

[00:00:00] <music>

Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I am very happy to be here with you today. Do you hear that music? That's not our normal music. It's because today we kick off a special series called Summer Lovin", a That Sounds Fun podcast series in which we want to restore hope in dating and bridge y'all to helpful conversations, practical resources, and amazing experts so that you see changes in your dating life, starting with you.

So during Summer Lovin', we're going to talk through a lot of aspects of dating, and each episode is going to feature an expert, either someone who's written on the subject, works with a ton of people who are single and dating, or is a licensed therapist. And in a lot of the episodes, we sit down with both a male and a female who aren't married to each other, or in life in general, and we get their perspective on it all. These are my staff, my friends or friends of friends, who are just normal people who are navigating dating in 2023.

Of course, they don't represent everything about dating, nor do they represent every person's experience, but I think they do a beautiful job telling us about themselves and their own stories. This is not an all-in-one guide to every part of dating, but it is a jumping-off point and hopefully offers you some good wisdom that you can start implementing right away.

We want to bridge you to these experts in their resources so you have something practical to walk away with. So at the end of this episode and every episode, we'll make sure to tell you how to find each expert and how to find their resources.

But before we dive into today's conversation, I gotta tell you about our incredible sponsor, [Athletic Greens](#). It is finally June, which means it's tour month, and I want to make sure I'm getting my daily nutrients that I need even while I'm on the road for the Here For You tour. So AG1 by Athletic Greens is 100% coming on the road with me. You should see my little water bottle. It says "Born to Slay ". And that's what I shake up my AG1 in. I am packing their travel packs for us on the road which makes it so easy.

And AG1 is such a simple way to incorporate healthy habits even when you're on the go. It's hard to keep track of all the vitamins and supplements we need to take so when it comes to things that will help us prioritize our health, it's as easy as adding one scoop of AG1 powder into cold water instead of keeping up with multiple different products.

Every scoop is packed with 75 vitamins, minerals, and Whole Foods-sourced ingredients of the highest quality that gives us major benefits like gut and mood

support and boosted energy and even healthier-looking skin, hair and nails. Plus, it supports your immune system which is really important to me when I'm about to, you know, live on a bus with 12 people for a month. We all need to stay healthy so we can come see you. You don't have to set a reminder to order it or worry about running out because AG1 is delivered like clockwork every month. So it is super easy to make a daily habit.

And those single-serving travel packs can be thrown in your purse or carry-on when you're on the go, or you know, on your tour bus if you're headed out. It is the healthiest thing you can do in under a minute. And with AG1 being good friends to our bodies each day, it's really that simple.

So if you're looking for an easier way to take supplements, AG1 is giving you a free one year supply of vitamin D and five of those free travel packs with your first purchase. So go to athleticgreens.com/soundsfun. That's athleticgreens.com/soundsfun. Y'all check it out.

Intro: So today on the show, we have our very first Summer Lovin" guest, Pastor Ben Stuart. You may remember him from Episode 360. So I knew we wanted to kick things off by starting with some of the most asked questions about dating. Things like where are all the single godly men or women? And are there even good men and women left? And spoiler alert, there are. And what are some of the do's and don'ts of dating today?

Ben Stuart is the pastor of Passion City Church in Washington DC and the author of *Single, Dating, Engaged, Married* as well as *Rest in War*. Prior to joining Passion City Church, Ben served for 11 years as the executive director of Breakaway Ministries, which is a weekly Bible study attended by thousands of college students on the campus of Texas A&M.

He was the exact right person to help us get this series started. He is such a wise and trusted voice when it comes to navigating relationships. And as you'll hear, there are so many noteworthy things he said that I think is really important as we restore hope in dating. So yes, this is a note-taking episode. So let's do this, you guys. Here is our very first conversation of Summer Lovin' on Dating 101 with Ben Stuart.

[00:04:23] <music>

Annie: Ben Stuart, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Ptr. Ben: Well, thank you, Annie. I'm so happy to be here.

Annie: I'm so happy that you're here.

Ptr. Ben: I literally looked at the calendar, it was like, Annie Downs, and I thought, "That sounds fun."

Annie: I love when that happens. Listen, we're doubling down. Not only are you on That Sounds Fun, but you are kicking off the Summer Lovin' series, the inaugural Summer Lovin' series. How do you feel about that?

Ptr. Ben: I don't know if I'm ready, but I'm ready. Let's do it. Let's go!

Annie: You're so ready.

Ptr. Ben: I'm up for the ride.

Annie: Our friends listening have already heard me say this, but I'll say it to you too. I mean, our hope is to restore hope in the dating process for Christians and to kind of give them a bridge. Every guest we're having on is a bridge to more content. So you and I are gonna get through everything today. But we will get through a lot.

I mean, the Surgeon General of the US just released massive concern about loneliness in America and how it's actually affecting our health. Can you talk about that for a minute?

Ptr. Ben: I mean, you know, it's something we've sensed for a while, and then now you're getting all this data to back it up, that this massive shift in technology that has really kick-started in '07... You know, when you really think about when the iPhone and the World Wide Web landed in our hands, it changed the way human beings interact with each other on a massive scale. And now we're starting to see it's isolated us from one another, you know? And in doing that, we've realized, it's not good for us to be alone. And we've really lost the ability to linger in conversation, to press through boredom into deeper topics.

I'll tell you what was interesting for me, Annie, is I was a college minister right as Facebook was coming out. And then I was one for 12 years. So I watched... I mean, I remember my staff coming into me and saying, "Hey, the interviews are getting more and more awkward."

Annie: Hmm.

Ptr. Ben: So over that span of that first 12 years, they were like, "They are having more trouble making eye contact, they're having trouble carrying on conversation. What is happening?" And these are my staff, they were on their 20s. And I told them by

the end of it, I was like, Look, our ministry is now... a large part of it is socialization, just teaching people how to talk to each other.

So I don't get mad at people when they struggle with that eye contact and conversation. I just go, you grew up in an environment that hamstrung you in this regard. Now we have to learn how to tap back towards local, communal eye contact conversation, and find that it nourishes our souls. But we lost something when we gained just technology advance.

Annie: One of the pastors here in Nashville, Matt Smallbone, last week in his sermon he said, "We do not assess technology before we add it to our lives. But we assess a medicine, we assess a home we're gonna move into, a vehicle, but we do not assess technology. We just go, The new technology is here, go. I had never thought about how I don't think about it.

Ptr. Ben: Yeah. And it's interesting. I was talking with this guy, enormously successful CEO kind of person. And I don't want to quote the exact numbers he said to me because I got to look them up to make sure. But he was like, "Do you know how much money the oil industry pulls in?" And he was talking about the oil industry. And he said, "Do you know how much the top tech firms bring in?" And it was like 5x.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Ptr. Ben: And he was like, mining your attention is five times more valuable than mining oil from the ground? He said, so there's all these companies and they're just trying to grab your attention and get you on the thing. And he goes, "You have to stop seeing that phone as your friend. It's not.

