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

Before we dive into this conversation, I want to tell you about one of our amazing partners, Awana's [Talk About](#) resource. This October you can walk with your kids through God's Word with Talk About, the family discipleship subscription from Awana.

Through the current Talk About series, Call on Him, you and your kids will study the Scriptures to learn how to call on God through prayer anytime and about anything. You know how much we love to talk about prayer here on the podcast. So I love that this tool will help me talk about prayer with my MiniBFFs. Together you'll ask and answer three big questions about prayer: What is prayer, how should I pray, and what should I pray about?

With your monthly subscription to Talk About, you'll receive an email each week with your family's discipleship bundle, including a simple and thorough conversation guide to share scripture with your family and weekly hands-on activities to apply God's word to your kid's life every day.

Plus bonus materials, including coloring pages, memory verses, parent prep videos, thank you, playlist, and more. So help your kids walk with Jesus for life and turn to him in all situations with the Talk About resource.

Try one month free with the promo code TSF, like That Sounds Fun, on talkaboutdiscipleship.com. Again, that promo code is TSF on talkaboutdiscipleship.com.

Intro: Today on the show I get to talk with my friend Shannan Martin. If you're a longtime listener, you may remember Shannan was back on the pod in Episode 102—an early adopter. You can go back and check that out if you haven't heard. It's a great episode.

Shannan is an amazing author and speaker. She is one of those friends who challenges me in all the best ways. Her new book, *Start with Hello: (And Other Simple Ways to Live as Neighbors)* teaches us how to neighbor well. It is full of simple practices that help us look for common ground with those around us.

Shannan is a dear friend who makes me better, and I want that for all of us today. So here's my conversation with my friend Shannan Martin.

[00:02:10] <music>

Annie: Shannan Martin, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Shannan: It's so good to be back.

Annie: It's such a time since you've been on here. Episode 102, September of 2018.

Shannan: What episode are you on now? Like how many-

Annie: We're in the four hundreds.

Shannan: Of course you are.

Annie: I've done a terrible job numbering things. So we're actually in the six hundreds because sometimes you don't use numbers. It's a worse thing to do to an audience. My friends on the other side are angry from the start. But I mean for years since you've been on the pod? Did we miss a book in the middle?

Shannan: No. For years apart these books.

Annie: When was the last one? *Falling Free*?

Shannan: *The Ministry of Ordinary Places*.

Annie: Oh, yeah.

Shannan: It's been four years but in my mind, I'm like, "That was like two years ago surely." It does not feel four years to me.

Annie: No. No. It's been a big four years.

Shannan: Yeah. Yeah.

Annie: One of the things that I think you're really known for... you and I have this hot take on Twitter. You find Twitter to be such a good place for interactions. I think it's a trash pile.

Shannan: I so agree with you, Annie.

Annie: I know but I think you're really right. In the last four years, you have had to/chosen to/taken on the responsibility of really using your words to teach us and to bring new conversations in.

Shannan: Yeah.

Annie: In the start of your book *Start with Hello*, you kind of go through like, "Here's who I was at 20, at 25, at 30, at 35."

Shannan: Yeah.

Annie: Why? What is it? Why can't you stay quiet anymore? I didn't want you quiet but do you know what I mean?

Shannan: Yeah.

Annie: Why do you feel like-

Shannan: Specifically on Twitter or just in the world-

Annie: Yeah, in the world? In the world, yeah.

Shannan: You know, I love Twitter for a lot of reasons. For me, because I'm an Enneagram eight. It's like where other people are like, it's intense and scary, I'm like, "It's where I can be my whole self. It's weirdly comforting and relaxing to me, which I know is so opposite for many people."

Annie: No, I know that's true, though.

Shannan: I can just kind of pop off on there... I try to always be, you know, wise and always kind. I just think that's so important. But as time goes on, we're always learning, we're always growing. And if we're really paying attention to the world around us, we will just find that there's more and more reason that we're going to have to speak up on something.

And it doesn't mean that we're all going to be just sounding off constantly about everything because there's enough outrage to go around. But it's like you pick your thing or your couple of things that you're so passionate about and try to bring your own kind of lens to that, your own light, I guess.

For me, Twitter is a place that I've learned so much through the voices I've chosen to follow and just kind of being in it and being in those conversations. I just think we're at a point right now where a lot of us are realizing and waking up to the idea

of we can't look inward anymore. We can't be quiet anymore. We can't just avoid conflict anymore. It's just unavoidable. So we've got to find our right way in.

Annie: One of the things I really struggle with—and you know this because, for our friends listening, you and I are in a small group that we meet pretty regularly—and one of the things that is really hard for me is there's this balance of pick a few topics that you really care about, get educated. You talk about this a lot in *Start with Hello*. Like don't get in an argument without being smart.

Shannan: Yeah, right.

Annie: Use your brain-

Shannan: That's a no to myself.

Annie: Yeah, me too. Me too. Truly. But pick a few things. But my concern and the thing that always stresses me out is when I feel like people decide "these three things are so important to me. I'm a follower of Jesus. If you aren't with me, I'm not sure you actually are a follower of Jesus, too." That's complicated for me.

Shannan: It's very complicated. And I think trying to exist in a position of humility on some level. I mean, I have to be really careful in that same way. Like I have to be careful that I'm not projecting what really matters to me onto the whole world around me. If I do, I'm just gonna be mad at people all the time.

I know in my head if I can kind of remember this in my body and in my gut, but I know in my head that we're all coming from different social locations, we're all coming from different perspectives, we are going to care differently about different things.

But to me, and even this can be nuancey and kind of challenging, if we are believers and if we are Christ followers, we have to be able to agree on like basic dignity and kindness, and you know, just the language we use. Even if we're going to disagree a little bit on issues or even on theological fine points, we have to be able to agree on just a base level of kindness.

