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

But before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our amazing partners, [Thistle Farms](#). Y'all, it's Thanksgiving week in America, friends. And y'all know how excited I get to be surrounded by my friends and my family and my MiniBFFs, all my favorites. I just love the laughter and the food and the light of the holiday season.

Y'all heard me talk about Thistle Farms before, an organization that's doing so much good in Nashville where I call home, but their reach extends around the world. This social enterprise provides healing, housing, and employment for women survivors of trafficking, prostitution, and addiction. They employ survivors and fund their programs by selling beautiful lotions, scrubs, candles, and essential oils that are handmade by the women in their program.

So this week as my family is getting together and also as I'm thinking about gifts that are on my list to buy, you best believe that Thistle Farms products will be the first on my list, both for myself and for those that I love. Specifically their holiday candles, y'all, if you are a candle person, they are to die for. Their newest scent is orange clove and it smells like cozy holiday hug in a candle.

We had one here at the office and there was a line of my coworkers hoping—"begging" might be a better word—to take it home with them. And as if candles aren't wonderful enough, they also sell them in gift sets, some of which include products made by women artisans in 21 different countries. Their mission is international and it is just so inspiring, y'all.

You can explore all of these products and learn more about Thistle Farm's mission at thistlefarms.org. And just for you, my friends, they've created the code THATSOUNDSFUN. So be sure to enter that at checkout and you'll get 15% off your order.

And just a reminder that all the links to our sponsors, the transcripts of the shows, our weekly email newsletter, the AFD Week in Review, and our Advent series, all of those links are conveniently available in the show notes below.

Today on the show I'm getting to talk with my friend Tsh Oxenreider. You might remember her from way back on Episode 34 or from our 2020 Christmas Party here on the podcast. And if you missed either of those, be sure to go back and listen.

Tsh is an expert on the church calendar and has written beautiful books and devotionals. Other titles she might answer to, she's a podcaster, a travel guide, newsletter writer, high school English teacher and a wife and a mom.

Her work around Lent and Advent and the liturgical calendar makes her the perfect person to help usher us into the season of Advent and help us prepare our hearts for our Advent series that get started so soon—this Sunday, six more days. So that's why we asked her to join us today.

And since this week's episodes are helping us walk toward Advent, we've got a special video version of this one available on YouTube, just as a kind of taste of what watching the Advent series videos will be like. It's not exactly the same because those are shorter devotionals rather than conversations like today's but we thought that would be fun to try.

And Tsh was generous enough to roll with it and come to Nashville. So you can find that at the link in the show notes or by searching Annie F. Downs on YouTube. It's also available in the Anniefdowns.com/advent spot where your Advent library is. You can go watch the video there as well. But since you're already listening here, here is my conversation with Tsh Oxenreider.

[00:03:37] <music>

Annie: Tsh, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Tsh: Thank you.

Annie: Thanks for being in person.

Tsh: Yay! I'm so glad. It's fun.

Annie: All the way from Austin Texas.

Tsh: Yes. Well, you have fall, and I'm glad to have fall.

Annie: Yeah, you get a whole day of it. You can just like drive around and see leaves. And it's very cold today.

Tsh: It's cold.

Annie: Everyone's surprised.

- Tsh:** Like I threw in my coat right before I left, and I'm glad I did. I needed it.
- Annie:** We all woke up shocked. Just so you know. Everyone was very surprised, just so you know.
- Tsh:** Good to know. All right.
- Annie:** Okay, big topic. Before we even jump into Advent, you quit Instagram.
- Tsh:** I did.
- Annie:** Do you miss it?
- Tsh:** No. Here's the thing. It was a slow downhill like... what's the metaphor? Exit ramp downhill something
- Annie:** Yeah, that's what you said in the post is you're like, "I've been thinking about this."
- Tsh:** I've been thinking about it for like a year. I had slowed down on posting big time. My work wasn't dependent on it anymore. So I just held on to it. Like had it as this last thing I felt like I was quote, "supposed to do." So I left it for a month to see how I felt. And I was like, "This is exactly what I want."
- Annie:** Wow.
- Tsh:** I still have my account there kind of as a little like flag so that people can go there. Well, first of all, there's like links out in the account. But so that people can see where I'm at. Like, you know, I don't want to just pretend I don't exist anymore.
- Annie:** Totally. Totally. It's not like... you didn't leave the internet.
- Tsh:** Right.
- Annie:** What was Instagram not being for you anymore and what was it being for you that both made you leave?
- Tsh:** So second part first. It was a chore. Like 10 years ago, it was fun for me. It was purely posting and purely seeing people's pets and babies and things they were doing.
- Annie:** Garden.
- Tsh:** Yeah, garden.

Annie: Food.

Tsh: Yeah. And then it just got weird, I guess. And I noticed that I was focused on numbers a lot. And I would let those things decide for me how I felt that day. And it just messed with my head to the point where I started creating boundaries. Like, you know, Okay, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, or do whatever. Or I would have my assistant check things instead of me. And it just got to be where it became this huge thing that I had to figure out.