Annie: It's not.

Ptr. Ben: I have certainly found that to be the case. Like I have to cast it out of my presence when I want to be present with my kids or my wife. I have to parent myself in that way. When I have friends over, tech is out of the room.

Annie: Right. So with so much loneliness attributed in a lot of ways to technology, we also want to talk about dating and dating apps. What's the good here with dating apps? What are your thoughts on that?

Ptr. Ben: I would say, you know, one of the modern challenges in some of these multicultural societies, technology is dating scripts of the past have gone away. You know, as good or bad as they were, different cultures had different dating scripts, you know? Like in the West, it was a suitor would come call in and then play the piano in the parlor. But everyone knew the rules.

I remember I went to the small town in west Texas and every Friday night they had a dance, and the whole town went and you brought a date. So these guys knew, man, Friday's coming. That society had a rhythm that helped people date. And now all those rhythms have gone away and no one knows the rules anymore.

Annie: I mean, I literally have recently said, If he and I were in the 1950s, we'd be seriously dating because the scripts are so different. Our behavior does not mean the same thing as it meant 50 years ago.

Ptr. Ben: And there's problems with every script, you know?

Annie: Yeah, right.

Ptr. Ben: They all break down in certain ways. But it has been interesting to see, Annie, like there are multiple books coming out now not from a Christian worldview but they are just stating, in no uncertain terms, the sexual revolution failed us.

Annie: Wow.

Ptr. Ben: And one of the ways it did was by moving sexuality to this casual place of "it could happen at any time". It's made your first date fraught with danger. What does coffee mean? What does dinner mean? What do these words mean? And they go, So rather than increasing the amount of sex, it's decreased the amount of dating.

Annie: Wow.

Ptr. Ben: So it's really wild.

Annie: Ben instead of increasing the amount of sex, it decreased the amount of dating. Dude, that's right.

Ptr. Ben: So you've got all these books by women like Louise Perry, just saying like this revolution has failed us. And then they get to the end of the books—I mean, there's a few I can mention—and they are stumbling backwards into scripture of like, We need communities with a common set of values, helping one another linger and develop deep friendships. You need a moral framework for how that man is going to treat you because by and large, they're going to be more physically powerful. Are they bound by character?

And you're just like, "You guys are stumbling chapter and verse into everything we've had that we would certainly barista for a while. And you go, No, no, this is what the answer is. God knows how the heart's wired, how humans are meant to

function. So I'm sad at the damage done but I'm hopeful because we have a gracious God and we got a good guide, you know?

Annie: Yes. That's the hope right here is that Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would teach us and guide us. And the Holy Spirit is eternal. So He can teach us about dating today and tell us what we do not know.

Ptr. Ben: Well, and I think about... You know, everyone brings up Ruth when you talk about dating or whatever. But you think about Judges... Read Judges and you go, "What a horrible time to be alive in the Old Testament. They're carving people up and mailing their bodies. It's horrendous. And in the midst of that craziness, Ruth marries a loser. Like, no one's asking now, like, "Where's my Chilion" or "where is my..." These guys are not good guys.

So you're like, you live in the darkest day in history for Israel, you married an idiot, everything's going sideways, and yet God still brought a Ruth and Boaz to get like... God loves to let beauty spring up from ashes and He just makes streams in the desert. So there is hope. But you can also acknowledge hope in the midst of a desert and challenge. And there are unique challenges with dating right now in this era that are unique.

Annie: What are they? What would you say they are?

Ptr. Ben: Well, I mean, I do think a lot of it... I don't like to lay the blame at technology, but it has messed up the way we interact with each other. So we...

Annie: Just always available. You can send a text or a DM at any minute.

Ptr. Ben: So we don't linger in conversation in the same way that we used to. We don't linger in groups at the same volume or we are easily distracted. And typically when there's boredom and there's no phones, you think of something else to ask. And then suddenly it opens the doorway into more depth. That's how conversation happens.

Then there's the whole stream of pornography and the enormous amount of damage it's done to young men. And this is where-

Annie: And women truthfully.

Ptr. Ben: Well, yes, increasingly more women. But I feel a great compassion for women because if you look, statistically, one of the outcomes of this rash of pornography is it just drives shame deep into the heart of people. You'll see it when people have difficulty making eye contact and engaging with someone at an emotional relational

level. So you have less people initiating dating, less people who think monogamy is possible. Again, I don't get mad at men. I go, This was thrust upon you.

Annie: Totally.

Ptr. Ben: But now, it's not your fault but it is your problem.

Annie: That's good. It's not your fault but it is your problem.

Ptr. Ben: And we are masters of our life. You know, under God, He's given us authority in this world to create structures for flourishing. So you're not a victim of that phone, you're the master of it. You're not a victim of your schedule, we're not a victim to the culture. We are counter-cultural makers. So I think we can acknowledge the problems but not feel bound by them.

Annie: Yeah, that's good. Okay, so for some of our friends listening, they've never dated. I mean, we have heard from so many women that are saying, "I'm in my 30s, I'm in my 40s, I'm in college, I've never been on a date. Where does a Christian woman even start right now? Like, where do we even start if we're dating and haven't dated before, but want to be?"

Ptr. Ben: That's a great question. I mean, I live in Washington, DC. Our church is in DC. The church's probably the highest demographic is 20, 30s single. And we have so many wonderful, beautiful, talented, smart, fun, young women who've never been on a date once. Some of my compassion for men is they get less reps asking. You know, like I said, like back in the day-

Annie: Every Friday night.

Ptr. Ben: ...the dance is coming every Friday, so you gotta ask. And when she says no, it hurts, and you survive it, and you move on and you go, "Oh, look." And you just get more reps. It's like throwing the ball. You get more accuracy with more reps. And it was interesting for me.

You know, when I first did a dating series with college students preaching it, they were asking very nuanced questions about talking to her parents, etc. Ten years later, it was like, "So if I like her, I should talk to her?" And I'm like, "Oh, man. Yeah, let's start there. Yeah, man. Let's start with their name, interests." But you're like, you've not developed those muscles.

So for me, I'm a big proponent of building believing communities that are serving together. A community with a cause. And I'm a big fan of that. So I would say get a part of a vibrant church community that's serving in the city, that you're living out

your values. I tell people that all the time. Like we asked God secret will, "Show me this, teach me this, show me what I'm going to give that in." And He won't tell us a lot of times. But I had to tell myself, especially when I was single, I was the last one of my friends to get married, I was like, "I'm going to excel at the revealed things. I'm just going to excel. I'm going to be great at the things He's told me to be great at."

And for me, when I was single, there were some pretty obvious things of like, Well, "Ben, you're going to need to get your act together in some ways. And I had to heal up some parts of me and work on me." But I wanted to be the most fruitful, loving, productive Ben possible in the world. But if you're doing that within the context of a believing community, you've drastically increased your chances of meeting somebody with the same cause as you.