Annie: I agree with that. One of the things that I feel very strongly about is—and we've talked about this a lot—is like making sure that people of other races feel seen and that what we do and build reflects the kingdom of God.

Shannan: Right.

Annie: We're working on that in the office, we're working on that in our work, and yet I have to reconcile that there are racists who will go to heaven.

Shannan: Oh, Annie.

Annie: That's hard, right?

Shannan: Yes, it's so complicated. It's so hard to reckon with this. I don't know how this all shakes out, you know. And that's a thing that's hard for... I think for me, somebody who grew up in evangelical churches my whole life, I was taught to just have answers for everything at all times. And even if I didn't, to pretend that I did.

Annie: That's right.

Shannan: So there are just these things. You know, that example, that's a really tough one for me.

Annie: It's really hard for me.

Shannan: It goes against everything I believe. But to be able to say like, I don't know how God is dealing with stuff and I don't have to feel certain or even pretend to feel certain on having answers for all these complicated questions. And that's okay too. It's okay to say, like, "I don't get it. And I might do things differently but-

Annie: If I was the one... Yeah, yeah, that's right.

Shannan: But it is good. It is a good practice and an uncomfortable practice to be able to acknowledge that like, you know, we can get on our high horses. I'm tall anyway, world. The world needs to know that I'm tall.

Annie: Man, it's been the center of the internet right now is your height.

Shannan: I am tall. It's a quick hop for me up on my high horse is my point. But it's better-

Annie: I have a strong cuffs, it's a quick hop. I'm with you. A quick hop.

Shannan: Right. It's so much better if we can stay down at street level, like in low places from a posture of like, This is complicated. It's hard. Things that we wish weren't so are. And we're going to try to be people who walk towards each other in hope, especially when everything in us is telling us to divide and to separate camps and to go inward, to drive into the garage and let the door go down. And you just don't have to deal with each other.

For a lot of us, that's our impulse. But when we can embrace the discomfort of connection, we just end up in a place that is just richer and truer and more safer and more abundant.

Annie: And I think if Jesus really meant that they'll know us by our love, the person who disagrees with me the most about the thing that matters to me the most, and also claims Christ, that's got to be my goal. And that is hard. I mean, I'm sitting across to you saying, That is hard for me.

Because I read things and I'm like, "How that person can read the same Bible as me and end up there, I do not know." And yet what I know of God is that He likes them too.

Shannan: I think we just have to try our best to kind of stay in our lane. And I don't mean that as like, you know, don't get involved. This whole *Start with Hello* book is about like get involved.

Annie: Get involved, yeah.

Shannan: Get involved. But to be able to just say like in that really difficult scenario that you like dropped us into three minutes into our talk, I just want to be able to say, you know, for me, like for anyone listening, I'm a white mom of four nonwhite kids and a neighbor to many. And this is what it means to be citizens of the kingdom is that we stay tender for the sake of each other and we listen to the person who has the least amount of power, you know, all these things.

Annie: That is something you have taught me that has gone so far my head is when I'm trying to figure out what the next move is or how do I balance all these people that I feel like I want to love well, listen to the person with the least power first. You taught me that.

Shannan: Ooh.

Annie: Really?

Shannan: Well, I appreciate you saying that. It's something that has been taught to me, you know. I mean, anything I know about anything I say today, I've learned from the people around me, I've learned from my neighbors.

And so my lane in all this, I hope, is that I am going to always push us towards empathy and honesty towards action for the sake of vulnerable people. We need to become a body of Christ that is less racist. That's just like the lowest of low bars.

And so for me, I'm like, I'm going to keep pushing us towards that. God's going to do what God's doing and I trust and believe that God is at work. But I also trust and believe that God is grieving over a lot of behavior, including mine.

Annie: Including mine.

Shannan: I've got my own issues too. But for my focus to just be, I'm going to do whatever I can with what I have and what I do know what I have learned. I've got so much more to learn. But I've come a far way. I've learned a lot just in parenting and living as a neighbor. And I want to steward that well. I want to take these stories and make them real, make them kind of make sense to people who might not have quite understood it in that way previously.

Annie: I am having a great time by the way. This is so fun. I love it so much.

Shannan: 100%. I'm like, Just block off the next few hours, we've got a lot to say.

Annie: That's right. For everyone listening, if you know anything about the Enneagram, Shannan's an eight, and my eight wing is very strong. But to me one of my strengths that is—our strengths also tend to be what hurt us—is I am a public learner. But to be a public learner you also have to miss step and realize that you don't know everything.

Shannan: That's it. And it's hard.

Annie: It's really hard. I think that's what scares a lot of us.... I won't speak for everybody else. What scares me is that learning publicly and pushing people publicly when I don't know everything. You're much more educated on a lot of this than me. But it's scary to me to learn publicly when I could just learn quietly and keep it to myself and not talk about anything except Ladybird Taco. You know, like it's very easy for me to talk about international soccer, Ladybird Taco. I have to be willing to learn publicly. And that's terrible.

Shannan: It's so hard. Well, here's an example. I completely agree with you and I appreciate you saying it. And I've watched you do it. And I know that there's the tension and a cost to it quite honestly. It's uncomfortable. Just yesterday was the birthday of *Falling Free*, my first book.

Annie: Yes, I saw that.

Shannan: And I'll be honest. I love that book. It tells the beginning of our story.

Annie: So good.

Shannan: It's like the building block, like the foundation of all this. But I would be lying if I said I don't read through it and cringe at faces. I have learned in six years. I hope I have.

Annie: I hope I have. Same.