So long story short, I just realized that our why wasn't worth it anymore. So I'm in a mastermind group with some writer friends. I write a lot more now than I do other things. And she was telling me she just launched a big book thing on Kickstarter, starting a publishing company, blah, blah, blah. And they were really intent on tracking where people came from. And it was like 1% came from Instagram. And for her sort of this realization of like, "Oh, it doesn't matter as much as, quote, they say."

As a person, it was messing with my head. I teach high school girls or I teach high schoolers, a lot of girls and I know the statistics, and I know the issues and I know how it's messing with them in particular as a demographic. So I didn't want to be on it and tell them they shouldn't be on it.

Annie: Right. When you're looking at their lives and going, "This isn't good for your mental health but I'm fine."

Tsh: "I am totally fine," but I'm not fine. And ultimately I just didn't miss it like I thought I would. I really didn't. So I will say there is a trade-off. I don't get to keep up with people like you and some of our mutual friends that are just doing things. But if I really want to know I can text. I can connect. I can just say hi. I mean, there's enough ways to do it to where it just wasn't worth it holding on just for that.

Annie: And is there some level of benevolent detachment, as John Eldredge calls it of, you know, we aren't meant to know everything.

Tsh: Well, that's the thing. So I don't know if you've heard of this term called Dunbar's number. It's a-

Annie: 150 or something, how many people you can really know.

Tsh: So it's this anthropologist. His name is number. He basically studied that most people in human history have known 150 people or been in connection, like in

community with. And that includes things like the barista and your mail carrier. So we're not even talking-

Annie: Like 150 phone numbers.

Tsh: Right.

Annie: Right.

Tsh: So it's almost like, yeah, it's not a very human app or platform. I mean, you could say that with all social media really. But yeah, it was like I don't need to know about this random person I met one time at a conference and their vacation right now or their home remodel. I'm sure they're lovely human beings, you know, go with God. It looks great but I just don't need to know. So, yeah.

Annie: I often will open my Instagram and if you look at who you follow, there's an option of who I interact with the most and who I interact with the least. And I will look through that and go, "Yeah, that is right. I haven't talked to that person in real life in a decade. I can unfollow their Instagram and release them from having to follow me if they feel like they..."

But I had a similar experience with TikTok where I got on because everybody was on and I thought it was fun. And then all of a sudden, I was like, "Oh, this is taking up so much of my time. I'm not offering anything. I'm just being a consumer." I don't like it. I don't like how it makes me feel. I don't like how I was not getting as much sleep. I mean, it was dumb. The problem of not sharing a bed is that you can end up watching things much later than you probably should.

Tsh: Sure.

Annie: So I hear that. What have you done with your time? You're writing more?

Tsh: I'm writing more. Here's the thing. That addictive feature or that addictive nature is a feature and not a bug, right? So all these apps they're meant to be addictive. So once you get off, you suddenly realize like I was addicted. So there's very few of us that aren't, but it's not because we're bad people. It's because that's just what they're meant to do.

Annie: That's right.

Tsh: So yeah, with my time, it's not like suddenly I have like hours and hours more time, but I kind of do because even if I wasn't on all that much, it was in my head. And so now that it's not in my head, I'm writing and I'm able to concentrate more long

form. Like I'm reading more. I can sit still for longer. When I'm in line at the checkout, I'm like reading a book.

Annie: On your phone, on a Kindle or something?

Tsh: Kindle or audiobook or something. Like instead of just mindless scrolling. So it's like, Oh, I'm a person who can focus." And then I'm writing a lot more. My whole thing is book writing. That's what I prefer to do with all my work. So yeah, that's what I'm doing more.

Annie: I am new to the Kindle life. I got one this summer and it has changed my life. Because a) the Kindle app is on my phone, and so I can pick up where I left off on my Kindle by side of my bed right now if I wanted to.

Tsh: That's true.

Annie: Shauna Niequist taught me this. But my discipline is when I'm waiting in line, if you can't just stand here, and wait in line, which is my first goal... Can you just stand and wait in line with everyone else and just not be on your phone? If I can't, I try to go to your Kindle app first. Because I'm trying to do the practice, as you're teaching it, of extending my ability to focus on something. And that is not what the internet wants.

Annie: And most of us don't. Like if you do that and you start looking around, you'll see you're in the minority, you're not looking at your phone. And so yeah, I mean, it's just kind of the way our culture is now and I'm not a big fan of that. I really don't want us to just be staring at squares.

Annie: I know. I know.

Tsh: It just feels like a weird thing to be a slave to. It's really weird. That's the thing. When you detox from it, you back away. Instagram actually seems kind of weird.

Annie: So what other rhythms do you have around your phone? Is Kyle on the internet, your husband?

Tsh: Barely.

Annie: Barely. The kids, do they have social media?

Tsh: No. We won't let them till they're 18. Tate was on it, my oldest, for a hot second, instant issues with her mental health, emotional health, relational. And we're like, nope, took it off and within like two weeks she was back to her normal self.

Annie: Oh my gosh!

Tsh: So it was that drastic. So no, no one in our family is on social media except for me with Twitter, but it's not on my phone. So I don't check it on my phone. I don't have any social media apps on... My phone is actually really boring. I purposely also like grayscaled it and made the icons like just plain black and white, which is weird. Like why would that matter? But it makes it less enticing.

Annie: John Mark Comer writes about that in his *Hurry* book.

Tsh: He does.