That's where I just think churches need to come around and help that. In the past, they used to. Churches used to host the dances. So I think pastors should care. But I think within that matrix of dynamic relationships, if you can teach people healthy ways to evaluate "should we date or get married?" then even if it doesn't work out, you don't blow up the church.

That was the thing when we first started to hear people were like, "Well, I don't want to ask anyone here on a date because what if we break up? Then who gets the church and the divorce kind of thing?" You're like, "You're going on a date, man. And if you're not introducing sexuality into it, you could go on two or three dates and realize, "Oh, we're not a fit. And you can still back up into friendship."

Annie: Dude, when I tell you that just happened with a guy that we go to the same church. We met because we both serve and we went on two dates and we're like, "I think the world of you, you're not my guy. He thought the world of me, I'm not his girl. But we are very able to keep serving because it was just two dates.

Ptr. Ben: And we now have people seeing that and experiencing that. It's really been fun to watch the theory really works.

Annie: Yeah. Talk about this a little bit. When you think about churches, there is single groups that single people turn their nose up to, which I'm kind of like, stop turning your nose up to that and just go hang out with them. Like try. But also what I see work at our church and some of the churches around us is get in and serve on the greeting team because then you see every person who walks in the building.

Ptr. Ben: Yeah, yeah. It's kind of like, is it a singles ministry or is it a single's ministry? If the only thing we're thinking about is our singleness, sometimes it can start to get awkward-

Annie: Weird.

Ptr. Ben: ...and weird.

Annie: It's weird.

Ptr. Ben: I remember going in my 20s, I'm like, "I do not like these. I do not like these." And I was like, "I'm just gonna run hard after what the Lord is doing in my city." And it was in the ministry part where I met Donna. That's where usually the eagles are flying—they're going somewhere.

So if you can just get involved in the ministry aspect... I mean, I remember visiting a group of friends once in Dallas and they were all in the single's ministry. And we went to dinner and it was just the least life-giving just complaining about being single or making some weird comments about young girls. I'm like, I do not like this. A

And then I went to one of their houses and one guy wasn't with us. I was like, "Where's he?" And you're like, "Oh, every Thursday, he hands out food with this kitchen ministry in the city of..." This dude is just going for it. And he was not the most physically attractive of the guy. I mean, he was in shape, but he was a little goofy-looking dude but the girls all wanted to be with him. And you're like, "Yeah, because he's going someplace."

So I just encourage people, look, I know that's easy to say and harder to live, but you just get in there and get involved in a community that's chasing a cause that's worthy of your life. Paul told Timothy that Flee youthful lust, pursue righteousness along with those who call to God over pure heart. And I'd say as you're doing that, you look left and right and there's people running with you. And some will be friends. Some will be mentors. Some will be cute. And those are the ones you-

Annie: Some will be worth making out with, some will not.

Ptr. Ben: And you say, Let's run together.

Annie: I had a doctor one time, Ben, tell me, I like I'd checkup. Kind of asked me about being single. And the doctor said, "You should start volunteering with the Sierra Club because that's people who clean up national parks. And he said, "The men you meet at Sierra Club care about something besides work. They have enough expendable income, they aren't working on Saturdays, and they are outside and probably active." And I was like, That is Brilliant, so it doesn't just have to be a

church. Like, what do you care about? Go start serving alongside what you care about and see who you meet there.

Ptr. Ben: Yeah.

Annie: Yeah.

[00:20:11] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to share about one of our amazing partners, [Caraway](#). Okay, I know we talked about what we put in our bodies often but have you ever considered what you're cooking with? As in, have you ever thought about the toxins that could be in your cookware? No. I know. Me neither. But now that I tried Caraway, I get it.

Caraway is on a mission to craft well-designed home goods that thoughtfully raise the standards of what you cook with. To put it simply, their products are designed to make your life easier and healthier. And y'all, their line of pots and pans are so cute. They have the most fun color options. They're good-looking and made for clean cooking.

If you want to do some summer cleaning and reorganize your kitchen, which is what I am doing in July, do it with Caraway. Their thoughtfully designed sets and complimentary storage makes getting and staying organized easier than ever. Their ceramic-coated cookware has a naturally slick surface, which means you don't need much oil or butter to get those eggs to slide right off the pan. And it's always easy cleaning.

Caraway's high-quality kitchenware is free of PTFE such as Teflon, lead, and other toxic materials. And like I mentioned, their kitchenware comes in a variety of chic shades. I got sage and y'all, it is beautiful. It is so beautiful. Your cookware can even be stylish in your house. Plus, all of their sets include complimentary easy-access storage solutions, which is super rad.

You can now save 10% off the full suite of Caraway products from their internet-famous cookware to their newly launched food storage set. So visit [Carawayhome.com/tsf](#), like That Sounds Fun, to take advantage of this limited-time offer of 10% off your next purchase. This deal is exclusive for our friends, so keep it to yourself. But visit [Carawayhome.com/tsf](#) or use the code TSF at checkout. Caraway is non-toxic cookware made modern. It's beautiful.

Sponsor: And I got one more amazing partner to tell you about, [Your Enneagram Coach](#). Okay, in this Summer Lovin' series, we have got a whole episode about the

Enneagram and dating and how it better helps us understand ourselves. And the experts we bring on to talk about it were certified by Your Enneagram Coach. Beth McCord, also known as your Enneagram coach, is one of our go-to Enneagram experts. And I love that she is where Jackie Brewster learned everything. And you're gonna hear a lot from Jackie in a couple of weeks.

If you've ever been interested in the Enneagram and enjoy helping people understand it too, Beth and her team can certify you as an Enneagram coach. They have nearly 2,000 Enneagram coaches in over 25 countries. These coaches are literally changing their own lives by building a flexible and successful side hustle doing something they're passionate about. But more importantly, they're helping others grow, heal and flourish using the powerful tool of the Enneagram from a Christian perspective.

Here's the cool thing. Beth's certification program only opens a few times each year and it is opening really soon. But before it opens, Beth wanted to give you guys the opportunity to explore this further. So right now you can register for a special class that Beth is hosting called Become an Enneagram Coach. And it is free, you guys.

If you're even slightly curious about what an Enneagram coach is, what they do, and if it might be a fit for you, then this webinar is an important training tool for you. Beth will share her story about how being an Enneagram coach has changed her life and answer your questions. So learn more and sign up for a free webinar at your Enneagramcoach.com/tsf, like That Sounds Fun. And if you're listening to this episode after enrollment has closed, you can still sign up to be notified next time registration opens at your Enneagramcoach.com/tsf.

Okay, now back to continue our Summer Lovin' conversation with Ben.

[00:23:54] <music>

Annie: One of the questions we got a lot of is, how do I know when I'm ready?

