them a narcissist immediately. And that might not always be true, right?

Dr. Alison: Absolutely. I mean, it's such a complicated when you really want to dig into it. But it is sort of this template that we understand of bad, toxic, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Dr. Alison: So it's like, well, let's talk about it then because that's what we're shooting not to be. So let's understand what it is. And then let's understand what the real antidote to it is, which is, spoiler alert, cultivating a strong sense of self.

Annie: Okay, we're going to take a break real quick and when we come back we're going to let everybody hear a portion of that first episode titled "What is narcissism really?" because I'm trying to learn right along with us. So we will listen to that as soon as we get back from this little break.

[00:23:36] <music>

Sponsor: So I'm just going to interrupt this conversation real quick to share about one of our incredible partners, [Pair Eyewear](#). So one of the funniest things, when we were on tour earlier this year, is that I would sometimes walk around the corner in the venues and run right into another version of myself. You know, this is true because we travel with these life size cutouts of me, one that's very tall and very tan, we call it Tani Annie, one who is slightly smaller than my true size, we call her Tiny Annie, and the one who's straight out of the pages of the kid's book, *What Sounds Fun to You?* we call her little Annie. The real real is that I am always Annie but it's kind of fun to have multiple ways to express yourself right?

You can celebrate all you are and explore fun different looks too with customizable prescription glasses from Pair Eyewear. I have the twain frames like Mark Twain from Pair Eyewear and I just love them for the later part of the day when I can use some help blocking that blue light out. But the cool thing about the pair is that you can super easily change the look of your glasses by adding on one of their magnetic top frames.

My base frame is a clear blush tone but I have this top frame that is dark and sparkling so I can change them out depending on my mood or my outfit. It's so fun how Pair Eyewear's base frames and magnetic top frames combos make it easy to switch up your style. The base frame starts at just \$60 including prescription lenses. And they come in so many different shapes. From Square to cat eye. And then there are hundreds of top frames, literally hundreds of top frame designs to match whatever base frame you choose. You can change your glasses just like you change your clothes.

Pair Eyewear wants us to get to express our individuality. And they lead by example because they design all their looks in house. And for every pair purchased, Pair provides glasses and vision care for children around the world. I love that. So get glasses as unique as you are. One pair, infinite style starting at just \$60. So go to Paireyewear.com/thatsoundsfun for 15% off your first purchase. That's 15% off at Paireyewear.com/thatsoundsfun.

Sponsor: And you know we say around here: It takes a village and a ring light to be the person you want to be, I stand by that. If you're like me and tend to default to the same standby outfits over and over, you need to add [Stitch Fix](#) to your village. Whether you need a date night dress to go with your new Pair Eyewear or some cozy loungewear, Stitch Fix can help refresh your look. It's so simple.

You can schedule a fix and a stylist will send you five pieces that fit your style, size, and price range with no subscription required. You keep what you and you return the rest. Or if you like to shop but don't want to endlessly browse, checkout Stitch Fix freestyle. It's an online shop built just for you. It's like having your very own customized clothing store. It's so cool.

To get started, you just take a style quiz which you know we love quizzes, and that way your Stitch Fix stylists can learn your preferences, from your favorite colors to preferred fits and price ranges. It's the easy way to get items that are just right for you from brands you know and trust. Like Madewell and Sanctuary. It's time to get looks that are so you, you guys.

Anytime y'all tell Ashley from our team that you like her outfit when you see her in my stories, she always tells me to tell you that all her compliment-worthy clothes are from Stitch Fix. Get started today by filling out your freestyle quiz at Stitchfix.com/thatsoundsfun and take advantage of the free shipping and returns. That's Stitchfix.com/thatsoundsfun to try Stitch Fix. Stitchfix.com/thatsoundsfun.

And now here is a clip of Dr. Alison show The Best of You.

[00:27:13] <music>

Dr. Alison: Hey everyone, I'm Dr. Alison Cook, and I'm here to help you discover what brings out the best of you. This podcast is all about helping you break free from painful patterns, mend your past and discover your true self in God. I'm so grateful you're here and I can't wait to get started as we learn together how to become the best version of who we are with God's help.

