

Annie: Hi Friends! Welcome to a very special episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. And you might be thinking, "Annie, what are you doing in my podcast feed on a Sunday?" Well, this is no ordinary Sunday. This is the first Sunday of Advent. And this week, we are kicking off our Advent series. I'm so happy to be here with you today.

Today's episode is an introduction to the series, kind of giving you more of the why behind it and then tomorrow we really begin. I'm so ready. And I'm so excited to invite you into this season in this journey together. Welcome to the Advent series. Today is called Let There Be Light.

Happy Advent, friends! It starts today. I am so excited about this. But I'm going to start by telling you the whole truth. I do not like candles. I'm sorry to tell you but I just do not think they are safe, you guys. I know this is a very unAnnie hot take. I know.

Because I think the world would assume that I love candles, I don't know. Don't we all assume that everyone else loves candles? And if you've ever gifted me one, thank you very, very much. I do really appreciate it.

But to be fair, I did really love them during the stay-at-home phase of the pandemic in 2020. That is true. I burned through many a candle that had long sat in closets and on shelves and in piles. One of my coping techniques for being alone that much and that long was to make my environment as cozy as possible. And candles were a big part of that.

And I liked them then for a very reasonable and thoughtful reason: because I knew I wouldn't leave them burning when I left the house because I never left the house. But other than that one season of my life, I really just have not enjoyed candles. It's just the idea of having fire wide open in your home. Yeah, I don't know. I just don't like it.

Even last week... How many times have you left your house and been like, "Did I leave my straightener on? Did I leave my curling iron on?" And I have to have these like real conversations with myself, "No, Annie, you unplugged it. No, you unplugged it." And then I got home from work last Thursday, and sure enough, straightener is still plugged in and a blinking red, which blinking red says, "You left this on and you shouldn't have left this on but we turned it off for you as a straightener." I just don't like it. I just don't like heat available in my house all the time.

So it only felt right that we start this new thing, an Advent series for the first time ever on the podcast, that'd be centered around the four Advent candles. But I had to have a very honest and truthful moment for me with you about how I do not love candles because I honestly don't need one more thing to do before I go to bed or before I leave my house. I just can't in my mind have to wonder if there's fire in my house. Right? I can't forget one more thing, especially if it involves fire.

So I don't love candles. But I do love Advent. You know this about me. So it's a compromise I am willing to make. So if you know me, if we've already been friends, you already know that part—that I love Advent. Better said, I love the Christian calendar, the liturgical calendar. I'm a seasons person. I work best when I know a start and a finish, when the goals are set and the dates are on the calendar, and I know this is a season.

I love Lent. I love Eastertide. I love Advent. I survive normal time, but I find it very boring and very long. You can actually see and download a really beautiful liturgical calendar over at Anniefdowns.com/advent.

When I look back on all my years of my life, this one has not been the best one. It honestly probably won't even rank in the top 10 or the top half. But I felt the sunset of ordinary time on the Christian calendar in the first rays of Advent as they started peeking through and I felt this long, deep exhale for me. Like when I blow out a candle. Always blow out your candles, you guys. You have to blow out your candles.

Maybe you can relate. Maybe it's been a season for you too or a month, or an experience, or a decade. But I bet you know how this feels.

And also I've watched over the last few months as thousands of us watched through 100 days together as we started and finished *Chase the Fun*. And what I saw pretty quickly is that we like doing things together. We learn best together. We actually suffer better together.

I've experienced that profoundly this year with y'all, is that when we talk about our suffering, everyone else says, "Yeah, me too." We just suffer better together. And we finish what we start when we finish together. And I really want us to start and finish this Advent series together.

And this is the other thing that I've learned. We like when our devotions are short and give us something to think about and to ponder on our own. It's like the difference between discussion questions in a small group and sitting for a sermon or a lecture.

We're discussion question people when it comes to our devotions. We want guidance, and we want something from the Bible and we want to think for ourselves and process with our people and each other. So we're doing something a little different during Advent this year here on the That Sounds Fun Podcast.