Shannan: I hope we are different people today than we were six years ago, 10 years ago, one year ago. And it takes that. So you know, there's that tension of like, "Oh, I wish I could change this." But also, you know what? I can't. Number one. And that's okay. We're all kind of wherever we are on the journey. And if we can normalize making mistakes...

You know, my friends of color will say... Many of them would see that as a function of racism itself. Like this idea of like we don't want to don't do anything unless we can do it perfectly. And I have to be honest. That's in me. So to be able to fumble around publicly and make mistakes and course correct and, you know, try a different way and apologize, I mean, those are our real tangible tools for connection and community and living as neighbors.

Annie: Who is my neighbor?

Shannan: Your neighbor is anyone whose life intersects with yours. So I don't ever mean the people just to the left or to the right or above and below you or you know, wherever geographically. But I mean it's anybody-

Annie: Above and below you don't mean socioeconomic. You mean like I live in a condo and there's literally someone below.

Shannan: Yes. Thank you for clarifying. I never want to leave out that a lot of people live in very different context that I do. I don't live in the suburbs; a lot of people do. A lot of people live in apartments or dorms or... So, yes, thank you for clarifying.

But I'm not just talking about the people right next to us. I'm talking about like a bigger community. As citizens of the kingdom of God, it's kind of everybody. So you can take that circle as to the ultimate wit. But mostly I'm just talking about like community, like people that you can regularly be for one reason or another kind of rubbing shoulders with.

[00:16:22] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [ThirdLove](#). So here's a question for you. What would it be like to

wear a bra that looks and feels amazing all day long, one that goes for morning meetings to lunch on a go, to running errands and bouncing all the things, to evening plans with friends without digging into your sides or pinching your shoulders or needing to be adjusted constantly?

I'll tell you what it'd be like. It would be like you're wearing ThirdLove's 24/7 Classic T-Shirt Bra. You guys, it's my favorite. The go-to bra, it is so super supportive and comfortable to wear all day. It doesn't show through your clothes and it's made millions of women very happy, including your girl AFD.

With ThirdLove you never have to get stuck with a bad bra again. They have expert fit stylists on hand to answer your questions you might have. And they make it quick and easy to return or exchange if you need to. In fact, returns and exchanges are free for 60 days.

And when you get your bras from ThirdLove, you're partnering with them to care for others too. ThirdLove is the largest donor of undergarments in the US, you guys. Partnering with organizations across the United States, ThirdLove has donated over \$40 million dollars' worth of bras to help women in need. I love that.

So here's what we're gonna do. We're gonna ditch our bad bras and get a better one that makes you look and feel great. So upgrade your bra today. Get 20% off your first order at thirdlove.com/soundsfun. That's 20% off your first order today at thirdlove.com/soundsfun.

Sponsor: And another one of our incredible partners, [Shopify](#). You guys, can we talk about notifications for a second? Most people don't leave them on but I kind of enjoy some of them. Some of them, not many of them, but some of them.

I mean, I recently learned how to change the notification when I get a message on Slack, which is our interoffice communication system to like a boingy sound like Tigger. I love it so much. Another sound I really enjoy is [Shopify notification sound]. That's the sound of another sale on Shopify, the all-in-one commerce platform to start, run and grow your business.

Shopify makes it simple to sell to anyone from anywhere, whether your thing is vintage tees or recipes for butter board. You guys, butter boards. Start selling with Shopify and join the platform simplifying commerce for millions of your favorite businesses worldwide.

With Shopify, you'll create an online store and your vibe, discover new customers and grow the following that keeps them coming back. Shopify has all the sales channels sorted so that your business keeps growing. From an in-person POS

system to an all in one e-commerce platform, even across social media platforms like TikTok and Facebook, and Instagram.

And thanks to 24/7 support and free libraries full of educational content, Shopify has got you every step of the way. It's how every minute new sellers around the world make their first sale with Shopify. And you can too.

Shopify makes selling simple so you can put yourself and your ideas out there, whether your thing is making eBooks or earrings. Shopify makes your success possible. It's how we get to sell fun stuff like Chai Day Friday mugs and our sweatshirts, our business casual sweatshirts.

When you're ready to launch your thing into the spotlight, do it with Shopify, the commerce platform backing millions of businesses down the street and around the globe. Go on and try Shopify for free and start selling anywhere.

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And remember that the show notes are your one-stop shop for links to our partners, to transcripts of these shows, and to sign up for the AFD Week in Review, our weekly email newsletter.

Now back to our conversation with Shannan.

[00:19:52] <music>

Annie: I was eating dinner with some friends a couple of weeks ago and they've moved into a new neighborhood in their town. And the wife said, "The hardest part for me is I feel like everyone who lives here is on vacation."

Shannan: Oh, yeah.

Annie: She said it just feels like they've built this whole neighborhood so that everyone feels like they're on vacation.

Shannan: That would be hard.

Annie: But at the same time a lot of us choose to live in neighborhoods where our home is a place that people can come to. So it's, again, the holding both sides.

Shannan: Yeah,

Annie: My neighborhood is not hugely diverse socio-economically. That's how neighborhoods work. Like everything's the same.

Shannan: That's how neighborhoods were designed in a lot of ways.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah. So what does it look like to be a good neighbor to the people who are just like us, that live close to us? Because whoever you live near, you're similar to in some way. That's how they ended up there. But also you don't want to be white savior going into another neighborhood. I mean, it just gets... "Well, my neighbor is the homeless guy and every Tuesday I'm gonna stop and offer him a bowl of soup. Is that being a neighbor? I don't know.

Shannan: I mean, it can be, I think. That's a very specific hypothetical. But-

Annie: I've really brought you some random things today, Shannan.

