

EPIPHANY 2023

Hi friends. Welcome to another episode, another year, of the That Sounds Fun podcast. I'm your host, Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here again with you.

We started a tradition last year- can it be called a tradition the second time you do something?- and I am excited to continue this tradition today- the tradition of you and I just chatting on Epiphany. That's today. January 6th. The last day of Christmastide. Day 12 of the 12 days of Christmas. And this is how we start the podcasting year.

I hope you had such a great Christmas season and a happy new year and I am so glad to be back with you today. I am ready ready ready for 2023.

I have a couple of goals with this episode every year (again, I know it's the second time, but we're calling it every year, okay? okay).

Thank yous.

Starts.

Announcements.

Invitations.

So.

First of all, some thank yous.

I have multiple thank yous today. You know how we talk about Sabbath not being just resting FROM work but resting TO the next thing? Consider these thank yous not just for last year, but also for the year to come.

First, I have to thank YOU for listening and being a part of this community. We think about you a lot, we listen to everything you tell us in emails and comments, on social media and in your reviews of the shows. (Which, by the way, if you've never rated and reviewed this podcast, let me thank you

in advance for doing that today? LOL... but if you could, it truly does help this show, by the magic of algorithms, get in front of a lot of new friends.)

So thank you for showing up here, for being such a good friend to me and a good friend to our guests that join us.

It's amazing to hear repeat guests talk about their experiences with you. How you show up for their concerts and events. How you yell their names when you are at the game they are playing in. How you support them with your time, money, prayers, social media, all of it. It's an incredibly cool part of us- we are good friends to the guests who come on here and they notice.

And I know you don't always agree with everything a guest says in the studio, or what they have said in the past, or there are times when you don't agree with something a guest does or says after they have been on the show. I get that. I've felt some of that too. But what is consistent is even in your disagreement, I have rarely seen our listener friends being the ones who lead the mob of unkindness. And that means a LOT to me. Because that same slow to speak slow to anger vibe that you extend to our guests, you extend to me. And I'm thankful. Because I know you don't always agree with me either.

Thank you for learning and growing alongside me and allowing me to make mistakes and missteps and misspeaks and in general, allowing me to be an evolving human who is growing and changing.

And we had a really big year in 2022 - lots of listener friends who've been with us a while, loads of NEW listeners, incredible guests, the second leg of our That Sounds Fun Tour back in February and March, an awesome Prayers Series in April, and of course, Advent.

I love making this show for you and I love that we are starting our NINTH year together and we have got some really big, really fun, really new plans. We're also bringing back some favorite series and favorite guests.

This Epiphany episode is the only time all year that I sit in this podcast studio alone. It matters to me that y'all know this. It matters because, in part, I want today to feel like a one on one conversation, like we're getting coffee. Except you know me, I'm drinking tea. But also, I want you to know I'm alone this time because usually I am NOT alone in here and I want you to picture what is true while you are listening.

I think y'all know this better now after the Advent Series than ever before. But it takes a big team to make this show for you twice a week, or DAILY as our team did during Advent.

So here's what you can imagine in your head:

During every interview, Craig, who is our engineer and photographer and videographer, sits in the studio with me to make sure everything gets recorded correctly and the files uploaded correctly.

Whenever I am reading introductions and sharing about our sponsors, Ashley, our COO, sits in the room with us as well to make sure I don't screw anything up.

Craig then turns all those files over to Johnny, who is our podcast producer and heads up the TSF Media team. All things media that come out of here pass through Johnny's incredibly gifted eyes and ears.

Then Jenna steps in, as part of the TSF Media team, and listens through the podcast episode before it releases. If you ever think I sound smart, it's probably because Jenna has edited out my mistakes. If you hear something that's a mistake, she's left it in on purpose to keep me humble.

Then Lillian listens to the episode as well, she's our CAO (Chief Annie Officer... which means she keeps my schedule and my life organized), and she is the one who does the show notes that you see below.

Speaking of show notes, y'all know that right here where you are listening- we put links in the app to the guest and to our sponsors. We also post a lot of links at anniefdowns.com/podcast, usually the morning after the podcast releases. And by "we" doing that, I mean "Lillian."

And the That Sounds Fun Network team helps us make sure we can work with the best sponsors. And they also provide great community for us with other podcasters. I know, I know, I'm a co-owner and founder of the network, but I'm also a client! LOL. For real, that team in the offices across the hall from this studio is extraordinary and have made this podcast so so much better.

So that's firstly. Thank yous.

Secondly, some starts.

We won't fix what isn't broke. For example, we'll still do shows on Mondays and Thursdays, maybe some bonus episodes here and there, and we won't have any shows record or release during Holy Week- that's between Palm Sunday and Easter, and we also won't record or release any shows during our Staff Sabbath, which is the first week of July. We think this is a good and right rhythm for our team and for our listener friends. Would I do five days a week to talk with all the guests I wish we could have on? One million percent. But for now, we are selective with our shows two days a week and which guests we bring to you. None of that will change.

But we are always up for making some changes and some adjustments and adding to the That Sounds Fun podcast in a way that we think will serve you best and be the most fun for you. So this year, you are going to start hearing, well, YOU on the show.