Annie: Of like turn your phone to grayscale and it'll make it way less interesting to you,

Tsh: So silly.

Annie: ...which is so insane.

Tsh: It's like we are pathetic people.

Annie: I know. It's one of the reasons I have two phones. I have what I call my work phone and my personal phone. But my work phone is literally a tiny computer.

Tsh: Sure.

Annie: That is all my apps, my email, Slack, Instagram, all the things I do for work are there. And evenings and weekends, it's just not available to me.

Tsh: That's good. I like that.

Annie: And so that way my phone is... while it is not grayscale, it is how I talk to people. It is calling and texting. And that's about it. And I can take pictures. But I don't even have an editing... I don't even have this go on there. Oh, that is over on the work phone. So I'm always like, no, no, I don't have two phones. I have a phone and a tiny computer. That's what I have. That is what I have. I have two of those.

As we're thinking about Advent, if you don't mind, give us a little bit of a thought around switching out habits. When we talked at Lent, Lent is get rid of things to make space. Is that true for Advent, too?

Tsh: Sometimes advent is called a little Lent. I'm not sure I totally agree with that. Because there is a little bit of a penitential kind of mindset. But really, it's about

preparation. I mean, Lent is too but this one really is about preparing. It's sort of like when you're preparing for company or you're preparing for birth, you know, preparing for some big thing to happen. That's what we're doing in Advent leading up to Christmas.

So in some ways, yeah, it might look like kind of what you might do whenever you're about to feast. You know, you're like, "We're just going cheap with food this week, because we're gonna have this really great food on the weekend." That kind of mindset. So sometimes people will do that. Especially like the Orthodox tradition, they are hardcore. They really do fast during Advent.

Annie: They do?

Tsh: They do.

Annie: Oh, I didn't know that. The same kind of like no eating or do they do like simple?

Tsh: I think they do no meat. You know what? I'm gonna say it wrong and someone-

Annie: So Orthodox, meaning Catholic or even Orthodox...?

Tsh: No, like Eastern Orthodox.

Annie: Eastern Orthodox. Wow. Okay. Wow. So they do a fast during Advent, too. That's really interesting.

Tsh: So some people will do that if they want to kind of cultivate that preparation sense of like, I can't wait to-

Annie: What a bummer of a Christmas party.

Tsh: That's the thing that's hard is that our culture is not built for Advent.

Annie: No.

Tsh: So a lot of what we should... I mean, what I think works best is within our own homes. You know, you can't force people when you're going out shopping like, "Stop playing Christmas music. Stop playing Christmas music." That's not reality. So the same goes with like Christmas parties and Kid events. It's gonna be Christmas stuff.

That's what's hard in some ways because one of the cool things about advent is the buildup. So that when Christmas comes and traditionally it's 12 days long, it goes

till January 5th, a lot of us are sick of it by then. It's where you hear 12 Days of Christmas and you're like, "No, thank you."

Annie: And everybody's like clean up before New Year's.

Tsh: Right. Right. But if you can somehow, within your own homes, delay it or like build up to it, then you kind of enjoy the 12 days a little bit more.

Annie: And this year, one of the things I think is really cool that I'm going to use in my observation of the whole thing, of the whole season, Advent and Christmas tide, is that Epiphany is on a Friday. So I'm like, "Great, Epiphany is on a Friday. I will clean up my house on Saturday, Sunday." But I'm like, "No, I want to see what happens if I care about the 12 days of Christmas."

Tsh: That's cool.

Annie: Because Epiphany is my favorite day of the year. I love Epiphany. But I'm not very good at observing Christmastide.

Tsh: Interesting.

Annie: Or Eastertide actually.

Tsh: Well, Easter is 50 days long, right?

Annie: Longer than Lent. I like to remind people. I think in the future, like we've kind of created this Advent thing for this year, I really hope to be the person who lets the experts create Advent and Lent, and I'll handle Eastertide and Christmas tide.

Tsh: Sure. Yeah, yeah, that's a good-

Annie: I'll handle the parties. I'll let you handle the hard ones. I'll be like, "And on Christmas come over here. We're gonna start 12 days."

Tsh: I love that. It's good.

Annie: Your Advent... So is this a season like Lent where we put our phones down? Is there a do an Advent study, whether it's Advent series with us or someone else? I mean, is it a trade-out?

Tsh: Kind of. Yes, you can. I mean, just like with Lent, it's a gift. It's not a have-to. So I think it helps to come to Advent with this idea of like, This is a gift from the

historic church that I am invited to participate in. Literally, everyone can. You don't have to be from some particular tradition at all. This is for all of us.

It's really old, just like Lent. So there's a lot of different ways to do it for, you know, history and tradition. So there's no one set like, do this. You know, the word Advent means arrival and so it's when you're preparing for something, there is a slow buildup. And so you could like say no to some things at the beginning and then gradually maybe say yes to things.

Annie: Oh, cool.

Tsh: Sometimes people do that with sweets, which is hard at that time of year, but you gradually increase the sweets or the Christmas music or the decorating of the tree, or things like that. But you can also do it in your own... Kind of in a Lenten way you can. But I think it's important to remember that this isn't quite the season of Lent at all. Like even if some people would call it a little Lent, I really don't think of it as that.

