

[00:00:00] <music>

Annie: Hi, friends, welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today. I'm so happy to know you. Did you hear the news? I have got a new kids' book coming out in 12 days. I know. We told y'all really close because we want to order books and then like show up. So September 19, my book for all my MiniBFFs called *So Happy to Know You* releases everywhere. I cannot wait to put this in your kids' hands.

Listen, I would love to personalize a copy for them. Just pre-order your copy by the 19th and then head over to sohappytoknowyou.com and fill out that form so I know who to personalize the copy to. I think you're gonna love this one.

So go ahead and pre-order your copy wherever you love to buy books. It'll be there in just a couple of weeks. And then again, sohappytoknowyou.com is where you can fill out the form so I can sign a book to your kid. Will send a little personalized bookplate. It's really cute.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to talk about one of our incredible sponsors. This episode is sponsored by [BetterHelp](http://BetterHelp.com). You know we love counseling around here. It is such a helpful tool in processing grief and trauma and just all of the normal everyday stuck places we find ourselves in.

My counselors had a huge impact on my life. And even with busy fall schedules, I'm working to make sure regular appointments with her are still a priority. You heard me say it when I had surgery what's sick and growing in secret needs to come out. And I fully believe that's true with our thought life and our mental health too.

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Get a break from your racing thoughts with BetterHelp. Visit betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun today to get 10% off your first month. That's betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun.

Intro: Today on the show, I get to talk with the brilliant Dr. Alicia Britt Chole. She's a speaker, a mentor and award-winning author. Her latest book, *The Night Is Normal: A Guide through Spiritual Pain* came out in July. Y'all it is beautiful. We're gonna talk about those moments when we feel like we can't hear God, when we feel like we're stuck and alone. We're gonna talk about the Gospels too because dah. If you're not already listening to Let's Read the Gospels podcast with this, jump over there and subscribe. It is a special conversation about the Gospels today.

I think we've all experienced a dark night of the soul, as Dr. Chole describes. What she so beautifully reminds us, as do the Gospels, is that seasons like that can be both beneficial and incredibly informative to our faith. I think you're really going to be moved by this one.

I just want to say to those of you listening who you come to this podcast today because you're like, maybe this conversation will help, and you are feeling like you're in a really dark night of your life, we see you and we love you, and we thought of you today.

So here is my conversation with Dr. Alicia Britt Chole.

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Annie: Alicia, welcome to That Sounds Fun. Thank you for doing this today.

Dr. Chole: Oh, thank you. I've been looking forward to this.

Annie: Me too. Me too. Now, I think I've told you this before, but I'm going to publicly fawn all over you for a second about how I feel about *40 Days of Decrease*. Have we talked about this?

Dr. Chole: Oh. No. No. I didn't even know you'd read it.

Annie: Oh my gosh, our leadership at church, like the pastors and I all did it together a couple of Lents ago and it was just life-changing. Thank you so much. Tell me, what made you sit down and go okay, I need to do a devotional about Lent.

Dr. Chole: Well, I was working on my doctoral dissertation, and at George Fox, you have the option of having an artifact. So for an artifact, I wanted to make an offering that was something I could give to others. And since my entire dissertation was on

disillusionment as a friend of spiritual formation, I thought, Why don't we go ahead and take discipline, something in our history that perhaps has been lost a bit, and reframe it as an incredible opportunity?

The sacredness of decrease really fits well with my long-term 30 years of study on disillusionment. So here it was. An artifact was offered and then by God's grace, the publisher wanted to make it something that others could read and hold in their hands.

Annie: A thing I need to tell you upfront about our personalities is I identify as the Enneagram seven. So I do not like pain and I do not like slow, and I'm not the biggest fan of feelings. So as you can imagine, I think, based on what I've read of your work, I think you and I are on the same spectrum, but we're on opposite sides of it. Would that probably be true?

Dr. Chole: Not sure about that. But I will say that you've just described about 80% of my closest friends on earth. I think we'd be good friends.