Ptr. Ben: Ready to go on a date?

Annie: To date, yeah.

Ptr. Ben: At all?

Annie: Yeah.

Ptr. Ben: That's a great question. I mean, I tell people all the time, certainly you can date and get married and not be a believer. It happens all the time. Marriage is a common

grace for humanity. But I tell people if you want to be successful, I encourage them, you need to get a relationship with God right before you'll get a relationship with a guy or a girl right.

Annie: Wow.

Ptr. Ben: I think of the woman at the well that Jesus visited with. And what's the whole context? He uses the well as a metaphor to talk about her emotional need, right? He's like, "If you would ask me, I'd give you living water that would come flowing out of you." And then in the context of that, He brings up her romantic relationships. "You've been in five that haven't worked out. You're in one now without commitment." He's not shaming her. He's letting her know. You've gone to all these men to meet a need. You need to come to me for it because then you'll be a fountain of living water rather isn't a drain.

And I think a lot of modern dating, it's two drains trying to suck life out of the other person, and then you just get these really unhealthy dynamics. But if you go, Man, the love of God has filled me to overflowing, now when I walk in the room, I'm not trying to get your attention and trying to get your approval, trying to suck your energy into me. I got something to give the world. I got something to talk about today. And people want to be around fountains, not drains.

So that's what I just encourage them. Get that relationship with God right first, prioritize that, and then you excel at revealed things. I mean, you go, "I'm just gonna get good at running with Him." And as you do that, you will run up alongside.

This encourages me, Annie. The longest chapter in Genesis is Isaac and Rebecca. The text slows down just to show you God provided him woman. He was in his 40s and God did it in His timing. But what I love about it is, you know, if you look at Rebecca's side, she was just showing up to serve her family. And it wasn't like Isaac rolled up with his sleeves up and glistening in the sun, you know, and she's like, "I want to water those camels." He was an old man. It was his servant.

She was just helping an old dude. But that's character. She had a cause: I'm chasing the Lord and shaping her character. And that makes me humble servant. And someone with a godly cause and a God-shaped character, now you're just looking for chemistry. Do I like hanging out with you? So yeah, maybe I'll stop there. I could keep going but...

Annie: That's good. That leads me right to an important question that a lot of women have asked is about women initiating. Because in the Bible, we have Eve who just walked up or laid there or whatever. She did nothing. And we've got Ruth who laid

at the feet of Boaz. So literally Scripture gives us the full spectrum example of the women walking toward men are not walking toward men and initiating. What do you think here? What do you think initiation can look like? I don't like to 'should' people. I don't really want to say what it should look like. But can women initiate in dating?

Ptr. Ben: Yeah, it's a good question. I mean, I don't remember the exact wording of the Proverb that but a man who finds a wife finds a good thing. So you're like, Okay, he's the one... The verb's "his". So you go, okay, there is something to men initiating. And then it's interesting. I don't have it in front of me, Annie, but there was a statistic I read years ago, it was not Christian women, just women in general, how many had initiated a date within the last year and it was, I think, 12%. So even people without any sort of religious conviction, they want to be initiated with. There's something about wanting to be desired or pursued.

Annie: And men don't feel that as much, right?

Ptr. Ben: Not as much. That's statistically viable. You go, This is happening out in the culture. So when a woman wants to be initiated with, I don't think that's wro... I don't think you should feel ashamed of wanting that or beat yourself up for wanting that. Or why do I like that? There's something about our wiring that desires that. And there's something I think good for men to initiate, to be courageous, and to risk rejection. I think it's good for a male soul to do that.

So I think those things are good. But doesn't have to be that way? I think Ruth does show you no. But what I think what's interesting is, you know, Boaz is not making a move. So she shows up, and it's like, are we doing this or are we not doing this? But she does it in a way that doesn't shame him. I think shame is such an issue in our culture today. And if it comes from that shaming voice of Well, men these days, don't do... and men don't do that... You're like, whoa, whoa, whoa, that's not good. No guy is gonna go like, you know what, thank you for shaming me.

Annie: "I can't wait to date her."

Ptr. Ben: "We should spend more time together. What else do you disapprove of?" I mean, I was a mess, Annie, early on in dating. Every relationship was just a dumpster fire and it was always my fault. One of the healthiest moments-

Annie: Is that really true it was always your fault?

Ptr. Ben: Yes.

Annie: Okay.

Ptr. Ben: Yeah.

Annie: I mean, that's interesting for people to hear because sometimes I would not say it's always been my fault. But some of the time, it's been my fault, for sure.

Ptr. Ben: The thing with me is I just realized early on I would go on dates out of a pressure. And then I realized, "You know what? Ben is not an emotionally healthy person. So I've got to get 'me' a little better before I get 'we' a little better."

Annie: That's good.

Ptr. Ben: Not that I have to be perfect. I just got to work on me some. And I had this kind of pain I didn't understand from my parents' divorce and addiction in our family. I just had to figure myself out better. So then when I met Donna, I was still kind of scared of relationships. But then I realized, but I am in a healthier place than I was. And those girls that met me before were all wonderful, I just wasn't in a place where I knew how to handle a relationship. So they all got so confusing. And I didn't know how to communicate. I didn't know how to say what I felt. I didn't give them the gift of clarity.

Annie: We're gonna talk about it. It's my favorite thing you say.

Ptr. Ben: There was a young lady in my 20s, she just came to me and was like, "Hey, I'm interested in you. We've been talking a lot but I just want you to know I don't want to pressure you at all but I'd be interested in dating you if you are. But I don't want to pressure you." She was really gracious. And it caught me off guard. It kind of embarrassed me like, "Geez, I probably should have started this." And we just realized over time, I think we're good friends. But I never felt embarrassed that she brought it up. I felt challenged to do better myself. But the way she did it was so healthy. I think about that with Ruth. Like, she didn't shame him, but at some point, she was like, "Hey, I would be interested."

Annie: I have one experience in my life where I was DMing with someone, and I wanted to give him my phone number. I was like, "Get us out of here. What are we doing?" I started to ask something, ask him if he want my number or something, and I just felt the Lord be like, "If you start asking the questions, now, you're never gonna give him space to ask the questions." And kind of slowing me down.

You know, like the Lord not shaming me either, but going like, You can wait and let him ask. Because if you rush everything, which is Annie to a tee, if you rush everything, you will have to rush everything. So I could feel the Lord helping me set up a start of a relationship and a healthier way than was normal for me. So every

time I bumped into that with this guy, I would say, "Nope, the Lord told me to slow down. The Lord told me to give him space to ask. And every time he did." I mean, we're not married, so not every time. But you know what I mean? Like, he always did, it just was slower than me.

So that version of initiation, I mean, I guess I want you to talk about like women can step forward, women can ask out, but we also need to think about from the beginning what's the relationship you want in the long run? If you always want to be in charge, find the guy who lets you always be in charge. But you're always going to be in charge.