[00:27:42] <music>

Dr. Alison: Hey everyone, it's Dr. Allison and welcome to this very first episode of The Best of You podcast. So this week, I want to kick off our very first series I'm calling Psychology Buzzwords. So what I want to do in this series is tackle some of these buzzy words that we are seeing everywhere.

Some of them you may be more familiar with than others. Some of them represent aspirational qualities, the sort of best of who we hope to be. And some of these words represent the toxic side of things. They show up when people are living from the worst of who they are.

Before we dive into this series, I want to say the following. And I'll probably repeat it over and over in this series because it's so important to understand the power of words. There's a difference between labeling a person and naming a pattern of behaviors.

Labeling slaps a sticker on someone that says: You are this. This is who you are. You are bad. On the other hand, naming a pattern of behaviors brings clarity. It brings life. It brings freedom. It's saying, "Here's what this is. Here's how this affects me. Here's how it affects other people. And now that I have clarity, I can move toward health, both in myself and in my relationships, and I can move away from toxicity."

So labeling uses knowledge as a weapon. It takes words and throws them on people and it doesn't really help anybody. Naming patterns of behaviors uses knowledge as a shield. It's not so much about attacking the other person or even labeling the other person. Instead, it's about equipping and empowering you to live with wisdom and discernment.

It's about you learning to honor your own heart, mind, and body as precious and worthy of care. So when you name patterns, whether it's yourself or other people, you can take steps to turn away from harm and toward becoming the best version of who you are with God's help.

All right, so today we're going to start off with one of the buzziest buzzwords right now, and that's narcissism. So I want to start here for two reasons. Narcissism in many ways represents the worst of who we can become. It's the opposite of a strong, healthy sense of self. It's a picture of what we want to move away from. And a lot of people don't understand this about narcissism. They see it as someone being too full of themselves when the reality is, it's the absence of a core sense of self. And we'll unpack that a little bit as we go.

The second reason I want to start with narcissism is that it's the word I see thrown around the most right now. And there's a lot of good reasons for that. It's real, it's

destructive. If you've been in a relationship with a narcissistic parent, pastor, partner, friend, anyone, it's really devastating, it's really hard to see it, to name it and to find your way out of that kind of relationship. But the term is also often misused in ways that can be damaging. So it's really important that we understand it since we're hearing it a lot.

All right, so to define narcissism, I'm going to look to two primary sources. And because this is a podcast, where we talk about faith and psychology, we're going to look at the Bible and we're going to look at the DSM for our definition of narcissism. The DSM is a diagnostic and statistical manual. It's what psychologists use to classify and describe patterns of human behaviors. It's exactly what we're doing here. So it gives us a picture of how the world of psychology is seeing these behaviors. And it's only one picture. There are many ways of looking at this. But I find it to be helpful when we're trying to understand these things.

So this is how I define it in its simplest terms. And that is that narcissism is the absence of a strong sense of self. That might be surprising to some of you, you might have thought of narcissism as being someone who's completely full of themselves. And that's a lot of times what we see are they love themselves so much. But the reality is that someone who is narcissistic is very far from their true sense of self, from their God made itself. There's a bit of a black hole inside it, a bit of a void.

And as a result, someone who's narcissistic has to take everything in the world around them as sort of an object to try to fill that void inside of them. Everyone in the world around a narcissist really only exists to help that person fill their own void inside. The narcissist can't really connect inwardly to a healthy core sense of self out of which to give out to others. So they're always trying to fill that void on the inside.

So with that in mind, here's what the DSM, which is this manual used by psychologists says about narcissistic behaviors. These are the criteria that are used to diagnose someone who is narcissistic. The first and important point is that it's a pervasive pattern of behaviors. We'll get into more of what we mean by that word pervasive.