Annie: I totally agree with that. I mean, but your book, *The Sacred Slow*, I mean, everything I read from you asks me to be better than I can naturally be. I just need you to know. And that was my experience of *40 Days of Decrease* where I was like, this woman is brilliant and I think...

Tell me why there are so many of us... I am the queen of this camp. Why are there so many of us that have fears about slowness?

Dr. Chole: Well, I mean, nobody's wandering around thinking about slow as something sacred. I mean, why on earth do something slow when you could do something fast? Because the thought is, the more we can do fast than the more we can do?

Annie: Yeah. I do think that. I need to know that when you say that I go, where's the lie?

Dr. Chole: Exactly. Yeah. So *The Sacred Slow*, though, it kind of turns the concept on its head. Because the point is that God, a God who's infinite and a God who's omnipresent, a God that has no beginning, no ending, a God that is everywhere at the same time, is equally present in every moment. There is more of God in a moment that seems to go faster or less of God in a moment seems to go slower.

So if God is equally present in every single moment, then every slow, steady second of life is just as full of potential to attend to Him and to recognize His love than any second ever has been.

Annie: Yes. You're not wrong. I'm wrong. I just need you to know I know how this goes. You're not wrong. Then the next question is, where are we rushing to? Like, where am I trying to get so fast? To what end? Like till tomorrow? Till the next day? I can't reconcile in my own self how... what I know you're saying is true that God is equally in every moment in your new book, *The Night Is Normal*. At one point, you even say something to the effect of that this whole thing is a spiritual journey, not a goal line to cross.

Dr. Chole: Yeah, that's right. A pilgrimage, not a performance.

Annie: Thank you. Thank you. You quote yourself better than I did. I apologize. But that is exactly it. It's a pilgrimage, not a performance. And that was really hard for me.

Dr. Chole: I think it's hard for a lot of us. A lot of us. We want... And it's out of a good place. I just want to say that. I mean, almost everybody I meet it's out of a good place. I love God. God saved me. God died for me. I want to spend every breath... I want to be sent out. You know, as I'm heading toward heaven, I want to make sure I've been poured out every drop in gratitude, and in love for Him.

The thing is, though, that in addition to that heart that's really set in the right place, we need to realize that God never wanted to use us, He's always wanted to love us.

Annie: Wow. Oh my gosh.

Dr. Chole: So whatever it is that we're pouring out... We can spend our entire lives busy pouring out without the certainty that we're loved. So when we slow down and we begin to live loved, we lead differently. But the heart of it is also beautiful. That's why it's so captivating. Who wouldn't want to give every last drop? It's not about not giving every last drop? It's about why we're giving, what we're giving out of.

You know, there are friends of mine who just have more capacity than I do. They simply do. They have more dreams, more capacity to fulfill those dreams. This isn't a matter of Martha's morphing into Mary's. It's about Martha and Mary equally doing whatever they do because they first know that they're loved.

Annie: Do you know I have always really disliked that story? For this reason. Because it always feels the pressure for anyone who connects with Martha at all, you need to change into a Mary.

Dr. Chole: Yeah. You know, Martha's authority is what made Mary's intimacy possible.

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Chole: Martha is the one who had the authority to invite Jesus into the house.

Annie: Yes, because it's at Martha's home.

Dr. Chole: That's right. And she invited Jesus into the home. And even though Jesus speaks about Mary, He speaks to Martha. So I love them both. I love them both. We don't need to change personalities, Martha and Mary. But all of us, we need to slow down enough to realize that we are already loved and loved more than we could possibly imagine in each day through each night. And when you live loved, you live differently.

Annie: Yeah, that "He never intended to use us but to love us" is something I'm gonna have to... One of the things our friends listening know is that on my Sabbath, on my Saturdays if I'm in town or Sundays, I grieve every time because I run so fast during the week that I choose to put all my grief in a bottle and put it on the shelf. And I go, I'll get to it Saturday. I mean, it's kind of my coping technique to not ignore all...

Because the other thing I did in my 20s was feel no sadness, feel no sadness, just go, just run. So what I've done in my later 30s and early 40s, has been you absolutely should feel this. And there's an appropriate way to feel all this. So here is the strategy currently. So you just gave me a sentence that's for sure gonna make me cry tomorrow. I feel it now but I'm putting it in a box so I can feel it on Saturday.