Annie: Yeah. It feels very different to me.

Tsh: It is. When you think of Christmas as a kid, the anticipation is almost more fun than the day itself. If you remember, like, as a kid Christmas night, you're like, "Oh, that was it." I guess I gotta wait a whole year for Christmas again.

Annie: Right.

Tsh: And it's because the month of December is so fun. And so it's kind of that idea. Like there's that spirit of like, you know, the hope for it, the waiting, the faith, the joy, all those things are very intentional. Because you're really gearing up for the big day, the big season.

Annie: Right. Right. In my experience growing up Methodist, the Advent and Lent have always been things but we didn't observe it by any stretch compared to what the traditional Catholic church or even Anglican or Presbyterian friends do. But we knew it. Particularly Lent. Lent was always like, "Y'all, this is gonna be hard. Give it up. Give whatever that thing is up." And with Advent, it was always like, which family is going to light the candle on Sunday at church. And that was kind of like, "And we're one week closer to Christmas."

Tsh: And if you think of like the grocery stores with advent calendars, it just feels like a countdown. In fact, a lot of people think Advent starts December 1st and it's 24 days.

Annie: Twenty-four days.

Tsh: So we just think of it as the countdown. Christmas is more than... like it's an actual set aside season in the liturgical calendar.

[00:19:21] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [StoryWorth](#). If you're spending time with loved ones over the holidays, chances are you're going to hear a lot of stories. The ones you love to hear, the ones you've already heard too many times.

But have you ever wanted to help your loved ones document those timeless stories? It can be challenging to write an entire book of life memories. I've done that a couple of times, you know. But StoryWorth makes it fun and easy. This is how literally anyone can write a book about their life.

So here's how it works. Every week StoryWorth will email your loved one a single life-related question that you pick from their collection. Like, what's the bravest thing you've ever done? Or what's the farthest away you've ever traveled? And all they have to do is reply with a story.

And then after a year, StoryWorth compiles your loved ones' stories, memories, and even any photos into an exquisite hardcover book, creating a beautiful and valued keepsake. The one that my dad is currently getting those emails. I can't wait to sit with my nephew and look at all of his granddaddy stories together. It's so fun. Millions of stories have already been told to StoryWorth because they make the process so simple.

So get started with your loved one for the holidays. And before you know it, you'll both be cherishing these timeless stories for generations to come. I wrote about memories I have with my grandmother in *That Sounds Fun*, the book, and y'all, oh my goodness, what I would give to have something like a StoryWorth keepsake about her life and her words?

So help your family share the story this holiday season with StoryWorth. Go to storyworth.com/thatsoundsfun today, and save \$10 on your first purchase. That's storyworth.com/thatsoundsfun to save \$10 on your first purchase. [Storyworth.com/thatsoundsfun](https://storyworth.com/thatsoundsfun).

Sponsor: And I want to tell you about another one of our incredible partners, [The Chosen](#). Okay, if you heard our episode with Lysa TerKeurst last week, you know she and I

both got to visit the set of The Chosen while they were filming Season 3. Y'all, it was so cool.

If you're not familiar, The Chosen is a series of shows based on the Gospels and it's an incredible visual retelling of the stories of Jesus' life. The first two seasons have been out for a while and just this past Friday, Season 3 released in theaters. You know our team was there for Jesus and popcorn. Ooh, we had the best time. I know you're gonna love it.

Season 3 picks up right where Season 2 left off, Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Mount, and then we get to see how things start to pick up. The group of people following Jesus are starting to try to live out what He's teaching them. And He's also really getting the attention of some people who are not so keen on all the hubbub. But in the midst of all the craziness, Jesus brings peace and rest. Isn't that just what He does?

So go see episodes 1 and 2 of Season 3 in theaters now, and then be on the lookout for episodes that they start releasing for free in The Chosen app before Christmas. And you can head over to YouTube and see our video of me getting to tour Capernaum. It was so cool.

Hey, for more information about seeing the two episodes in the theaters, which you gotta go do, visit thechosentickets.com. Again, that's thechosentickets.com for all the info.

And now back to our conversation with Tsh.

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Annie: One of the things when we were setting up the Advent series talking about hope, peace, joy, and love, there were all sorts of names for the candles. So there's the shepherd's candle and the prophecy candle. I mean, it was just kind of like, why do they all have different names? So do you know? What's the hope...? Why are those the four things we go after during Advent?

Tsh: Different traditions have adopted different ways of doing that. It's a very strange thing, in my opinion. As someone who grew up nondenominational, I was like, What? When I think of it as... Now you're gonna make me say it wrong.

Annie: I know. Hope, peace, joy, love.

Tsh: Okay. To me, there is a little bit of a logic to that. Like hope is the beginning. So it's that true, like start of that anticipation. You know, it tends to be the Sunday after

Thanksgiving a lot of times. And so you kind of get that like yay, peace in that sense of "Okay, we're now in the holiday season. This is great." The joy, you're getting excited about it more. And then the love.

The joy tends to be a pink candle.

Annie: Yeah. Why is that the one that's pink?

Tsh: I have heard different interpretations of it. But the one I like is that it's the Marian candle. So it reminds us of Mary about to give birth. And so it's like the last few days when she's expecting. So it's that remembering what that must have felt like. I don't know. I think that's kind of cool. I don't know if that's true with a lot of traditions but that's the thing I like the most.