We did that prayer series in April—Remember? I loved it so much. So did y'all. Y'all loved it so much—that we're like, okay, let's do an Advent series too." So instead of our normal podcast episodes, which release on Mondays and Thursdays, we're releasing a short devotional every single day Monday through Friday on the podcast. We're gonna have some Christmas party shows on Thursdays too. Don't worry. Y'all know I have to party.

But each of these four weeks of Advent, we're going to look at one of the Advent candles: hope, peace, love, joy. I know some of your faith traditions use some other titles for the candles but these are the four we are going to focus on. And we chose them on purpose. I find myself in great need of hope, and peace, and love and joy.

I need hope because as my mentor Nancy said to me a few times over the last few months, it won't always be like this. Whatever your "this" is, hope comes to remind you that it won't always be like this. Sometimes hope screams at us in big, profound ways and sometimes hope quietly flickers in the background. Yeah, like a candle. I know, I hear myself.

I need peace because when long to-do lists meet a packed calendar, meet disappointment or grief or trials of any kind, peace is laughable for me. And when you have to strategize when to sleep so that everything gets checked off the list and making sleep a literal thing to check off in your life, peace isn't just easy to conjure up. But peace also isn't long bubble baths and sleeping late. It's deeper than that.

I need love because of all the fruits of the Spirit and of all the lists the writers of the Bible made, love is on all of them and feels like the one thing that I fight for the most.

And I need joy because honestly this is the easiest of the four for me. You know that. I get joy. I get that it isn't a feeling, that it is more than happiness. Remember, I talked about fun on the daily. So joy gets all wrapped up in there. It's the one I can find on the floor of a dark room if I just reach around enough.

But maybe hope is easier for you than joy or love or peace. I just have this sneaking suspicion that this is the year we need to seek out these four and wonder about them and think about them and somehow find them. So pretty much what we're doing the next few weeks is chasing after hope, peace, love and joy. And I think they each have something very, very unique to offer us.

So while the podcast will be Monday through Friday, we've actually created a whole beautiful experience for you that you can get at Anniefdowns.com/advent. Every devo you hear is also a video. So if watching is better for you, we have them there.

And you can also download a PDF called the Advent Series Guidebook. And it's beautifully designed with questions to help you dig in every day and space to take notes and journal a little bit. It includes some extra thoughts each weekend for when you're having your day of rest or having a little time to yourself. Ears and eyes, we got you covered.

So invite your friends to join us. Again, that's Anniefdowns.com/Advent. That's where the Advent series guidebook is available to download with all the questions and scriptures and bonus thoughts. There's a Facebook group to join where we can talk to each other constantly.

I'm telling you we finish better when we finish together. What we have learned over the last year is y'all want to talk to each other. And so we've built this Facebook group that you can join where we are, where you are. Everyone is welcome. And that's a place where y'all can connect.

There's tons of resources for you and your kids. We've got a whole Advent series for my MiniBFFs, too and a video like this, if you're watching, for every day's episode if you'd rather watch than listen.

So let's do this together. Let's celebrate Advent together in a way we never have. There is something for us in these four weeks. There's something for us in these four words in these four candles that I think we really need.

So today I would love to pray for us as we start. Lord, we hand you Advent. We hand you Advent in a way we never have before. We hand you Advent with new commitment and new desire and new want. Because God, I don't just want to anticipate Christmas, I want to prepare for what you're doing in the next season. I want Advent to not only prepare us for Christmas but to prepare us for next year.

So, God, give us a little bit more space, give us a little bit more discipline, a little bit more time so that we finish this together. We are looking for you in this Advent season. When we are chasing hope and peace and love and joy, what we're actually chasing is You, Jesus. So we're looking for You. We love you and we trust you. In Jesus' name. Amen. I'll see y'all tomorrow.

Oh, friends, I'm so looking forward to what God's going to show us during these next few weeks. Invite someone to join us. Be sure you've got your Advent series guidebook ready. In fact, there are a few questions for reflection in the guidebook for today.

If you need anything else for me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that'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. We'll see you back here tomorrow as we start our week. That is all about hope. See you then.