Ptr. Ben: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And that's where I'm a big proponent of the community element. Because you get to evaluate someone in a communal context where there's just a little bit less pressure. You just get to see, like, how do they treat people? How do they act? And you can see like, is this person just passive in every relationship? Well, that will make me crazy.

When Donna... It's funny, you bring that up when she met me, she would say she wanted to expedite things. But because we were a community-

Annie: Congrats.

Ptr. Ben: Thank you. But because we were in a community, we have mutual friends, and one of them came to her and was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, do not do that to Ben. He will disappear."

Annie: Oh, wow.

Ptr. Ben: He's like, "If he feels pressured by you, he will bounce." But he was like, "You don't need to worry. He knows how to initiate and he will when he's ready." He just kind of helped stabilize her with like, give him time. And Donna and I laugh about that. She's a ready, go, set person, I'm a ready, set, set, go person. But it works well. But in dating she realized and I think because of that, with many counselors' victories, sure, because we have this communal environment, they were able to let her know, "Hey, but this one, don't ready, go, set this one."

Annie: That has helped me a ton too. And at times, people will say to me, "You should say something." Like the drop the hanky thing. Like, "You should stand in front of him emotionally or relationally and communicate. You don't have to wait in your house because then you're only going to date like the pizza guy. Like, don't wait in your house." But it appears to me as we're talking about the different dating scripts, women leading or initiating is a modern thing. Am I wrong about that?

Ptr. Ben: I mean, it took different forms. You know, you think about arranged marriages... I spoke at a thing years ago. They asked me to speak to their youth group and youth meant not married. So they were all in their 30 professionals in town because it was an Indian denomination. And they were like, you know, our parents help arrange our marriages. I'm like, "Oh my gosh, that sounds crazy." And I remember they looked at me and they're like, "The person who knows you the best and loves you the most helping you find someone, why would you not do that?" I'm like, "Geez, when you say it that way."

Annie: Right.

Ptr. Ben: And not all parents fit that description. But you know, you can have parents help and initiate either from the guy side or girl side. Like, let's help get these people together. And then outside of that, official parent one, churches and communities would often do that to people. But now it really started in the 1920s. We could go down the rabbit hole of how sort of modern dating developed. You know, but the way it developed it has put women in isolation often waiting on these men.

And I think with the advance of technology the way it is, men initiate far less and it's put women in I think an understandably distressed situation where you're like, We need these men to initiate more. But shaming them is not helpful. Because I look at them and say, This is not their fault, it is their problem.

So for me, as a pastor, I want to encourage men to initiate and I would encourage women not to get frustrated. Like I started to hear early on at our church like, "Well, no guys ask out anymore. Where are all the good guys?" And I, you know, did a whole series on Song of Solomon, but I read that passage about David. He said he had lion-faced men on his team, and I was like, I know them. So don't say there's no good Christian men. I know lion-faced men. I'm looking at them right now.

And they just need that called forth from them. They don't need to be shamed for not living into that. They need it called out of them. So I think we as a Christian community need to help women and help modern men and women with this process. So I sympathize with women that are like, "Why is no one initiating?" You are a victim of a broader cultural narrative. It's not about you. It's about the moment in history you find yourself in. So don't beat yourself up about it. It is very hard but it's not without hope.

Annie: That's right. That's right.

Ptr. Ben: And I've seen it in our church. I don't set up dates. I don't pressure people to get married.

Annie: Yeah, I've noticed. You don't set up dates. Hello. I am right here, Ben Stuart. I'm right here.

Ptr. Ben: Okay. Well, you know, you can shout some ideas. But I'm saying I don't pressure people. But we're watching people date and get married and really beautiful relationships form. And I believe that's possible. I believe it.

Annie: I also want to take a second for us to talk about... I mean, our words have the power of life and death. So no matter what you feel about men, how you talk about men matters. So my encouragement would also be to women listening that are discouraged or feel like men aren't who they're supposed to be. There's a way we can talk about that that does not shame men even if they aren't listening. It doesn't say your words have the power of life and death if you're standing in front of the person you're talking about. It is your words can bring life. So if we could start talking about men like they are trying and like they are growing and they are lion-faced, I think we'd see a difference in the culture.

Ptr. Ben: Yeah. Both parties are victims of much bigger forces. And you go okay, but you don't have to be a victim your whole life. You're like, Oh, okay, these forces have hamstrung us both, men and women. Now, how do we rise up and walk together? And I think you do it as family and do it as community. And we're going to be a community chasing a cause. And as we do that, then we find that chemistry with somebody and begin this process of evaluating.

[00:37:46] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to share about another amazing partner, [Fuller Seminary](#). Okay, we talk about counseling and therapy around here a lot. But have you ever felt led to become a therapist yourself? Have you thought about pursuing a career centered on the healing and wholeness of individuals, couples, and families?

At Fuller's Master of Science in Marriage and Family Therapy program, you can work alongside a supportive community of faculty and students who are committed to the formation of heart, soul, and mind to further God's mission of redeeming the world. Fuller provides students with the clinical training to become skilled Marriage and Family Therapists. Through their program, you will have the opportunity to engage in a broad range of therapeutic and spiritual formation practices, including exercises that simulate the counseling experience in real-time, which is really cool. Licensed faculty members help equip students for their career and connect them with internships.

Fuller students are not only widely recognized as the best trained in the field but also have one of the highest pass rates for their state licensing exam. Okay, if you've been waiting for a green light, if you've been wondering if this was the right next thing for you, if you feel passionate about becoming an agent of healing and reconciliation in the world, go to fuller.edu/thatsoundsfun to learn more about Fuller's MS and Marriage and Family Therapy program. That's fuller.edu/thatsoundsfun.

Sponsor: And one last amazing partner to share with you, [Sundays For Dogs](#). Listen, while I mostly only talk about the Georgia Bulldogs, today we're showing love to any dog in your life. Sundays For Dogs is healthy dog food. It's actually easy to store and serve for your furry baby so they get meals that both taste good to them and is good for them. I know you put time into thinking about what you feed yourself and your family, so don't forget your dogs. They're part of the family too.

Sunday's is air-dried dog food containing 90% meat, 10% vegetables, and 0% synthetic nutrients. Besides USDA beef and all-natural chicken, it has digestive aids like pumpkin and ginger plus disease-fighting antioxidants. I mean, that sounds good to me. All those dog moms and dads out there report noticeable health improvements in their pups. Plus every order ships right to your door so you'll never worry about running out of Dog food again.

Unlike other fresh dog food, Sunday is zero prep, zero mess, and zero stress. Sunday's is shelf-stable, which makes it easy to feed your pup top-quality food. Every order ships right to your door, so you'll never worry about running out of dog food again. And it is 40% less than other healthy dog food brands. And you know, a great place to meet somebody if you're single? Dog parks. Dog parks. So take your dog out there, meet somebody, and then feed them Sundays For Dogs.