Annie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was really fun researching into those and paying attention to why different traditions call it certain things. And you're like, "Oh, yeah, of course, the shepherd one goes along with... Like, "Oh, now I understand. That makes sense." And so I thought that was really interesting.

Tsh: I think you hit on a larger idea, and that is, whenever you didn't grow up with advent, sometimes you feel overwhelmed at all these things. Like you're calling it a billion things. Okay, we light candles, but then we also do what and we... So some people will just say, "It's not for me," or "Too much," or "Why would I add another thing to an already busy season?"

And I think it's helpful to remember you really don't have to do all the things. You can do one thing. You can literally light a candle every day, like you said. You can just intentionally listen to an Advent playlist. You can do a scripture study. There's not like a big to-do list for Advent. It's a gift. And so if you feel confused by names of candles, don't worry about it.

Annie: Right. Right.

Tsh: Maybe in a few years, you'll want to do more of a deep dive on that. Just take what works for you, leave the rest and don't sweat it. That's what I tell people. My book that I wrote about it, it has five things to do a day. And I tell people like, especially if you have little kids, or if it's finals week or whatever, do one of those things. Truly, pick one thing.

Annie: But one of the things I love about your book, *Shadow and Light*, is you give us art to look at and a playlist, music to listen to every day. So there's always this, like, full-rounded experience around it. But pick what works for you.

Tsh: Right. It's intentional because, you know, the sensory experience I think matters a lot. We're human beings. You know, we live in bodies. And so we're not just heads floating around. So if we just read scripture, pray in our head and then move on, we're kind of missing out on maybe some of the sounds, the sights. And that's what we like about the holiday, isn't it?

Annie: Yeah, that's what everybody wants. One of the things I've heard a lot, feedback I've had a lot about Advent that I'd love for you to speak into, you're married, you have three kids, so when y'all celebrate Advent, it's like a "we" thing. But a lot of our friends listening... I mean, our stats tell us half of our audience is not married. And so half of our friends listening that are not married are going like, "I mean, I'd love to observe Advent, but is it just a Bible study? Do I light a candle at my house by myself?" Sometimes their traditions of the Christian church make us feel more lonely.

Tsh: Yeah, yeah.

Annie: So what's your advice or thoughts for people who are alone on a daily basis when they're trying to observe a season like Advent?

Tsh: It's kind of communal season honestly.

Annie: More than Lent is to me.

Tsh: Oh, way one Lent, for sure. I know of someone who is single in my town who does Sunday gatherings every Advent. Every Sunday in Advent, that's a potluck. And that's particularly for Advent to... You know, and they do the candle-lighting thing. So they kind of treat it like a family meal, but with a group of whoever. And I don't think it's even just for single people. I think it's for whoever wants to just do it together.

So I would really advise people especially because during the holidays we can feel even lonelier than normal to go out of your way to invite people and make it weird anyway.

Annie: Yeah, make it weird.

Tsh: And you super can just say, like, "Bring whatever food." You can even like, "Everyone just bring your own meal. Let's just eat together kind of thing. I think it's important to think of Advent kind of with that done is better than perfect idea. Like it does not need to look-

Annie: Done is better than perfect.

Tsh: It doesn't need to look Instagram-worthy at all. Like do not sweat that you've got all your stuff together, that your house is clean. Just gather. And then I think the sensory experience thing is good on those other days of the week. Like, honestly, your Lent can be going on a walk. I keep saying Lent. Your Advent can be going on a walk. It can be recognizing the change in seasons, it can be listening to the plays.

Don't feel like you have to like make it a ceremony. If it feels weird to light a candle by yourself back home, don't feel like you're going to just not do Advent at all.

Annie: Done is better than perfect. Is that what you said?

Tsh: That's what I said. Yeah.

Annie: That's great. I need to hear that because I even... I have this like little dream of a small group I want to do at my house, but I keep not doing it because I'm like, "I need to get two more chairs. If I could get two more chairs..." No, I don't. I have two chairs outside that I can just dust off and bring in. But in my head I'm hearing the only way this work is if it's perfect, so wait until you have a budget for two more chairs and wait until you find the two right chairs. But if we do that with Advent, we will miss Advent.

Tsh: We will. I mean, I'm in that same boat. We live in a fixer-upper and I'm always thinking, like, "When we have sideboards or baseboards or whatever..." And at some point, it's just not gonna matter. And people don't care. In fact, I think people are kind of blessed when they come to a somewhat janky house, you know, more than we realize. People don't want to come into a museum. So don't let that be an excuse. Advent is short, honestly. You think it's four weeks long-

Annie: It's so much shorter than Lent. My gosh.

Tsh: On the calendar, it feels like, Oh, it's a whole month. But it goes by so fast because you've got a lot of things. I think that's the other thing that's helpful to remember is to not go into Advent with this idea of like checking off a list, so that if you have three events in a row that on day four you feel, quote, "behind" and you have to do like three days worth of something.

Annie: Yeah. Oh, right.

Tsh: Don't do that to yourself. Just let God talk to you that day. Open whatever devotional you're doing on that day. Don't feel like you have to catch up. That's a temptation for a lot of us in Advent.