I think you're right. It's such a beautiful invitation. I have to tell you, even the conversation of high capacity versus people who say other people have higher capacity than me, in my worst moments... I'll confess to you like a bunch of people aren't listening to us. In my worst moments, when people talk about capacity, it makes me feel more prideful than sorry, of like, Why? I didn't make myself this way? But are you saying I have a high capacity? Because I probably wouldn't have picked a high capacity. But do I have a high capacity?

Will you talk a little bit about even that concept? And what is the gospel capacity like? What is Jesus actually asking us to have capacity-wise? Is He asking people to have a high capacity? Or is He asking us to slow down and have a low capacity?

Dr. Chole: I think consistently throughout the Gospels and from the Gospels forward, the one thing He's asked us, the one calling, the one true calling that He gives to every single one of us isn't about capacity, it's about relationship. He says, follow. That's what He's asking to everybody: follow.

Follow is, by very nature, relational. He wants us to follow Him. That's the true calling. So to all the diverse personalities of the 12 and beyond, to all the thinkers or the doers or the beers or the relators, or whatever Enneagram we might want to put there or Myers Briggs, or however much we might want to decipher their fivefold gifting, primary gifting clusters, the fact is, to every single one of them, He said, Follow.

So whether people are high capacity or low capacity, the challenge is, we still tend to want to reduce the spiritual to the mathematical and make faith the formula. "This is what I do and this is how I do it. And this is to the level I can do it." But the thing about formulas is they got faith of relationship and a follow is anything that's relational. So I think more in terms of follow, my filter is, Jesus, where would following lead you and I together today?

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Chole: So whether that's into high productivity or sitting and journaling, whether that's into a desert just to sleep, or whether it's on, you know, some five or six stop speaking engagement, it's about follow. So, that's really where the tension is.

It's not about our dreams. It's not about our capacity. It's about the relationship we're cultivating. Annie, I think so many times, regardless of how we would describe ourselves, we're not quite sure Jesus is enough. We're not quite sure follow this enough. So we keep looking over His shoulder for something else, something more, something beyond. And sometimes that's what drives us even more than dreams.

Annie: Yeah, yeah. Because I think the struggle I find myself in is if I really want to partner with Jesus, and like run fast with Jesus, I can also at times be looking over His shoulder acting like I'm the one who needs to decide where we're going.

Dr. Chole: That's easy to do. And Jesus has a lot of different paces but all of them are very attentive.

Annie: Yes. He did not run, He walked as far as we can. I heard a pastor say recently it's amazing how slow Jesus went when He knew He only had three years to change the world.

Dr. Chole: Isn't that something?

Annie: That is embarrassingly true that I've never one time thought about that. It's just unbelievable. So matching with my personality as well, your book, *The Night is*

Normal, I read so many things that I have never even thought about. It's just incredible.

Dr. Chole: Aw.

Annie: First of all, I think people are just gonna absolutely love it and have loved it if they have already read it. Will you talk a little bit how in the Garden of Eden there was night before there was sin? Oh, I gotta show you this. We have a mind-blown emoji button that we push. So I gotta tell you that it blew my mind when you talked about how before there was sin there was night?

Dr. Chole: Yes, absolutely. In the beginning, in the creation pre-sin, pre-curse, pre-drama, night was one of the original residents of Eden. There was evening, there was morning; there was day, there was night; there was the greater light to govern the day, the lesser light to govern the night, which means that the night wasn't original resident. The night is normal. It means that in the beginning, walking with God required day faith and night faith.

Annie: I mean, from the absolute beginning.

Dr. Chole: From the start.

Annie: Why does no one teach us that the night is normal? Why is that not taught to us?

Dr. Chole: Oh, my word. Well, that would take a while. But I think that our generation and I mean everybody who's alive today, let me say our age, especially, has a difficult time believing this or seeing this and believing it because we have a couple of different errors that have risen to the level of doctrine simultaneously.