Shannan: I love it. So many things, Annie. First of all, I work in a soup kitchen. So I'm like, Please make soup for the person who isn't housed or whatever. I appreciate that you said, we don't need to be running around being white saviors. Thank you. That's true. And we could have a whole hour talking about that. But at the same time, I believe we should be finding ways to be in actual relationship, in community with people who we think are different from us in some way.

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

Shannan: I happen to live, and I feel like the luckiest woman alive... I do live in a really diverse, in every sense of the word, racially, ethnically, religious, socio-economic, political, like any type of thing. Like we have it all.

Annie: The bigger the city, the more you live in an urban setting, the more there's diversity of all of those things-

Shannan: That's true.

Annie: ...within walking distance.

Shannan: I don't live in a big city, though.

Annie: True. True. True.

Annie: You live in the city versus living in neighborhoods or suburbs.

Shannan: You know, that was, to a point, an intentional choice for us. But also there can be a lot of damage done in some of those choices. you know, to be like you said, like, "I'm gonna move in and..." And if I'm being honest, that's what some of... I can feel a little cringy because I know I came into the neighborhood with some of that thinking that I've kind of had to like disabuse myself of. I think it's like a both... and.

And that's what I hope comes through in *Start with Hello* is this idea of like I'm writing about some of our best friends whom we got to know through just taking a risk and putting it out there. And in so many ways they're very similar to us.

And I'm writing about people who on paper I have nothing in common with. And, you know, we're building relationships because my husband Corey is the chaplain of a jail. We have so many relationships with people whose lives are really hard in ways mine has never been and probably will never be.

You know, I think of community at its best as this like tapestry of like, you know, there are people that we have really close connections with and people we have kind of loose, comfortable connections with, but they all matter. They all kind of weave into this sturdy fabric that helps us to feel less alone and more...

Like we actually are... There's actually a point here to all of us being in this particular place together at the same time, because it doesn't matter if you're in the suburbs or rural places or... It doesn't matter where you are. There are other people there too. And there's got to be some kind of magic to like, "Okay, I'm here and so are you. I wonder why that is." And then spinning as long as it takes to answer that question. It's just slow work.

Annie: Okay, so Shannan, I don't ever do this. But my Bible is sitting here because I did another podcast where I needed my Bible. So in Acts 17, it says, "From one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth. He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us."

Shannan: Though He is not far.

Annie: Right.

Shannan: So good.

Annie: I love the 'perhaps.'

Shannan: Right.

Annie: He did all of this, He puts you in this place "that perhaps you might. That maybe someone would." And so when I think of you and *Start with Hello*, I'm going like, I mean, God puts you right where you're supposed to be. He gave us the neighbors he gave us that perhaps... And not even the neighbors. Perhaps I.

Shannan: That's the thing

Annie: Right?

Shannan: I talk so much about neighbors and living as neighbors because I believe we're all longing for connection. Even if we don't quite know it, even if we're terrified, which most of us are. If we are going to actually live as neighbors, it has to go both ways.

Like we have to be looking out into our life, particularly this is like a word for us Jesus people, that we would be reflecting the love of God onto the world around us, but that we would see the face of God reflected on the faces around us. It's got to go both ways. That we are on the receiving end of that and we're also on the giving end of that.

Annie: I mean, that's why what you teach so much so beautifully online, but really beautifully in *Start with Hello*, is like it is not yours to go and be a hero. It's going to be a neighbor. And the humility, the being low and saying, I don't have more to give them than they have to give me.

Shannan: Right. And it's different things.

Annie: That's right.

Shannan: But to be willing to... It's my favorite tip when people say okay, like, tell me what to do. How do I get started?

Annie: Right.

Shannan: Especially if we're talking about like our actual proximate neighbors, some of us are like, "Okay, this is awkward because I've lived here for six years. And how do I after six years be like, 'Oh, hey, neighbor of six years, what's your name?'" A lot of us-

Annie: It feels very weird.

Shannan: It just feels like, okay, that ship has sailed. It's gonna be too awkward. Maybe we should just move-

Annie: I'll make a list in my next house.

Shannan: Right. But my favorite, favorite tip, I'm sorry to say, is to just ask for help.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Shannan: Oh, to be the one who shows up needy. We don't want to hear that. It goes against everything most of us have been taught to do. And I'm not saying like ask for a loan, ask for money. But to say-

Annie: And you're not saying fake it. You're saying, I can't lift this couch. I can literally go ask a neighbor to help.

Shannan: I mean, Cory, very recently needed a very tall ladder. We have a ladder, but not very tall ladder. And the impulse is like, "Oh, I guess I better run to Menards." Instead, he went next door.

When we can kind of begin to build those like, "I've got your back. You know, you've got my back, now I can have your back." And it builds this trust and it builds this kind of ease of doesn't mean that we're necessarily going to become the best of friends and go on vacation with our next door neighbor. But it does mean...

You know, somebody told me once... on our very worst days, like if the worst thing happened to us, that our minds could run wild with that, our neighbors are the people who are closest to us. They are there before, you know, EMS or whatever. Whatever bad thing we can imagine, before our extended family can get there, our neighbors are already there.

And what would it look like if we just knew each other's faces and names, if we just had a rhythm of like, you know, they've been in our house before, for whatever reason, we've talked to them in their yard before? Like if we had that kind of foundation of trust and connection, it changes things.

Annie: I had a dog for six days. Remember when I was allergic to it?

Shannan: Oh, yeah.

Annie: It was terrible. But when I was out walking Helen and those six days, I met more neighbors because I didn't know what to do with my dog. And they all had dogs

and walked all the time. And I was like, "Actually, I've seen you every day. Who are you know?"

Shannan: "How do I dog?"