Annie: Talk to those certain Myers Briggs Enneagram numbers. And you're like, "If I don't do them all I'm doing this wrong." But I say that a lot with *100 Days to Brave* or *Chase the Fun*. I'm like, Do not catch up if you're six days behind. Just jump in with us. Like get in right here. Let God talk to you today is the right language. That's a great way to say it. Let Him say to you today what He has for you today. Don't feel like you have to keep up.

Tsh: Right, right.

Annie: What is changing about Advent globally? Am I in a seat where I feel like more people care? Or is there something different going on?

Tsh: I think there's something different going on. And I thought that too because I started doing Advent with my kids maybe eight or nine years ago because I didn't really hear it, about it growing up other than the grocery store things, you know, chocolate, and at church. Like lighting a candle.

So I thought maybe it was one of those like, you know, when you get a new car, you start seeing that car everywhere. So I was like, "Oh, it's just because I'm aware." But I really think Advent is becoming more mainstream, at least among Christians, to where it doesn't seem as maybe intimidating to nondenominational types or just those who didn't grow up with it. And that's really cool. Because like I said, it's shared history for all of us under the unified church. And so it's for all of us. It's not just for those who grew up in a particular tradition.

Annie: And maybe I just feel... and this might be about a red car, so I see red cars, too. But I feel pulled toward things that are old and traditions that are rooted. And I want to time myself to those in some way that I don't know that I felt 10 years ago. Maybe it's elections and maybe it's discord in our nation and in our faith. I feel a lot of discord in our faith between people who disagree but claim Jesus. And so there's something about tying to these things. But can they even find where Advent and Lent started?

Tsh: I know Lent started... like we have record of it in just documents in the like 140s. So even before we decided what was in the Bible, so in that way Lent is older than the Bible. I don't know if you can say that. But Advent I think we have record of it first mentioned and like the 800s, 900s. It doesn't mean it didn't exist before them.

Annie: Sure.

Tsh: So it's been around a long, long, long time. And I'm with you. I think, you know, we could talk for hours about the whole, like, what is it that's making us vie for

more tradition? But we forget, I think, as Americans how young our traditions are a lot, you know?

Annie: And our country?

Tsh: Yeah, and our country as well. Kyle and I used to live in Turkey and it was just such an eye-opening experience for us to live in the place where the church started. We lived in İzmir, which is the ancient city of Smyrna.

Annie: Wow.

Tsh: I remember Tate's third birthday party was at a McDonald's and across the street was this plaque that said, like, this is where - what was his name? Oh, I forget which St. died. Like was murdered. I'm completely blanking. But it's like one of those super old like in the first-century saints. And it's like, that is just mind-blowing to this American.

So I say all that to just say sometimes we think, Oh, this is old because I'm like... I don't know. There's old, as in less than 100 years old, and there's old, as in like 2,000 years old.

Annie: Yes.

Tsh: And things like Advent and Lent, just the liturgical calendar in general speaks to that. I think when you're not sure what is going on in whatever God is doing in your life, and in your church community, whatever, a lot of us are, you know, going through a lot, there's something that feels really grounding about participating in something that millions and millions of people have done over the years.

Annie: Yes. It's one of the reasons we worked really hard to make sure the Advent series matched what was happening globally. Because we went like, "There are millions of people who are talking about hope, peace, joy, and love for the next four weeks."

When I lived in Scotland, the building I lived in was built in the early 1700s. And one of my friends was like, "You recognize that this flat is older than America." And I was like, You know, I don't pay attention to that enough. I don't pay attention to how young our traditions are and our decision, and even in some ways Protestantism compared to Catholicism and the birth of the church.

Tsh: I don't know when it was when I realized that like I heard about, you know... Went on in Acts, the book of Acts, and then like Martin Luther...

Annie: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tsh: And I was like, Wait, there were 1,500 years of things. It wasn't just like the dark ages. There was a lot that happened." I think we miss out on a lot.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. It feels like things like Advent, Epiphany, 12 Days of Christmas, Eastertide and Lent are in an ordinary time so boring. Ordinary time wears me out. This year I had a, I don't know if you saw something on the internet, but my sister had a baby that passed away. But he lived 56 days. So it was a long summer of sadness. And multiple times, I thought, "This is so ordinary time. Like this would happen in ordinary time.

Tsh: It sounds like such an Annie thing to say. Like an Enneagram seven. Because to me, by the time Eastertide is over, I'm grateful for ordinary time.

Annie: Ah, yeah.

Tsh: That's just me. I don't know what it is. But I like that.

Annie: I can hear that. It's like, I don't need another celebration or another start and finish. I just want to live for a little bit.

Tsh: And that makes me excited about the season. Because Advent is the New Year of the liturgical calendar. So in some ways, the first Sunday is like Happy New Year for the Church. So you get this build up. Like you get Christ the King Sunday, All Saints Day, All Souls Day, and then Advent. And it kind of feels this like, yeah, new year, new you for the church in a way.

Annie: I don't think I realized that. That is the start. I mean, that's why it's at the top of the liturgical calendar circle.

Tsh: Yeah. It doesn't make sense for like actual calendar or Gregorian or whatever it is. But it does, yeah.