But here's some of the checklist. A grandiose sense of self-importance, someone who's preoccupied with fantasies of success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love, sort of this idealized fantasy of love, someone who requires excessive admiration, they might have a sense of entitlement, which is an unreasonable expectation of special treatment or maybe they want you to automatically comply with whatever they think or want or need in any given moment.

They lack empathy, which means they are either unable or unwilling to recognize or identify or come alongside the feelings of other people. They are someone who exploits other people. This is what I mean by this idea that they're looking at you really only as someone to serve their needs to sort of fill that void inside of them. You're just an object in their world. Arrogance is a feature of narcissism as well as envy.

Now, here's the thing, we all have some of these qualities. And in order to meet the criteria to be diagnosed as someone who's narcissistic, you have to have a bunch of these qualities. And remember that word they have to be pervasive. And we'll talk more about what that means.

But before we get there, I want to look at a passage from the Bible that I think really describes this idea of narcissism really well in a way that's amazing to me, because it's long before the word ever really existed in our modern vernacular. So listen to me read these words from 2 Timothy 3.

Now I'm reading from The Message version. Okay, you ready? This is 2 Timothy 3:1-5. "Don't be naive. There are difficult times ahead. People are going to be self-absorbed, money-hungry, self-promoting, stuck-up, profane, contemptuous of parents, crude, coarse, dog-eat-dog, unbending, slanderers, impulsively wild, cynical, treacherous, ruthless, bloated windbags, addicted to lust, and allergic to God. They'll make a show of religion, but behind the scenes they're animals. Stay clear of these people." So that's from The Message version. Again, from 2 Timothy 3. I'll link to it in the show notes.

But it's so striking to me. There's a way in which nothing is really new under the sun. You're going to find that as we dig into this podcast. All these psychology buzzwords are, in many ways, new words for old behaviors, behaviors as old as the sun.

So another thing that's interesting to me is N. T. Wright's translation of this very same passage uses the phrase "people will be in love with themselves" and there will be a pattern of godlessness." Now, again, this idea that people are in love with themselves not so much because they actually love themselves in that way that we're supposed to care for ourselves, but they're just in love with this idea of themselves, because there's such a void at the center.

So there's no real ability for love to flow vertically and horizontally. They're only able to bring love toward me—inwardly. I can only bring the love in. I don't have anything on the inside from which to pour out to others. That's the narcissist.

Okay, so there's a lot to unpack here. So I just want to pull out three different things from what we just read. Number one, this idea: Don't be naive. Don't be naive in this world. And you know this. You're listening to this episode, so you're obviously interested in this idea. You know there's toxicity in our world. I wish there wasn't. I wish I could get on here and talk about nice, happy things all the time. And I promise we will. But it's real.

Narcissism is real, and we can't be naive. And if you find yourself in a narcissistic relationship without knowing what it is, it's really helpful to understand it so that you can name it. This is biblical. It's biblical to be wise, to be discerning, to be careful, to be cautious, to arm ourselves with that shield of knowledge that I was talking about.

The other thing I want you to pay attention to is this idea of patterns of behaviors, both in the DSM and the Bible, there's this emphasis on patterns. This is so important. It's not just a one-off. Any one of us can be selfish, self-centered, entitled, arrogant, or envious. Any one of us can be any of those things in any given moment.

If any one of those behaviors at one moment in time, make someone a narcissist, we are all narcissists, right there. I mean, I know I am. If any one of those behaviors makes somebody a narcissist. There's a difference between someone who's self-centered in a moment and someone who has a constant pervasive pattern of only being able to see the world through their own self-centered lens, who is incapable of empathizing with another human.

So this idea of it being a pattern of behaviors over time is really important to understand as we go through all of these buzzwords. These are not one-offs. We get to make mistakes. We get to have a moment. It's not just a selfish or self-centered person even. This is a pervasive pattern of self-focus behaviors over time, with reckless disregard for other people. Okay, so don't be naive. These are patterns of behaviors.