Annie: Yeah, "how do I dog here? Teach me how to dog." And it really was the first time that I have this realization in my neighborhood that there are—this is tough truth—there are people who know each other. It just wasn't me. They all knew each other. They all talk to each other. They care for each other. They help each other. Suddenly, they were helping me. And I thought, "Oh, I'm the only one not doing this."

Shannan: I mean, how did you feel? Thinking about it now, what happened?

Annie: So now what happens without said dog, now I know my neighbor Beth. She was bald last week. And I was like, "Beth, are you okay? Are you sick?" And she was like, "I'm really sick." And I would have seen it and not known her name.

Shannan: You wouldn't have known how to even have that conversation.

Annie: That's right. But we have had the same kind of dog for a minute.

Shannan: Okay. That's the perfect example of what I was just saying. Like on her worst of times, there you are.

Annie: I'm going to notice.

Shannan: And you know her name.

Annie: I literally only know her first name.

Shannan: That's okay. I make a point to say I have a file-

Annie: I have a note on my phone.

Shannan: I do too. When I learn a neighbor's name,-

Annie: Same.

Shannan: ...I take a note because I've learned the hard way.

Annie: What else do you put on the note?

Shannan: Just any like tidbits that I-

Annie: Same. They'll tell me their apartment number and I'll say, "Brown hair."

Shannan: I say like, blue house and any other random thing I know.

Annie: I do the same, Shannan.

Shannan: There's no kind of neighboring thing that we can't get past in some way. So I'm not trying to create a new barrier. But I will say, what can be even harder than like, "I don't know how to get to know people," is if you get to know them and then you forget. And that happens too.

Annie: It happens to me all the time, so I started a list.

Shannan: You start a list. And if that has happened and you don't have your list yet, you just say, "I should know this by now and I'm so embarrassed. I know you told me your name. What's your name again?" We feel so awkward about it. But when we're on the receiving end of that, we're never like, what a dummy. We don't think like that.

Annie: I actually love it.

Shannan: I love it too.

Annie: Especially because of our public lives, I love when someone doesn't remember my name.

Shannan: It's vulnerable. I know. I love it.

Annie: I think it's great. Thank you.

Shannan: I love it. And it sets the relational tenor at like we're gonna bumble around and be kind of awkward.

Annie: Yes.

Shannan: I wish I could have written a chapter saying how to never feel awkward.

Annie: Right.

Shannan: We're just going to. It's just part of it. And we have to know that, accept it and know that we can survive it.

Annie: I promise you there is one girl who walks all the time and we sit near each other at the pool a lot and I do not know her name. I promise you I will find her name out before the end of the year.

Shannan: You have homework now, Annie.

Annie: I know. I know. She walks by me when I'm sitting on my patio, and she'll stop and talk. So we were very kind to each other and we're very different but I do not know her name.

Shannan: You're gonna know it soon.

Annie: Yeah. Because you can text me. You can Vox me and ask me and text me. I mean, when you're thinking about *Start with Hello*, when you're thinking about us thinking about our neighbors, what's the win? Everybody buys the book this week that it's out and they finish reading it in a month. What's the win in December? What are we doing?

Shannan: I think in December every person who reads this book can point to one little thing that they did differently. And I'm gonna give you just a couple of examples. What I do not mean is they now host a weekly dinner club.

Annie: Right. With six people they do not know.

Shannan: No.

Annie: No, don't do it.

Shannan: I mean, this is a whole book of like the tiniest stuff matters-

Annie: That's what I love about it.

Shannan: ...and it's not wasted. For some of us, we might have... we all come to it with different limitations and different resources and different personalities and we already have kind of a different comfort level. So for some people, it might be like I invite an actual neighbor over to my house for dessert. That's a big thing.

On the other end of that, it might be like I, for the past month, I have taken walks in my neighborhood and paid attention. I come to the book *Start with Hello* with years of that really kind of slow, hidden, like, why am I even doing this and doesn't even matter work? Of really like, Okay, I'm just gonna, like, really get to know this place and try to tune into it. I talk all the time about looking at the sky.

Annie: Yes, all the time.

Shannan: Because when we train our brains to do something like paying attention to the sky, it helps us pay attention to other things, too, including the people around us. So that you see, Beth, you were available to that moment, you're awake to that moment. And you saw her, and you knew her name and you said something.

So it might mean that we set the intention that sometime this year we are going to invite a new friend to go on a walk with us. I mean, it can just be any number of things. We might decide that for a whole month, we're going to only read books or listen to podcasts by people of color or people who come from a different perspective. Like we're gonna set that intention.

Like I have a lot to learn. As we discussed previously, our neighborhoods are by design set up to kind of keep us segregated. It's not always-

Annie: In a lot of ways, not just race.

Shannan: In a lot of ways. Yeah. So whatever the thing is that you know like this is something that I don't know a lot about or I have a lot to learn, or I have a level of discomfort even. But to say like, "Okay, I'm going to take up my own re-education. We have Wi-Fi and library cards... we can learn a lot if we put our minds to it. So it could be any number of things.

Annie: Will you talk about that book a moment that we all just got and everybody is reading?

Shannan: Yes.

Annie: Because I think that's such a good example of a book that will make us uncomfortable, mostly because we don't talk about lament-

Shannan: That's right.

Annie: ...and why it matters for us to read books by people who are not like us.

Shannan: So it just came out. It's called *Voices of Lament*. The main editor was Natasha Sistrunk Robinson. She is amazing. She's brilliant. And she pulled together I think it's like 27 or 29 other... It's all women of color. Like BIPOC. You know, they have some indigenous writers. And they base the book on... I think it's Psalm 27. I hope I'm getting that right. And just writing about the spiritual discipline of lament.