We have the blurring between emotion and devotion that has occurred among us. We have how we mistake now, consequently, adrenaline for anointing.

Annie: Wow. Oh, gosh.

Dr. Chole: Right? Right? Hello. That means we have a really difficult time deciding the difference between what feels good and what is good. So you've got this kind of trio of dominoes that have been knocked over us. And what is the night? Well, the nights of time when you don't feel great or you don't feel anything, you don't know anything for certain, or what you used to know for certain now seems fuzzy.

So with those three things in place, Annie, we naturally view the night as spiritual failure instead of spiritual formations. So somebody show me the [inaudible 00:17:40]. You know, how do I believe this? So that's why we don't have a spiritual

framework for the night. Which means we are missing one of the richest mentors of faith. And not only is the night normal, but the nights necessary. There's things that grow in the night that are just too weighty to be held by sunshine.

Annie: Man when you talk about the flowers that only grow at night in the book, I mean, oh, gosh.

[00:18:05] <Music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to share about one of our amazing partners, [FabFitFun](#). I love FabFitFun. It is the best way to save money on beauty and lifestyle products from brands that you love and discover new brands that you fall in love with, all without overpaying.

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That link and all the links you could ever hope for conveniently they're in the show notes for you, or you can find them in Friday's AFD Week in Review email, and you can sign up to get that also in the show notes.

Sponsor: And I've got one more amazing partner to tell you about, [Hiya Health](#). With school back in session, I know those germs are flying around again. And I want my MiniBFF to stay as healthy as possible. Please and thank you. I've got a new book for you.

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Okay, now back to our conversation with Alicia.

[00:21:39] <Music>

Annie: I'll tell you I had surgery a couple of weeks ago and it has absolutely changed my rhythms and it's changed my life this month. And one of the rhythms that's busted has been my early mornings. So I have felt like God was quiet in a time when I'm in a lot of pain. And one of the central fears in my head is, "Oh, no, don't tell me this is the start of a dark night of soul. Oh, no, don't tell me this is the start of Him being quiet."

I feel so much fear around a dark night of the soul of thinking, "If the sun is setting, will I survive not hearing from God?" What's going on in me? Diagnose me in front of everyone. Because there are other of our friends who feel this, who start thinking and start panicking if God's quiet for two days or five days or a month.

Dr. Chole: Yes. Yes. Well, number one, thank you so much for your honesty and your vulnerability because I do think a lot of us are afraid. I think that's why a lot of us

keep moving. Because maybe we'll have that feeling again in the next song that we hear or in the next book that we read, or the next retreat that we attend.

Annie: Yeah, right. The next podcasts we listen to.

Dr. Chole: That's right. Surely someone somewhere can help resurrect that feeling. I obviously don't know exactly what's going on within your soul. But in interacting and in monitoring my own soul, to me, there's several different things that occur.

One is that I'm not quite sure that I have a theology of my feelings. I tend to go from thinking too much of them to too little of them, to treating them as truths vocal twins, or ignoring them as insignificant. So I'm not quite sure how to spiritually interpret my emotions. A theology of emotions with service. Wow.

Annie: How do we build one of those? Is there a path to that?

Dr. Chole: Oh, there is. Yes, there really is a path to that. I think of actually the genius of one of my very first mentors, Annie. You know what she had me do? I mean, I had just met Jesus a couple minutes ago, right? I started university but I had always loved words, I always loved research, and now all of a sudden, God's alive, who knew?

And the very first thing she did was we went to the Bible for four and a half years and we studied Father God, then we studied the Holy Spirit, Genesis to Revelation, then we studied Jesus in the New Testament, all the while writing down the emotions each one expressed, the activities of each, how they interacted with humans.

And what I didn't know was happening is that there was a theology of emotions. So we go to somewhere like Matthew 26, and Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. You know, we went around here in the *40 Days of Decrease*. But there in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says... He was sorrowful and troubled, and He says, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Well, that's not lovely.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah. That's not an easy feeling.