At the end of most episodes, if not all, one of YOU, our listener friends, will be joining me to tell me what sounds fun to you. How cool is that? Keep your ears open for how to sign up for that. We've got January sorted, y'all are gonna love hearing them, but we want you to jump in too, as the year

goes on, and introduce yourself to your thousands of friends who listen each week right along with you.

And as you know, the other start that is near and deeply dear to my heart- The Let's Read The Gospels podcast. The response to the first five days has already been extraordinary and has us excited about what God could be up to and what the next year is going to hold as we read the Gospels together- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John- 3 chapters a day for 30 days gets us through all four books, and we will do that every month. Just commit with us to January and see what happens! And if you missed a day, just jump back in with us.

Remember, you don't have to spend every day in the Gospels to be changed, but every day you spend in the Gospels will change you.

Make sure you have subscribed to that podcast feed- it's different than this one. It is it's own show all together. And we created a Let's Read The Gospels Guidebook that comes with the reading plan (and lots of other stuff) or you can just get the monthly reading plan. Both are available at anniefdowns.com/gospels.

Also? There's a new book coming out this year. But more on that later. Like way later. Like August later.

Thirdly, some important announcements.

Well for starters, it's high time to get that tour bus rolling and come and see you guys. So, we're taking June 2023 to bus around and hang out with y'all. But this tour is like nothing I've ever done before- it's called the Here For You Tour and it's me and.... CARLOS WHITTAKER, you guys. Yep, Carlos and I are coming to a bunch of cities in June because we like being where you are. We like to show up. You guys like to show up. That's why we named it what we did- the HERE FOR YOU Tour. Because you guys show up for us, show up for each other, and we get to show up, too. Each night will be incredible and unique and it's not a podcast tour, so none of it

will be recorded or shared. Just lived. To get more info and make sure you're signed up to get first access to tickets, go to hereforyoutour.com.

And we'll be doing another large group of friends going through Chase The Fun together this year as well! We won't be doing it until the summer, but grab the book and hang on to it- we'll gather up all the Chase The Funnners and do that 100 day devotional together later this year.

And of course, we've got some fun other things to tell you about this year, but I'm also a big fan of surprises so I gotta keep some things hidden for a little while longer.

And finally, some invitations.

I'd like to finish by inviting you to join me in the work I think God has invited us to. I don't know why, but I feel a pretty significant sense of urgency this year. Even as you've heard today, on Epiphany, there just isn't room for fluff this year. Now, there's always room for fun, but that's not fluff. We have too much to do, and we work hard, pray hard, rest hard, and play hard. So the only way we can do all that is if we are living and working on purpose. Something feels different this year- streamlined, focused, stalwart.

We have a renewed and I'd say a new sense of purpose. A sense that it matters who hears these shows, it matters who hears the Gospels. I don't know what else our team will dream up and build in the future, but I know that I speak for all of us when I say that we feel deeply called to the work we're doing through That Sounds Fun Podcast and Let's Read The Gospels.

As this year goes on, it would mean a lot to me if you would just share the episodes that matter most to you. Repost them on your social media, email the links out to your people, text while you are listening. (65% of our shared episodes come from you just hitting send in a text message. That's wild to me.) I can't reach your friends- you can reach your friends. And your friends, like me and my friends, need hope. They need strength. They need

Jesus and everything good that comes from relationship with Him. Please invite your friends along- to listen to episodes, to read the Gospels, to sit with you at a tour stop in June or a speaking event, to read a book I've written along with you as you read. Let me be a bridge between you and your people to inspiring and encouraging resources and creators. And Jesus. Let me be a bridge, for your people, to Jesus. It would be my greatest honor and I will handle with care every friend you invite along into our little world of friends we have here.

And my final invitation is an invitation to join us in prayer. We really need your prayers. I need wisdom as a leader here, as the tip of the arrow, I need to hear God and have direction. Wisdom and courage are the two things I'm going after. And our team needs prayer. The word we are asking God for this year is FLOURISHING. That doesn't mean we won't have hard days, personally and as a team, we just want the theme to be flourishing. I will know I'm leading well, I will know people are in the right place and right on purpose, when their lives flourish. So would you please pray that we would be protected as we do this work, that God would surround us, and that our lives- personal and professional- would flourish. That we would...

Work hard.

Pray hard.

Rest hard.

Play hard.

It's what we have hanging on our wall here in the offices and it's what we remind each other to do. I hope you'll join this year. Maybe my Epiphany today, even as I'm talking to you, is that it's not just how we share our work that matters, it's how we share our lives. I hope today feels like that. I hope when you see me or any of our team out and about and say hi and share hugs that you feel like that. I hope you feel like, through our podcasts and videos, social media, books, and stages, that we are sharing our lives with you.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 comes to mind... I mean, not that address. I had to google it. But here is the verse, in the CSB version.

“We cared so much for you that we were pleased to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.”

We care so much for you, friend. Not just me, but our whole team. You should hear them talk about you. It's very sweet and so genuine and generous. Our team loves you. You have become dear to us.

So here's to 2023- more focused, more fun, more friends, and more of Jesus. Yes and amen.