Annie: Wow.

[00:36:38] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just taking a quick break from this conversation to tell you about another one of our amazing partners, [Everlywell](#). So the holiday season is thinking a lot about gifts and gratitude, right, we've already talked about it. And one gift to be truly grateful for is our health.

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And now back to finish up our conversation with Tsh.

[00:39:55] <music>

Annie: What do you know about Advent now that you didn't know when you started with the kids a decade ago?

Tsh: Oh, that's a good question. Let's see. Okay, you know how you were saying earlier like that had to be hard to deny yourself certain things. For me, I didn't know that I would kind of look forward to a little bit of that self-denial during Advent. Because in my mind, when I started doing advent it felt like, well, why would I add one more thing? And I think what I realized was it's not adding more it's giving myself permission to savor.

Annie: Wow.

Tsh: So instead of feeling this pressure of making every day special during Advent, I actually can... like week one, we put our tree up; week two, we put the lights on.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Tsh: Week three, we decorate it. And then I'm not dying to take it down on December 26th. So to me, it's like I didn't... And when I first heard that, I was like, "Why would I do that to myself? I love Christmas. Why would I do that?" But it's actually good for me. It's kind of like doing the hard thing, like, you know, doing the workout, you're glad you did it. It's kind of that idea. So that's probably it.

Annie: The savoring is such a good word for me because I think one of the reasons I want to clean up Christmas so quick is, "Okay, we're done. Let's go to the next thing, to

the next thing." And the practice of my actual life is not rushing through this to get to that because it never... It doesn't. It does not serve me.

It actually does not serve me in the long run because it means I've rushed through everything. Because there is no next that I savor because I'm trying to get through, to get through, to get through. And so even the process of "could the discipline be to leave my Christmas tree up that long?"

Tsh: It's weird. I love New Year's Day. To me there's that clean slate feeling. I love that. It really is this almost weird "hold on just a little longer, just a little longer" to make it more of what I feel like maybe God's inviting us to do. Like, no, keep celebrating. Keep being excited that Jesus came to earth, you know?

Annie: Yes! Yes!

Tsh: And then a lot of traditions end with the 12th night party, which I've always wanted to do. That sounds like such a cool way to do it. And people will bring their trees and create a big bonfire. There's a lot of cool ways to recognize, Okay, the next day when we do Epiphany, then it's almost like that's the new year, sort of. I don't know.

Annie: Wow. I mean, Epiphany is the one, man. If I ever have kids, I want to name one of them Epiphany.

Tsh: Why do you like it so much?

Annie: I think that it's really profound to mark the day that the wise men came to Jesus. I just think there's something about... And I like the word. I think the word means a lot. That you know something you didn't know before, and Mary talking about treasuring things in her heart. So I just have four, probably five years since Epiphany of 2017 was when I had a really profound experience around Epiphany.

Tsh: That's cool.

Annie: And I've loved it ever since.

Tsh: Do you do the chalking of the door? Do you know that tradition?

Annie: No. What's that?

Tsh: Okay. A lot of traditions will do this. You write with chalk on the outer frame of your front door. It's CMB and I can't remember what those letters stand for.

Annie: Something in Latin, right?

Tsh: Yeah. And then you write the year. It's supposed to mean basically like you're blessing your house for the year.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Tsh: And you're saying those who walk through this door frame will find what's inside to be a haven.

Annie: Wow.

Tsh: So a lot of traditions will like as a family pray and then they'll pray throughout their house.

Annie: And you do it on Epiphany?

Tsh: On Epiphany, yeah.

Annie: Oh, I'm doing it this year.

Tsh: Yeah, yeah.

Annie: Okay. What are y'all's family plans for Advent?

Tsh: So I teach English, and my kids are still in school, so we don't go anywhere. We have school at the same time. So those first few weeks kind of feel busy. And I bet a lot of parents understand that feeling. You're just kind of living life

Annie: And when Christmas comes... I think Christmas is a Sunday this year. So a lot of people won't get off work or school till midweek.

Tsh: I know. It's a weird thing.

Annie: Or Friday even.

Tsh: So I go with that. You know, I don't sweat it. But at night, as a family... and I mean, I'm talking... I've got an almost 18-year-old and almost 15-year-old and 12-and-a-half-year-old. So I've got older kids but we still make a point to light our Advent candles. We put them in a log. And we go through *Shadow and Light* and we listen to the song. It's based on the Psalms. So we read the Psalm. And a lot of times we do this over dinner.

Annie: Oh, sure.

- Tsh:** Because we're gathered anyway. Family dinner is a big deal for us. We really try to keep that sacred. But I've got like a kid who goes to bed after I do because she's up writing papers. You know, it's like we're past that age of tucking her into bed. That's just not a thing. So that's what we do. If we skip a day, we skip a day. Not a big deal. That's just how it rolls. That's what we do.
- Annie:** I mean, Tate's last Christmas at home.
- Tsh:** I know.
- Annie:** Whoa.
- Tsh:** It's a very weird thing.
- Annie:** It's a weird thing.
- Tsh:** I'm not ready. I'm not ready.
- Annie:** Well, okay, is there anything we didn't say about Advent that you think...?
- Tsh:** I think maybe don't be a purist as maybe sometimes... Like people will be almost too rigid about it. And there's no reason to be rigid.
- Annie:** Don't do it.
- Tsh:** If you want to listen to Christmas music, listen to Christmas music. Don't feel like you can't.
- Annie:** Be a little more rigid with yourself on Lent because you're meant to feel-
- Tsh:** Yes.
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Tsh:** This is anticipation. So sometimes we like sneak the chocolate, you know, and we go ahead and listen to the Christmas music.
- Annie:** I mean, I love getting to talk to you and then Thursday on Thanksgiving having Father Mike, to get this round experience of the unity of the church and how a couple of times of year we are actually doing the same thing.
- Tsh:** That's rare. I love it.