And we've got a special deal for our dog-loving friends. Get 35% off your first order of Sundays. So go to Sundaysfordogs.com/thatsoundsfun, or use the code ThatSoundsFun at checkout. That's sundaysfordogs.com/thatsoundsfun. Upgrade your Pap to Sundays and feel good about the food you feed your dog.

And now back to finish up our Summer Lovin' conversation with Ben.

[00:40:54] <music>

Annie: Let's talk to our friends who have jumped into dating. They're meeting people, they're going on dates. One of the questions we've gotten a lot that I think is really interesting is, what happens when you start dating people that your family doesn't expect you to date? So someone of a different age, someone of a different race, someone that goes to a different church or has a profession that your parents are

expecting you to marry a doctor and instead you married a dentist, or expecting you to end up with someone who teaches at the school you teach at and instead you're dating someone across the world that's a missionary that you met online? So what happens? How do we handle falling for and being open to relationships that do not match the expectation of our community or our family? It's happening a lot.

Ptr. Ben: Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, for me, there's some non-negotiables.

Annie: Okay.

Ptr. Ben: Right.

Annie: Yeah. Tell us those.

Ptr. Ben: Who you date matters. So when you're talking about dating, I'm like, anyone can get a date.

Annie: That's right.

Ptr. Ben: If you set your standards low enough, you can get married tonight.

Annie: What's actually true is we can all be married. That's right. Anybody listening could be married right now if you decided that that was the number one thing that mattered and nothing else mattered. Yes, you're exactly right.

Ptr. Ben: And a whole string of tragedies would be awaiting on the other side of that truth.

Annie: That's exactly right. But you'd have a ring.

Ptr. Ben: 'Who' and 'how' matters a great deal. Biblically, that non-negotiable who, is, are they chasing the same call? That was Abraham with Isaac, was, she can't be a Canaanite. And that wasn't ethnic. That was faith commitment. Because his only criteria was, she's got to be willing to come with us. God called us on the cutting edge of faith, she has to be on that edge too. And if she won't, then forget it. I'd rather my son be single than settle. And that's it. And he had to walk 500 miles to find that girl. You know, you're like, it may take that. But I think that cause is non-negotiable.

And then you got to see, is their character being shaped by God? I don't care if they've got a Christian enthuse on their car or a Bible on their coffee table. I know a lot of idiots that dress up as Christians. You want to see, is their character shaped by God? So that will eliminate almost everyone on the planet, you know. But who's left is a small subset of wonderful human beings.

And then I just think your next thing is after cause and character is chemistry. Do we enjoy getting along? Do they make me laugh? Can we talk for hours? And that's where I think, you know, holding off on physical intimacy is so important. Because you know it's fun but it's like, splashing a volatile chemical into the mix. Like you just messed up the experiment. Dating is evaluation and you're going, "Do we mix well together?" Because most of our life we'll be talking or hanging out or vacationing together. Like, do I like hanging out with you?

So those are the non-negotiables to me. And then once you get there, everything else to me is periphery. It's just how much friction are you willing to tolerate. And that's where the communication becomes so important. So you go, can you date across ethnic lines? Of course, you can. Moses did. That's never been a biblical issue. Faith commitment's critical.

Now, once you get into ethnicity, you go, the challenge will be cultural. And you go, how big is the cultural divide? Can we navigate it? Like we just had a friend marry a wonderful Korean woman and so her family has a high honor culture, a lot of them don't speak English. And it's like, "Okay, man, you're gonna have to figure out how to tack towards that."

Annie: He's a white guy?

Ptr. Ben: Yeah. "And they're gonna have to figure out how to tack towards you." But they all did it and it's beautiful. So you go, "Okay, he wasn't really what they thought she would bring home. But as I got to know him, they're like, but look at what he's chasing and look at what it's made him. This is a wonderful human being. The end. So it may take time to convince parents that but..."

And then some of that other friction stuff like age, you know, your priorities change with different ages. So that's something you'll have to evaluate. And that chemistry thing of conversations, you know what your interests are, you may look and go like, "You're a wonderful human, but I just don't care about anything you care about." You just gonna have to figure that out.

Annie: That is so okay. I mean, remind the women listening, if you don't think he's fun to be around, he's not your only option.

Ptr. Ben: Oh, don't stack that onto your life. Don't stack forever under the boredom like that.

Annie: Right.

Ptr. Ben: You don't need to do that. Oh, my gosh, Annie. I mean, I dated someone once and I was just like, "They love the Lord and would be an amazing mom and wife and all that." And I was like, "I could do it. I could be faithful and love her." And I stopped myself, I was like, "She needs someone that thinks they won the lottery to be married to this woman. She doesn't need me dialing up my discipline. No one wants that."

Annie: That's right. That's right.

Ptr. Ben: So don't do that. Don't be like, "I could learn." Like, do you like hanging out? The profession side, that was Donna and I's biggest friction because ours had a lot of travel, hers and mine. So we just had to figure out, how do we reconcile this? And that was what made our dating take a while, was going, "I don't want to get in the way of what God's built you to do. I don't want to sell out what I think He's called me to do. How do these live together?" And that was a big part of our evaluation. So there's realities there that may make or break a relationship. But it's just how much friction can you handle.

Annie: That's really great. So we're gonna have an entire episode coming up in the series about sex and dating. But will you talk a little bit about the evaluation part, like you started in on the evaluation part, and what happens when it gets really physical and how that can affect your evaluating?

Ptr. Ben: I mean, we all know, you know, sex releases dopamine into your brain. That's a happy chemical that say, "Whatever you just did, do that again. Do it a lot." So you want to do that. And it's fun. But the problem is, when you begin to mess your body with someone like that... I think dating exists for evaluation. That's why it exists. So dating is for evaluating, are we meant to run together for a lifetime?

So the Bible didn't have dating in it. That's not what they did back then. But all through Proverbs, there's evaluating. What kind of man is he? What kind of woman is she? It's written to a single person evaluating the character of someone before you link up your life together. So as you're watching someone, you're evaluating, Can I trust you? A man given the angers like an unwalled city, you go, "Hey, if that guy is always angry, you will never be safe with him. Don't marry him. It's better to live on the corner of a roof than with a contentious woman.

If she always got beef with somebody, always matter. Don't marry her. It's written to like... you're supposed to watch him. So dating is watching somebody. You're not trying to make them do anything. And I've talked to people dating, they're like, "Well, I think he needs to go to the same church as me. And I think she needs to come at..." You like, "No, just watch him. Dating is evaluating, what are you like? And can I trust you? That's the character part. When I'm not at my best, will you

still be kind? When I hurt you, will you forgive? When you're angry, will you pursue reconciliation? Or do you become a threat? You need to watch their character.