So the third thing I want to pull out of 2 Timothy in particular is this idea that he says they'll make a show of religion. So religious people are not immune from these toxic behaviors. I know you're sitting there listening to me going, "Yes, I know this." I know many of you have been hurt by narcissistic behaviors in faith communities and faith-filled homes. You may have grown up in a home where faith was shown, but the way that it was lived out was really toxic. So people of faith are not immune from these patterns of behaviors.

In fact, Timothy highlights that these behaviors will come from people making a show of religion, right? He's highlighting this. I don't want to stigmatize anyone

group, but we can be really quick to point to celebrity culture, or politicians or other go-to places but the truth is these toxic behaviors are also in faith communities. And they can be even more hurtful there, because we're not expecting them there. We're oftentimes taking our guard down when we go into these faith communities. And so it's even more harmful than when we bump up against these toxic behaviors.

So those are three things to pause on before we move forward. So what are some examples of different types of narcissism? Well, first of all, it lies on a spectrum. And that's true of any behavior. Most of us are not one thing. Most people are not all one thing. We're complex. And some forms of narcissism are more damaging than others. They all create wounds, they all create pain. But some forms can be more damaging and even more dangerous than others.

So my good friend who's a professor in therapist Chuck DeGroat has an amazing book, where he talks about how narcissism shows up by Enneagram type. So for those of you who are Enneagram enthusiast, please check out that book. It's fascinating to see the ways he describes the different numbers and how narcissism shows up. The book is called *When Narcissism Comes to Church*. He talks a lot about how narcissism shows up in faith communities specifically, but Chuck says there are many faces of narcissism.

With that in mind, I want to paint a picture of a couple of different types of narcissism and how these may have shown up in your life.

[00:41:15] <music>

Annie: Oh, Dr. Alison, I'm ready to hear the rest of that episode. I'm ready to hear the rest of that Episode. What is a narcissist really? You're answering it. I am really, really grateful. Where are we going to go after this?

Dr. Alison: We're going to get into the next big buzzword right now, gaslighting. I love that one. It is a big one right now and it's real. Then I want to take us into some of these other buzzwords. We're going to get into trauma. We're going to get into selfhood, which is actually the least of the buzzwords, but one of the most important because that's the root of this all. It's becoming that true self and God.

And then I want to talk about some of the relationship buzzy words, codependency. How to find safe people, right? So we're moving from sort of toxic into health and then into healthy relationships.

Annie: Oh, I love it. Okay, let's talk for just a second about self-love. Because sometimes, especially in the Christian space, that's considered sinful to love yourself and to like

think of yourself. There's a lot of people who say, "You're not as great as you think you are," or "You should not love yourself. You should only love God and bla bla bla. Talk a little bit about what self... I mean, I know that's what the episodes about coming in a couple of weeks, but help us with that word, because it is one that can be buzzy for faith people to stop you from caring for yourself.

Dr. Alison: Yeah, it's interesting. Actually the term itself I think is hard. Where I go with it is the greatest commandment: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. Love your neighbor as yourself. So there's an assumption in what Jesus is saying that we will love others to the degree that we honor ourselves. We are part of that equation.

There's three relationships in that equation. God, others, self. How do we treat ourselves? And often what I find, especially with women, is if we flip that, and I don't mean to be sacrilegious here-

Annie: No.

Dr. Alison: But now many women are better at understanding... I ask them, how do you love others? Give me a list. How do you love your friends? "Well, I show up for them when they're hurting." Well, isn't that interesting? What if we flip that? How do you show up for yourself when you're hurting?

So oftentimes when Jesus said that, love others as yourself, I'm walking people through that you get how to love others. How do we take some of that and flip it to the "as yourself"? Because those are linked. When you are self-shaming, self-blaming, that comes out in your relationships with others.

Annie: Yes. I mean, He could have said how you love your parents, how you love your children, how you love your pets, how you love... love others as you love God. I mean he could have said a lot of things and He said love others as you love yourself. I will sing that from the rooftops, Dr. Alison because I think people leave that third part out all the time and it frustrates me.