Annie: I just think it's beautiful. I love it. Every part of the body working together is better, I think.

Tsh: Amen.

Annie: I like it so much better.

Tsh: I think Jesus likes it too.

Annie: I do too.

Tsh: And just going on that.

Annie: I do too. Okay, well, Tsh, the thing I have to ask you, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you these days. What are you doing for fun?

Tsh: Like you said, it's Tate's last year at home. I have been showing her movies that I want to make sure she sees before she leaves the house.

Annie: Oh, right. What were some of the top ones?

Tsh: I mean, and they're not like important.

Annie: They are important to you.

Tsh: They are like *The Breakfast Club* or *Pretty in Pink*. Things like that. So, for me, it's like when she became a senior, I realized, like, "Oh, no, there's all these things that I always thought one day, one day, one day." And so we're just trying to enjoy it.

So we have a chalkboard in our house of just like when Kyle and I think of a movie we'll write it down. And so we've just been doing a lot of family movie nights, watching classics, like 80s movies and 90 movies. It's not just teen movies, either. Like we showed them *Braveheart*, you know, things like that. It's just movies that to us are like, "You got to see it even if you don't end up liking it."

Annie: Have y'all watched *Flight of the Navigator*?

Tsh: Yes. Oh, we love it.

Annie: I love it.

Tsh: I loved it when I was a kid and I was glad to see it still hold up.

Annie: It still holds up. Those stairs when the UFO opens-

Tsh: I know.

Annie: ...still blows my mind.

Tsh: They're still good. There's some that do not hold up.

Annie: Yeah, right.

Tsh: But that is not one of them.

Annie: As soon as Disney Plus had it on there, I was like, "This is the movie of my childhood." How do y'all snack during movie time?

Tsh: Depends on who's hungry.

Annie: Yeah, good point. Don't have to eat.

Tsh: I mean, popcorn sometimes. Kyle... his new thing is making Kombucha.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Tsh: So we have like a whole shelf in the fridge.

Annie: Oh my gosh. Like in different age things.

Tsh: It looks like a mad science lab.

Annie: I'm sure it does.

Tsh: And so he's like pouring different things. So sometimes we'll like sample Kombucha over movie night, which sounds so hippy. I just realized what that sounds like.

Annie: That's very Austin of you. Well done.

Tsh: It's so hippy. I don't know. We have what's called scrounge tonight. Nobody cooks on Sundays unless you want to cook for yourself.

Annie: Got it.

Tsh: So it's like raiding the fridge. So a lot of times it's like you're eating an apple and some carrots. All right, you do you. Someone else is eating a bagel.

Annie: Scrounge night. What a great like sort it out, everybody. We'll help you Monday through Saturday, but Sunday is scrounge time.

Tsh: Mm-hmm.

Annie: Great. And you just let them eat whatever is in their hearts.

Tsh: Honestly, I don't care. They're old. They'll understand. If they eat not great stuff they'll feel it.

Annie: Right. That's right. That's exactly right. If you don't have protein, you're gonna know at two o'clock in the morning you didn't eat protein.

Tsh: Yeah, they'll remember.

Annie: You'll do it different. Tsh, thanks again for doing this.

Tsh: Yeah.

Annie: You've been such a good leader and friend to me, but a great leader in observing parts of our faith that really matter to me. So thanks for doing this.

Tsh: Thank you for having me. I love talking this stuff.

Annie: Here comes Advent.

Tsh: That's right.

[00:49:00] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, isn't she just the best? That is a whole episode full of such helpful information. Oh my gosh, I'm decorating different this year. I totally am decorating differently. And I'm just thrilled. That's like the perfect way for us to kick off our walk toward the advent series this year. Be sure you're following Tsh on social media, tell her thanks for being on the show.

And if today's conversation had you more interested in our Advent series, just hop over to Anniefdowns.com/advent for all the details. There are beautiful video devotionals and Advent series guidebook to download and use as a companion,

resources for MiniBFFs and so much more. And if you're subscribed to this podcast, those daily devotional episodes are going to drop in your feed each weekday of Advent.

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's 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 is trying to get all my Thanksgiving clothes in a carry-on. That is my life goal and it sounds fun to me to try. How much am I gonna have to wear on the plane? This is the question.

Y'all have a great week. Happy Thanksgiving to our friends here in the US. We'll actually be back here with you on Thursday as normal as we continue walking toward Advent with one of my favorites and one of your favorites, Father Mike Schmitz. Father Mike is back, you guys. And on Thanksgiving, yes and yes. We'll see y'all then. Happy Thanksgiving, friends.