And then you watch the chemistry? Do you make me laugh? Do we enjoy being around each other? Author Song of Solomon, the imagery is springtime. Are you and I'm more alive when we're together? I mean, I've watched two wonderful people get together and then it just feels like winter. You're like, Y'all don't splash together. But when they get together, there's an ease to it. He's bounding over the mountains like a stag to get to her, appearing to the lattice. Like they're excited. Like, it opens with her, like, let him kiss me with a kiss on his mouth. She's excited to be around him. Do you see excitement? Do you see life?

It's a character that draws you to each other. You know, that's what she said. Your oils are fragrant, your name is like oil poured out. She was like, when people say your name, they think your character. And your characters of sweetness. So that's what you're trying to watch.

But if you start throwing sexuality into that, it's like throwing gasoline on a fire. It'll flame up. But then when it goes away, what did you have? Did you just have cardboard? Well, then that's gonna go out. You know, but you need to see, you know what? There's some real logs of like, we like talking to each other. So I've been to so many couples where you're like, "Their hands are all over each other and they want to get married. But then you sit at dinner and you go, Every time she talks. You're looking elsewhere. Every time he talks you look embarrassed. Y'all don't even like each other, you just like touching each other. And that's not going to go great in a year.

Annie: Right. Much less 20.

Ptr. Ben: Oh my gosh. So what you see in modern dating where sexuality is moved forward, people tend to stay longer in relationships with someone because they're hooked on the sex or the convenience of living together. And then they discover over a longer period of time, "Oh, I don't even like you." So what you see... And like Mark Regnerus covers a lot of this in his dataset. He's a professor at the University of Texas. He's like, you just see a lot of hurt feelings and wasted time.

I mean, if you said no sex, you could figure out in two months if you like this guy. But if you all start sleeping together earlier, three years later, you'll go, "You know what? I don't even like him." And you're like, But you bonded. It doesn't just release dopamine, it releases oxytocin. That's a bonding hormone that's released during breastfeeding. Like you're bonding with the wrong person.

So you withhold that bonding in physical element until you go, is this a person I can trust and love? And that takes time. That goes slower. So you know, biblically, we're called to do that. Because, you know, Paul told the Corinthians don't sin against your body. That's a sin against you. Just hold off so you can evaluate, is this a person worthy to unite with mentally, emotionally, and then physically? That's where the Bible holds the physical to the end.

Annie: And the living together part, I mean, that's very, quote, "normal" in Christian relationships now around me. I mean, I've been surprised at how many Christians I know are very casual about living together. Is it that casual?

Ptr. Ben: No, I think it's a terrible idea. Statistically, it doesn't help with marriage or divorce. The outcomes are negative. Because you end up locking into a relationship sometimes with someone. It's kind of like cell phones, you know, where you get into a cell phone relationship, like with a provider, and you go, "I don't like their service, but they've made it such a hassle to leave." You end up going like, "I don't really like this guy. But we share the bills and all my stuff's here. You end up lingering in the wrong relationships longer.

Annie: Because breakups are so hard.

Ptr. Ben: Breakups are way worse.

Annie: Gosh, they're so bad.

Ptr. Ben: And you go, You could have figured this out and saved yourself time. That's what's been so hard to watch lately is people are extending the amount of time they're in the wrong relationship. And then they look up and they're older and going, "That took too long." Your evaluation process took too long. And because you moved in fast with someone and you figured out later, "I don't want to be with them forever."

As much as you try to justify that living together as modern, all that living together says, I might want you. And that's not very romantic. You know, real love is stronger than death, fiercer than the grave, is what Song of Solomon says. Nothing can quench real love. So you wait for that, you know. You don't wait for someone that says, I might want you pending on what you provide me. That's not what you want.

Annie: No. That's not what we want.

Ptr. Ben: You want someone that says, "I want all of you and I'll give all of me. That's what you want. And that's possible. Don't believe the lie that's not possible. Donna Freitas has all this. She is a professor at Notre Dame.

Annie: Love her.

Ptr. Ben: She has all that research of young people just saying over and over again that they hate the modern dating script, but they think it's the only one. And you go, but such a huge percentage of you hate it. So don't believe the lie "it's the only one". Let's rage against it together.

Annie: Will you talk a little bit about clarity is kindness. It is the most repeated three words out of my mouth from anyone. The Lord is probably gonna have a talk with me about how I quote you more than I quote Him, because I'm always like, Clarity is kindness in work. Clarity is kindness in dating. Clarity is kindness. Even if you don't get the answer you want, it is such kindness."

Ptr. Ben: Proverbs says that an honest answer is a kiss on the lips. I mean, a kiss on the lips is, you know, in that culture was a sign of respect and affection. It's like, I care enough to give you information. Because you can't make an informed decision without information. So I've got to give you honest information. So for me, when people say, "Who do I date?" Like, Oh, man, it's caused, character, chemistry. How do I date? Number one, it's clarity. You have to be real clear on what you're doing.

And clarity and initiation and... I think statistically you see a lot of the distress women deal with, a guy asks something vague, like you want to hang out? Like, what does that mean? So I did surveys of like, "Would you want him to use the word date?" And most women said yes.

Annie: Yes.

Ptr. Ben: "Because I know what it is."

Annie: It helps so much.

Ptr. Ben: Yes. "It just helps me figure out what level of outfit I'm putting on."

Annie: Yes, yes.

Ptr. Ben: So I encourage guys with that level of clarity and initiation, then clarity and evaluation. I encourage people about three, four dates in, you start to wonder what are we doing here? And you have to address that. What I did with Donna was at the end of every date, I would say something like, "Hey, this was really fun. I'm enjoying getting to know you. I'll call you." Because I wanted to leave and her never wonder what's next.

Annie: Wow.

Ptr. Ben: So her friends would be like, "Are you gonna text him? Are you gonna dm?" She was like, "He said he would call. But she already knew what the next step was. I did that out of love because I wanted to save her from the distress. And then every few dates, I would say to her in the evaluation, "I'm enjoying getting to know you, I'm not trying to waste your time. I'm not ready to get married like tomorrow but I think there's a potential here that I'd like to keep exploring."

And then I encourage people to give a real clear out. So I would tell her about every third or fourth date, Like, "Hey, if at any point, you don't feel comfortable with this, what we're doing us pairing off together, you know, not being in a big friendship group together," I was like, "Just let me know. I trust God with my life and I trust Him with yours. And I think we're trying to evaluate, Is He drawing us to run together? And if at any point you have concerns about that, tell me and it's okay, we'll stop." And I just wanted her to have that clarity all through the process. Because you do talk to a lot of people who are in distress because they're like, "I don't think this is working and I don't know what to say," or "I'm scared to-

Annie: Or "what did that mean?" I mean, what does that mean? That text does not have a color? I don't know. I don't know what he's trying to say.