And Natasha shared, you know, this is something that historically the white church has not been good at. And if we are honest, most of us can say we have seen that inaction. Like we don't know what to do. Yeah, we're out here somehow celebrating when people die. That's a weird skew on lament.

And her point was the black church, the global church, the church of color has... this has been something we've been doing. So it's important for me as a white woman to learn about it from these women of color. Like if we say we want to learn something. We should be learning it from the people whose reality it connects with. It's fantastic.

Annie: Yeah, I have one here.

Shannan: The cover is gorgeous.

Annie: The cover is beautiful.

Shannan: Yes.

Annie: Okay. When you say "celebrate people dying," do you mean when we're watching it on TV? You don't mean that. You mean that we're calling them celebrations of life?

Shannan: Yes, I do.

Annie: Got it.

Shannan: It's a personal thing, Annie.

Annie: No, this is great. Thanks for explaining.

Shannan: It's an Enneagram eight kind of thing maybe. I told-

Annie: You're like, "Be sad."

Shannan: I've told my family like, "If I die, do not be having a celebration of life. Be grieving. Be grieving."

Annie: PS: if you die. I hate to tell you we're all gonna die.

Shannan: Right. Did I say "if"?

Annie: Yeah.

Shannan: Well, okay, if I die, if I just up and abandoned my family now-

Annie: Yes, yes. If I abandon my body in the present time. Yes, yes, yes, I know what you mean.

Shannan: You're like, "Shannan, we need to talk."

Annie: Yeah. "I have Enneagram eight thing to tell you."

Shannan: I just think it's-

Annie: Because that means we're abandoning lament-

Shannan: We are.

Annie: ...if we only call it...

Shannan: We are running from discomfort.

Annie: Yes, I see what you're saying.

Shannan: I will add... So I'm an adoptive mom times four with like some other kind of bonus kiddos too who are not my kids but important to me. I don't talk about adoption hardly ever and I'm not about to talk about it a lot right now. But what I will say is I have had a front row seat to the importance of making space for grief and how not good many of us are at that and are rushed to make things joyful, are rushed to put a bow around things. I think it's unique to our kind of part of Christian culture, the idea of a celebration of life. I know it's very beautiful-

Annie: No, I love it.

Shannan: ...and meaningful to so many people but I'm like, what if we just grieved when we lose somebody and understanding the hope that awaits them and all these things.

Annie: Sure.

Shannan: What if we just really allowed ourselves to feel that pain and discomfort? Because that's the thing, Annie. We just don't want to.

Annie: No, I do not want to.

Shannan: We really don't want to do it publicly.

Annie: No. No.

Shannan: We want to have the celebration publicly and then go home and grieve alone. Well, the same is true about... I mean, weddings in the Bible were a week long and mourning lasts for days and days and days. And we go like, "The funeral is done, you're good."

Shannan: Like, "Okay." We're not sitting in sackcloth and ashes and wearing black for however long.

Annie: No. No. It's because we want to be comfortable, Shannan.

Shannan: It is.

Annie: Because I want to be comfortable. And it's uncomfortable to stay in pain.

Shannan: And it's uncomfortable to be near someone in pain. I mean, that's another part of my journey. I wrote about it.

Annie: Yeah, you wrote about it.

Shannan: I really try hard to expose my failures along the way because they are many. But I wrote about a time when I had friends who suffered a loss and I had the opportunity to enter into that loss. You know, just like in a chance encounter in the pasta aisle at Kroger, which is where it happened.

I had that moment and I knew I had that moment. And did I take it? I didn't. I took the easy way, which was easier for me and probably much more painful for them. And I existed, you know, up at small talk when I knew better and I walked away. And the minute I walked out of that store I felt true shame. And I went home and sent an immediate apology. Like, "I am so sorry that I just did that." And just owning it. I have no excuse.

But I know that in that moment I was so uncomfortable with their discomfort and grief. What I was telling myself was like all the things we do, like, "What if they don't want me to bring it up? What if they're having a good day? What if this makes them sad? What if? What if? What if?" But what it really was self-protection myself. You know, it was me looking out for me. And I want to get better at that.

Annie: When my nephew passed away I ran into someone probably a month later, and she said, "I saw something sad happened but I didn't want to reach out because I didn't know if you were okay that day or not."

Shannan: That's it.

Annie: And I said, "When something sad happens I think you can reach out any day."

Shannan: It never stops being sad. It never.

Annie: Yeah. It's not like TJ's on earth with me again. It is gonna be sad every time I think of it. But to me, I thought there's something that she didn't want to-

Shannan: Which is okay. I think a lot with a lot of these things our intentions might actually be good, but the impact is not good. Like we can cause pain even when our intentions feel good in so many different ways.

Annie: That's the problem, man.

Shannan: That's the problem, man.

Annie: I had a pastor who once said "we judge ourselves by our intentions, and we judge others by their actions."

Shannan: That's it.

Annie: That is rough. Because what we want is I want you to judge me by my intentions and you want me to judge you quote-quote, by your intentions. And we don't get to do that.

Shannan: No, we don't.

Annie: Because we don't know people's intentions.

Shannan: We don't. And in our intentions only take us so far.

Annie: That's right.

Shannan: We've got to be coming to a place where we understand that complexity and discomfort is the path to community. It just is.

Annie: Oh, gross. You're right.

Shannan: I know. I'm so sorry.

Annie: That's why I love you is you're right.

Shannan: That is so fun.

Annie: Everyone, this episode is branded differently. No, this is why *Start with Hello* matters and why your voice matters so much to me is because you say, "Annie, the way to actual community is being uncomfortable." And I go, "Oh, you're right."

In what other culture, in the thousands of years that humans have existed, did we work so hard to be comfortable?