Dr. Chole: No. Nobody's announcing that on a Sunday morning. "Hi, I'm Pastor so and so, I'm sorrowful and troubled. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." So once we realized that Jesus was sinless and sorrowful, that Jesus was the truth and He was troubled, then we start building this theology of emotions. That being troubled is not always a sign of a faith deficit. Being troubled is not always a sign of a faith failure.

In fact, in the garden, being troubled was a sign of obedience in the making. So when we are troubled, when we are sorrowful, when we sense that dip in emotions, which sidebar, we're living on adrenaline so much, it has to equalize just on a chemical level, and we cannot mistake that equalization as failure.

But when we're dipping, it gives us a framework to say, Hey, listen, those emotions that fit more with the night than the day, Jesus had them too, which means this could be healthy. That means this could be holy. This means this could be obedience in the making.

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Chole: So I think a theology of emotions will serve our age and our generation well.

Annie: Okay, keep going on the other things your soul feels in the fear of the night.

Dr. Chole: Well, we've got memory. We've got that amygdala that's working over time and that records the sadder, more painful experiences of our life. And anytime we're even close to a stove that may be turned on, it reminds us. I remember once I was really struggling, Annie, with the frustration over the way I was responding to something that was similar, but not certain to something I had experienced in the past. It was actually my fifth year cancer recurrence.

Annie: Write about that in the book. My gosh.

Dr. Chole: Yes, yes. And I remember talking with my mentor who's in her 80s and I was pouring out my heart and how frustrated that, you know, I was having these emotions. And she said, Oh, my goodness, how wonderful that your amygdala is doing its job. And I said, "Oh, shoot, go ahead and be all scientists." But she was right, my amygdala recorded things that had taken my breath away in the past. I'm approaching another scan. Scans have absolutely changed the trajectory of our family. It's okay that I'm anxious. It's okay that I'm experiencing this.

She said, "But Alicia, even though your amygdala remembers the past, it's not a prophet about your future, so you need to talk back to it."

Annie: Oh, wow.

Dr. Chole: "You need to talk back to it and say, Yeah, that was a painful time, but I've had nine more scans that had good news, or two more scans that had good news." So she really encouraged me to, I think, both acknowledge the way my brain is wired, and how that affects my emotions. But also to realize it's not a prophet, it doesn't know the future. It's just reminding me of the painful past.

Another thing that comes to my mind is that Jesus is so welcoming of all of it is truly me. Just like the Father was welcoming of all that was truly Jesus in the garden. My honesty is a key to intimacy with God, not the absence of cooperative emotions. That's not what I'm waiting for. My honesty is the key.

And though I'd love for my emotions to cooperate, I'd love for them to get in line, you know, like kindergarteners did on the way to the lunch, they don't always. But my honesty is what opens the door.

So, story. When I was little, my dad, who did not believe in God, did a tremendous job putting a face on God, and several of the things and ways in which he interacted with me. Daddy would always ever since I was tiny, Annie, itty bitty girl, he would sit me down, he would say, "What's the daughter thinking? What kind of questions does the daughter have?"

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Chole: I'm the only child, but I'm still called the daughter. So I would ask all my questions about the hippopotamus and my dream when I was two and whatever had happened to me. As I got older, my questions became more complex. And, you know, then we would talk and we watched Johnny Carson and muse, the world's problems, you know, till one or two in the morning.

Looking back, I do not remember a single answer to any of the questions that I raised but I remember the safety of asking. I remember that asking was building trust and trust was building love. And that's what happens with God.

We keep thinking what we need is an answer. Actually, all we need really is an offering of honesty. That honesty will build trust, and that trust will lead us into love. So we bring who we really are into the room.

Annie: I love in the book where you talk about how the Bible says God is love, not God is trust. That love is this... Like it should be what we lean on is the love part. Oh, you just... When I tell you I teared up 112 times reading your book. It's great. It's fine.

I think one of the questions... One of my fears about going into dark nights of the soul, which I've had hard seasons, I don't know that I've ever had one of those. When people talk about having a dark night of the soul, they talk about like a once in a lifetime hurricane kind of feel. So I don't know if I've had that.