Ptr. Ben: And I tell women, give him the gift of clarity as well, too. I mean, one of the most wonderful things I've heard multiple times now women do is they'll tell a guy, "Hey, you're great. Thank you. I don't really see this going anywhere." And I've had multiple guys tell me, "It stings a little, but it's way better than being ghosted or being gossiped about." Just tell me. Let's respect each other enough to give each other clarity. So yeah, I think clarity is kindness.

It's been fun too, Annie, just like more and more now up here... I just had this happen last week. Two different couples come up and they're like, "I can tell he read your book because he's basically saying it exactly how you said to..." And she's like, "But you know what? I'm fine with it."

Annie: "I agree with it." That's so good. That's right. We're gonna have a whole list of resources for people around this Summer Lovin' series. And your book is top and to the right because we want everybody to grab it. It's so helpful.

Okay, two last questions for you. One, give us some hope. Give us some hope for dating. Is this going to be the generation of people who 50% of us never get married? Have we missed what God had for us? Have those of us who are not married yet miss the right person because culture's a desert?

Ptr. Ben: You know, there are statistics like that, that say things like that, that if you're not married down, you'll never be in this generation. That could be true. I think trends... I love reading them. I read stats all the time. Trends are true until they aren't. So Rome was not trending towards Christianity until it was. Right?

Annie: You don't know any single guys until you do. That's right.

Ptr. Ben: You know, America was going to hell in a handbasket before the first Great Awakening until it wasn't. So our God is too big for doomsday scenarios like that. I just think whenever I look at the world, I start to lose hope because I go, "Oh, man, there's not much hope there." But when I look up, I'm like, "Anything is possible. Miracles are possible.

My sister said this to me a few years ago, Annie. We were looking at each other and given our family background, she goes, "Ben, there is no reason in the world why we are all not on the downside of our second marriages."

Annie: Wow.

Ptr. Ben: "By the grace of God." Because we all have wonderful marriages and great kids. I mean, I'm really a big advocate of these techniques the Bible's given us, but it's about positioning yourself to be a recipient of the grace of God. That doesn't mean life's easy. That doesn't mean it's not painful or hard. But the grace of God can wash away sin, can bring beauty out of ashes, can bring hope in the desert. I've seen it. I've seen His faithfulness. I never want to cheapen people's pain.

So I tell them that God cares about your love life even more than you do. I think that even that Genesis chapter kind of shows you that. Like, this is a value for Him, He created you for this. That longing for connection was in Genesis 2, pre-fall. He made that in you. Don't be ashamed of it. But take it to Him, put it at His feet, beat on His chest, and then fall in His arms and trust Him, and then go, "I'm gonna rise up and excel the revealed things." And I told God that for myself. I'm like, you know, He put Adam to work. "Go name the animals." "Which ones?" "All of them. Go."

Annie: Right.

Ptr. Ben: And at some point, I'm gonna knock you out and wake you up, and he's gonna show up. And I had a friend tell me that once. She said, "I'm just praying you would just keep doing the work God's called you to do and at the right time, He will open your eyes and you'll see Eve." And I was just doing ministry.

I didn't feel like God owed me a relationship. God owes me nothing. He didn't owe me life. Like if He kills me tomorrow, I'm not a victim. I need to get clear on that—He owes me nothing. But He's given me a life. I'm preaching the gospel, I'm going for it. I'm discipling these kids. I'm doing this. And then I was at an event and I saw Donna and I was like... I would kind of pride myself on being the guy that didn't need to date, didn't need relationships. And just, every time I talk to her, it's like, "God, these arrows just keep getting right under the armor and I can't deny it.

And He opened my eyes and I saw Eve. So I just think, you just go for it. Do the work He's called you to do, excel at the revealed. Don't give up hope. Let's trust that the Lord's... You know, ancient Rome became Christian because they saw healthy dating, and marriage relationships in the Christian community.

Annie: Wow,

Ptr. Ben: It's one of the major things that converted Romans is because their sexuality was so out of control, their women and children so hurt, their men so dehumanized. They looked at Christians and they said, "Your method is backward, regressive, odd, strange and beautiful." And it was the Christian love that drew the Romans to Christ. So don't give up hope. God has changed way worse cultures than ours.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. Oh, Ben, you're such a gift. This is just the start of what you offer. So we will bridge everybody to you and your series on Song of Solomon, and for sure, your book *Single, Dating, Engaged, Married*. You're such a gift to me, my friends. Thank you. Thank you for doing this.

Ptr. Ben: Well, we love you. And this is so fun. I'm cheering you on at every level, Annie. So keep running. We're with you.

Annie: Okay, the last question we always ask. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, Ben Stuart, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Ptr. Ben: Annie. I decided I never have any fun. It was a problem. I think last time I was on the show you asked me what was fun and I'm like, I don't know, a book. And I just realized I don't do anything fun. So I was like, I love national parks, I love the wild, I'm disappearing into it. So I just got back from four of them. I served the sand dunes at White Sands, New Mexico, climbed the peaks of Big Bend. I like being outside. I like the desert.

And now my family is activated. They're like, "What's the next one?" I'm like, "The next one is the Dry Tortugas. No one goes there. Can't get to it except by boat or seaplane. But we are going. And we got a chart with all 63 national parks. We are going to, by the grace of God-

Annie: Your desert pictures were awesome. All the girls out. And I was like, this is the coolest trip.

Ptr. Ben: I have mixed feelings about people discovering it.

Annie: That's right.

Ptr. Ben: But I'm like it's too cool.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. Don't be afraid of the desert. That feels like a theme today. Don't be afraid of the desert.

Ptr. Ben: There you go.

Annie: Just go surf it. Oh, that's good, Ben.

[01:02:45] <music>

Annie: You guys, isn't he the best? I told you that was a note-taking one. Listen, there's already stuff for us to do right now based on what Ben just taught us. Okay, as promised, we are always going to bridge you to resources that will help you as you continue this. So make sure you check out his book, *Single, Dating, Engaged, Married*. And if you go to Anniefdowns.com/dating, we have a full list of helpful resources from the experts in our Summer Lovin' series. And follow along through the rest of Summer Lovin' so that you get to hear the whole experience.

And listen, if you're single or dating or you just love someone who is, be sure to share the show with friends and loved ones so it can help them understand you better.

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 next week, you can find me out here on the Here For You Tour. Listen, if you haven't gotten your tickets, do it now. You do not want to miss this. It's the hereforyoutour.com.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me, man, we've been dying to kick off this series. So what sounds fun to me today is kicking off this Summer Lovin' series with you. I cannot wait to hear your thoughts.

Y'all have a great weekend. We'll see you back here on Monday as our Summer Lovin' series continues, where we're talking about dating at this age where we're going to talk about the difference in dating in your 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and beyond. We have Dr. Debra Fileta on with us who is so brilliant. And you get to meet a couple of my friends, Becca and Lucas. You're gonna love this. We'll see you on Monday.