Dr. Alison: And you're going to get another series that's coming down the pipe which is what does the Bible really say? Because we get into these really like "deny yourself, die yourself, turn the other cheek," all these that are really profound, beautiful statements that can be so misconstrued. So I'm excited.

Annie: Ah, love it. Okay, so your shows come out every Thursday. The narcissism one is waiting there for people right now. And then next Thursday is gaslighting. So we're just coming in hot. You are coming in hot starting the show. Dr. Alison. Thank you so much for making this one. I am so excited for our friends who are experts at

being in counseling like me, and the people who are new at it. And I only mean expert is I've put in a lot of time, not that I'm very good at it. I've put in a lot of years. And Dr. Alison, is it always going to be you teaching us, or will there ever be any guests involved?

Dr. Alison: No, I'm excited. There'll be some solo and then I'm going to bring on different people that I know that are in this space to help kind of round out the conversation.

One of the things I think that's really helpful is to just talk to people in real life how they've navigated. There won't be therapy sessions, but just conversations about how have you navigated these things. So watch for those bonus episodes to drop. We'll be bringing in some other people. I would love to try to do some Q&A. We'll have to figure out the technology.

Annie: Girl, I got you. That's why you join a network is we got shows all over the network can do Q and A's, including mine. So we got all the technology. We've already got it registered. Listen, this is why you jump on a network. You say, How do I do this? And somebody over here probably knows. Not usually me. You know who it is. You know it's Fallon. Fallon is the one who knows how to do everything.

Okay. Well, I am thrilled about this. I cannot wait to hear people's feedback. I mean, we're already getting it since the show released yesterday. But, man, I'm thrilled to hear what happens this weekend as people get a little bit of time to sit and listen.

Two final questions. One, someone listens to the show, they listened to the one yesterday, they keep listening, and they go, "I need therapy. I would love to sit with someone. I'd love to try counseling for the first time." How do we find a counselor in our area?

Dr. Alison: So I have a resources page that I will link to. It's on my website everywhere. And I'm hoping to add to it. I try to add to it all the time. There are amazing now. There's online therapy. There's online Christian therapy, there's online couples therapy, there's huge search engines to find... And I have a whole article that kind of walks people through the process. It can be overwhelming, but I have sort of... I'll link to all these in show notes. You know, walk through the process of how do I find a therapist to help me.

Annie: Great. Thank you. That's awesome. That's a question I get a lot and I'm always like, "I just go to my counselor. I had a breakdown and someone called and said you need to go to a counselor and gave me a phone number." That's how I went.

Okay, so the last question we always ask, Dr. Alison, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, because your show The Best of You is on the That Sounds Fun Network, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Dr. Alison: What sounds fun to me right now is doing this podcast with That Sounds Fun Network. I'm telling you. This feels fun to me to do it with other people. It would be really hard to do it by myself. So I'm thrilled and excited and can't wait.

Annie: Oh, me too. The two reasons we built the network is I had friends who felt lonely and friends who had content and didn't know how to put it out. So we are so thankful that we are stepping in with you in a little way to help you make a difference on the planet. It's your work, we just get to walk alongside you and we're really thankful. So everybody can go subscribe today and start listening about before you call everybody else a narcissist, check yourself. Check yourself. That's our big advice today.

[00:47:56] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, don't you love her? Oh, we are going to love this show so much. What a gift! So often people say, "I wish I could hear what happens in counseling appointments. And this is on the track to that. You are absolutely going to love it.

So be sure to go right now wherever you're listening to me and go subscribe to The Best of You. You don't want to miss a single episode. Rate and review the show when you get a chance. Be sure to share it with your friends.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram at Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me. And I think that's it for me today and for this week, 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 hanging out with my family. Everybody's here in town for Mother's Day. It's going to be really fun.

So y'all have a great weekend. Happy Mother's Day to all you moms and mothering voices out there. And we'll see you back here Monday. Talking all things Mother's Day and to celebrate with my friend Kirsten Watson. We'll see you guys then. Have a good weekend.