But there's a point early in the book where you talk about the difference between spiritual darkness and spiritual death. Can you kind of define those for us so we can

figure out whether are we in some sort of spiral that we need help getting out of or is this just the night and the clock will tick and it will become day again?

Dr. Chole: Yes. Well, honestly, wherever we are, even if it's broad daylight, I think we all need a ton of light.

Annie: Amen. Yes.

Dr. Chole: Right. Right. I'm a major fan of, you know, people who love Jesus offering me therapy. Sign me up. Sign all my children up. Sign all my friends up. So I tried to be surrounded by a host of a good therapist and great friends and solid mentors, whether I think I'm in the day or I'm in the night.

I think one of the things that helps clear up this contrast between spiritual darkness and spiritual death are two other words that I use in the book, the distinction between disillusionment and despair. We spent a lot of time talking about dissolution in *The Night is Normal*. And really what spiritual pain is, what disillusionment is, is the losing of some illusions, which means you get to gain some reality.

You know, think when we are first beginning to walk with Jesus. I don't know about you, but having been an atheist, and then all of a sudden, you know, going from there is no God to Oh my God in about 90 minutes, oh, it was like the world was all of a sudden full color and I could feel God's presence everywhere I went. And every time I opened the Bible, I could hear his voice. It was just stunning.

And then I started moving into my first night. I don't talk about dark nights as much as I just talked about night. Because nights are normal.

Annie: Nights are normal.

Dr. Chole: Some are deeper than others, some are longer than others. But I've had a whole lot of nights in the last 30-something years. So I start walking into the night where things start becoming a little less bright and a little less certain. But what I'm doing is I'm losing some illusions. I'm losing some illusions about God that are just as normal as the illusions that a baby has about their caregiver.

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Chole: We're losing illusions as we're maturing. So in the beginning, you know, if you would ask the baby, let's say the caregiver is the baby's mother, who is mother. And the baby might say, mother's milk. And later on, mother is face, and eyes. And later on, mother is the one who feeds me, the one who plays with me, the one who takes

me to school, or whoever the caregiver is. At each stage in development, the baby's answering, honestly, but there's more.

Annie: There's more. That has always been true.

Dr. Chole: Yeah, it's always been true. Right.

Annie: That's important.

Dr. Chole: So here's what happens in our relationship with God. In the beginning, we're like, God is milk. As we lose illusions and we gain reality, we open up a little bit more to the complexity, the beauty, how captivating God is. This is healthy. This isn't loss. This is gain.

So that spiritual development. That's spiritual maturity. And you contrast disillusionment with despair, where there is no gain on the other side. It's characterized by hopelessness. And as we know, that can lead us into extremely dark places.

Annie: I find myself as I was reading your book, as I think about this, and it is so timely, we're having this conversation because the fear has been so up close to me the last couple of weeks. You say often in the book, you cannot think your way out of this. You cannot perform your way out of this. And I think I can. I think, Okay, the reason God feels quiet is because of me. So let me do these practices and let me read more my Bible, let me make another appointment with my counselor. And all that's good and right. Because you even say in the book, like, take care of your body in the night-

Dr. Chole: Absolutely.

Annie: Get enough sleep in the night. Tie yourself super close to Scripture in the night. Serve other people in the night. I mean, you just give us such good handholds. But I also think I can think my way out of it, that I should be able to get out. So talk to us about that trapped feeling of if this starts, I will never get out.

Dr. Chole: Oh, fear doesn't follow logic, does it?

Annie: Not very well.

Dr. Chole: No. Fear is such a strong emotion. I think sometimes we try to medicate one emotion with another emotion. But I think the greatest antidote to fear is relationship. I would love to be able to logic my way out of the fear that I have. And Annie, I've got a good bit of it. I came by inheritance. My mama was

captivated by fear. My grandmother was paralyzed by fear. Fear is very familiar to me. But I find that it is relationship that leads me, regardless of how long the night is. I have another story. I like stories. Are stories okay?

Annie: Yes.

Dr. Chole: Okay. All right. So I think I told us in one of the book, I'm pretty sure, my daughter... We have three children through adoption. And our middle child is my baby girl. And we just had... Oh my goodness, she's now 20. We just had 21 days in your backpack in nine different countries. Oh, it was... Oh my goodness.