Shannan: I know. I don't know. I don't know the answer to that but I know we put a lot of energy into it. You know, a lot of us we have these barriers in our minds about getting to know people and having people in our homes. Hospitality... I have started to call it—Just on my own. This is not in the book. This is for free—hotmesspitality.

Annie: That's so good. That's so good.

Shannan: It's ridiculous. You know, we have this idea that things have to be a certain way and that what we have is not enough, and that we are not enough, and we don't have enough time, and we don't have enough energy, and all of those are very normal and very relatable feelings. I am an introvert, all of this is challenging to me, too. But at the same time, we spend a lot of energy and effort trying to protect ourselves from each other-

Annie: I know.

Shannan: ...when what we really need is kind of like the close compression of each other. Like, we need to be-

Annie: I know.

Shannan: ...like we were built for community because we were. We have this longing within us, whether we've really acknowledged it or not. I mean, we all kind of want the same thing. And so maybe we just need to go first.

Annie: Yeah. I know. You and Jenny Allen say the same thing in two different ways. Right? In Nashville I have stopped using Uber because we can ask people for help. A thing has happened where if you're financially able to take care of yourself, you do. And we don't have to get help anymore.

Shannan: There's a verse I don't know what book in the Bible it's in, I don't remember but it's like so Enneagram eight and I love it. But it says basically like, "Woe be to you if you warm yourself by the light of your own fire."

Annie: Wow.

Shannan: And that's kind of I think goes along with what you're saying. Like we come to a place where we are able to solve most of our own problems-

Annie: Comfort levels.

Shannan: ...and the door's closed. And then we find ourselves sitting on our own and feeling a little lonely. And I just think we all feel... we think it's just us and I think it's really universal. I think we're all feeling a lot of the same things. We're all feeling rusty at this whole conversation. We're coming out of a time where like whatever skills we did have feel pretty rusty. But we can take these really small steps.

Annie: It feels rusty and the cost feels higher, the risk feels higher because of cancel culture. So we feel rusty in conversation, we feel rusty in being together and in inviting people in and the risk is higher than it's ever been as how it feels-

Shannan: It's how it feels.

Annie: ...whether it's true or not.

Shannan: You will be shocked to hear that I have issues with the phrase cancel culture, Annie.

Annie: Tell me more. No, I don't know this. We have never talked about this.

Shannan: It's just that it's become like a political sound bite from both sides. It's a thing we've always experienced it but now we've been handed this catchphrase that means different things to different people. I think we have always had the risk of being... It's the fear of the risk of being rejected. That is nothing new under the sun. It's just been co-opted by these political machines. So of course I reject it.

Annie: I love that.

Shannan: But you're right in saying that the fear of being rejected or unloved or abandoned or you know, all these kind of core fears, those are always on the table. And it doesn't mean that if we put ourselves out there we're not going to experience some of that. But maybe if we just kind of go into this new bright world with our chins up knowing that like it's not going to be perfect, it's not going to happen the way we think it is. It's going to be very slow work that feel like maybe nothing is happening. But in December maybe we'll look back and see this one little area of growth.

[00:46:16] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting one more time to tell you about another amazing partner, [Raycon](#). Okay, I told you all this when she was on the show, but I've been listening to Taya nonstop lately, and it's been so great. Lyrics that speak straight to some things I'm living through. Truth that's building my faith, are crystal clear voice my ears. I seriously think one of the reasons it's been so good for me is that I've been using my Raycon wireless earbuds. So I'm like completely immersed.

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Sponsor: Do people walk into your kitchen and the first word out of their mouth is, Wow? Well listen, I think I've told this you before but my kitchen sometimes serves more of like a hallway than a destination where I spend a lot of time, you know?

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Now back to our conversation with Shannan.

[00:49:31] <music>

Annie: Okay, well you talk about routes are greater than wheels?

Shannan: Sure.

Annie: I love that chapter.

Shannan: Thank you.

Annie: And I feel like that's a good like why. That's a good way to what we're doing.

Shannan: I wrote routes over wheels is like choosing with intention to stay. Now, I listed the caveats because I know there are many. But there are all kinds of reasons that we are all going to not necessarily stay in this moment in time forever. But until we go, we really choose to stay.

Annie: That's right.

Shannan: We choose our place. We choose to find the beauty in it. Even if we have to really search for it for a while, it's there. I mean, God's beauty is in all things and we've got to be looking to find it. But yeah, choosing to kind of have some grit to us and to say, you know, this is our love song for the long haul. This is our testimony. This

is our commitment. And we are going to choose to be committed to this place and to these people.

One of my friends in Goshen-

Annie: Indiana, where you live.

Shannan: In Goshen, Indiana. Jason and Courtney, they live not far from me, like a mile from me, but they have chosen to make as much of their life happen within a four block perimeter.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Shannan: And that's the thing. They're so intentional about it. That is their commitment. Those are their roots. So, looking at it as like the Bible verse you read: we're in this place for a purpose with intention. So what do we do now? We let our roots kind of sink into the soil of each other.

Annie: I love that. For four blocks. I mean, our friends listening have heard me say a bunch like, I've decided that when it comes to church, it's 18:50 and I've got one choice. Right? There's one church in my town and I go to that one.

Just because otherwise, we can all hop around. 1850 is just a random year when cities were small, right? But it feels like the same idea of Jason and Courtney of going like, "I'm gonna play it right here." And I love what you said, "with the intention of staying." It does not mean if your job transfers you can't move or-

Shannan: No. Right. I think of military families. There's so many different reasons that... and there's a level of privilege to being like, "I will live here forever," because a lot of my neighbors they're at mercy of a landlord. And sometimes really problematic landlords. We don't all get to choose these things. And it's really important for us to acknowledge that.

I can maybe choose to stay in my house forever. It's my house, but so many of us, that's not our life. I'm all about acknowledging the ways my life might be easier than it is for some of my neighbors, just because I know a lot of people whose life is difficult.

So in routes over wheels, we talk about the boundary stuff, which is not something... for years I was like, booo. Like when talked about self-care, I was like, booo. But I have grown since then. And I have now seen up close and personal like, "Oh, yeah, they were right."

You know, I've had to be humbled in that way too. Like, if we're going to live in community, it will be messy, there will be complications, we will be exhausted, we will have conflict, like all these things are gonna happen. We do have to take care of ourselves. Surprise, Shannan, you're gonna have to have some boundaries.

Writing about those things in a way that kind of makes it plain and makes it practical and acknowledges it's not always going to be easy but it can be pretty simple.

Annie: Hey, what did we not say about *Start with Hello*?

Shannan: We covered a lot. What we didn't say about *Start with Hello* is that a lot of this... and this is important to me. This is a really practical book but it's also because I am a storyteller by nature, it leans on stories of my neighbors, and what I have learned from them specifically.

And one of the most special things, which you know about, you were here all along, one of my neighbors was one of my readers for this. I hate him to kind of go through. Jose, he was amazing. But yeah, what I want people to know is it's going to be a practical guide for moving towards each other and moving through this division and all the things, all the things. But it's also going to be a glimpse at really beautiful people and just some really ordinary, beautiful stories of how all this really works.

Annie: It's a beautiful book, Shannan. And that is a huge tip to our author friends is one of the things that a lot of us do is we pay two or three people who are not like us to read our manuscripts-

Shannan: Who we think are not like us.

Annie: Yes, yes, yes. Sorry. Sorry. Who we have perceived are not like us, in that they can see blind spots I cannot see.

Shannan: 100%.

Annie: And you were one of mine.

Shannan: Yeah. I forgot about that.

Annie: Me too.

Shannan: I paid you to read *That Sounds Fun* because... I think I paid you with American dollars. I hope I did. I did. I did because I remember who else. I remember who else was readers.

Shannan: Yes. Yes, yes.

Annie: But a lot of us do that because we can accidentally right through a blind spot-

Shannan: Oh, I did.

Annie: Me too.

Shannan: 100%.

Annie: It's so embarrassing when you get the manuscript back. I was so embarrassed when you and the other readers sent it back and were like, "That is a really sideways way to believe for a person who lives on earth." And I was like, "Oh, I'm so embarrassed, but it's so good."

Shannan: I didn't say it to you like that.

Annie: No, no, no. That's just how I heard it.

Shannan: Oh, dear.

Annie: That's how I heard it.

Shannan: No, it's vulnerable. It's vulnerable. And that's why we got to do it.

Annie: That's right.

Shannan: I mean, he pointed out a... He's not an eight. So he might have been a little more gentle.

Annie: Yes, y'all were very kind.

Shannan: But yes, he's like, "Would you consider..." And I'm telling you what, Annie? He saved my book with one story in particular and I learned something huge that I just did not know. And I am so profoundly grateful.

Annie: Me too. I was so embarrassed about a couple of stories y'all pointed out and so thankful that only three people saw it instead of the however many ended up reading the final copy.

Shannan: You don't have to go into detail at all but was there a story that we all were kind of flagging?

Annie: Yeah. Everybody flagged one story the same. And then there was a couple of moments. I mean, everybody was very kind, but yeah, there was one story that everybody said, "Hey, that doesn't work." And I was like, "Wow."

Shannan: And now you know.

Annie: I'm with you. I learned a big thing. I'm so grateful.

Shannan: I know it forever now.

Annie: Yes, that's right. That's right. So any of our friends writing books-

Shannan: Do it.

Annie: Do it. You will be so glad once it's on a shelf.

Shannan: Jose and I have been friends for years but now we're buddies. We like have lunch together regularly. It brought us closer together, which is so beautiful.

Annie: I love it. *Start with Hello*, it's great. Shannan, the last question we always ask, as you'll recall from four years ago, because the show's called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Shannan: What sounds fun to me is being back home.

Annie: Yeah, you've been gone.

Shannan: I'm at the end of... It's the longest stretch. It's not that long. But I've been gone for a week. I'm ready to be home in my messy house with my people. And I'm just gonna say it, it's the very very, very end of pickle season-

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Shannan: ...I want to make one more batch of pickles.

Annie: I'm going to try. I believe in your party bark recipe. I believe in it.

Shannan: Oh. I believe in it.

Annie: It's delicious.

Shannan: So I need to believe in your pickle recipe. Pickles and party bark. Who knew?

Annie: It's this guy. And you're very tall.

Shannan: And socks.

Annie: And socks. That's right. It's what you're known for. Where can we get your pickle recipe?

Shannan: It's on shannanmartin.com. Okay, it's a free download. My artist friend painted a beautiful watercolor.

Annie: Oh, I love it.

Shannan: It's so beautiful. But yeah, you can find anything you need over there.

Annie: And the book is out everywhere where people love to read it. Congratulations, friend. Thanks for doing this.

Shannan: Thanks, Annie.

Annie: I love you.

Shannan: I love you too.

Annie: You're such a good teacher and a friend. And I'm really, really grateful.

[00:57:41] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, don't you love her? She's just amazing. Okay, grab your copy of *Start with Hello*. Follow her on social media so you can tell her thanks so much for being on the show.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that is how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me, y'all, I'm about to drive out to a place called Camp Widjiwagan here in Tennessee to hang

out with some friends that are gathered. I cannot wait. I love that place. So it's a beautiful day to go on a drive. I cannot wait.

Y'all have a great weekend. Go on drive yourself. We'll see you back here Monday with the brilliant Diane Langberg. See you then.