Annie: You're amazing that you did that.

Dr. Chole: Oh, well, she is extraordinary. We had so much fun. But she, in the beginning, you know, what you start noticing whether it's your niece or your nephew, whoever it happens to be, what kids do, what they love to do, she loved to dance. So she started ballet at three, loved ballet, loved dance. And by the time she was approaching high school, she was serious. I mean, she was a junior company member at a professional local company, she was planning on graduating and then actually going, you know, trying to get in the junior companies to do ballet for the rest of her life. She actually had the skills to dream this.

Anyway, we were at a red light distracted, not a demonic, but just a distracted driver rear-ended us. The X-ray showed an L5 fracture. Longer story short, the next two years where a lot of intense physical therapy, and Keyonna [SP], man, she hit it hard. She did everything she was asked to do. But she never regained her backwards flexibility. So the dream that she thought God had created her to do was buried. She had experienced her mom, you know, a 10-year cancer patient. Her eldest brother has autism. It's not like she was unfamiliar with pain.

Annie: Sure.

Dr. Chole: But this was the first time it addressed something that was in her DNA. So we were having a mentoring moment and this is what got brought to my mind. And this is what I would offer. I said, "Sweetheart, you are really great at living happy with Jesus. You've done it your whole life. You are fantastic at living happy with Jesus. And now you have the opportunity to live sad with Jesus. And that's okay. Because at the end of your life, what's going to have made your life rich actually isn't going to be the happier or the sad, it's going to be the 'with Jesus'."

I think it's the 'with Jesus' that carries us through the night even when we can't feel him. It's the choice to believe that He is here, just as much as he was in the daylight, that carries us through the night.

Annie: The night is normal. Even the title has been so hopeful for me. Because one of the questions I have asked ever since I knew of this concept of God going quiet on people, and Jesus being with us but not communicating with us was, why would He want to do that? Why would He want to do that? So will you talk a little bit about you write about it?

Then for our friends listening, there's actually two other sections of the book too about when you're disillusioned with yourself and disillusioned with other people. I read those as well. But the one that has me crying has been disillusionment with God. But we will talk about those two, Alicia, I promise in a few minutes. But why does God want... Why is this fun for Him?

Dr. Chole: I don't know about fun. But I do think we can say loving, which may actually even be more of a theological quandary for us to accept. So let's, once again, look at Jesus, again, to have a theology of emotions and a theology of life. Let's look at Jesus.

Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River, the heavens open, Father God's voice declaring, "This is my Son whom I love. With Him I, well pleased. A Holy Spirit descends and bodily form like a dove. God speaks in the cool crystal waters of the Jordan when He's surrounded by people who are there seeking as well when He's near John the Baptist. But do we have any record of Father God's voice in the 40 days of the desert that came right after that? Did the Father not love the Son?

Annie: Yeah, He did. He said it.

Dr. Chole: That's right. He loved Him. Was the father displeased with the son?

Annie: No.

Dr. Chole: No. He'd already made a public announcement: This is my Son whom I love, with Him I am well pleased. And then Jesus goes into the desert and we have no record of the Father's voice, but the enemy's voice, this clarion.

Annie: Right.

Dr. Chole: So when we're in those places where we can't hear anything, we need to remember Jesus' example. It's not because God doesn't love me. In fact, He loves me. It's not because He's not pleased with me. He was pleased with Jesus. It's not because I'm in disobedience. Obedience leads Jesus straight into the desert. It has led many of the greats straight into the desert.

So what's happening in the desert? The winter, the night, the barren place, the last thing we expect. Our love for God is being purified. See, in the daytime, at the Jordan, in the crystal waters or whatever image you want to use, in the day, we think we see clearly, we think we know fully and it's easy to self-lead.

Annie: Yes, yes. Because you can see.

Dr. Chole: In the night... Right. You can see. "I got this." So we kind of tagged with God. Thanks so much, God. But in the night you lose the illusion of self-leadership because you can't see, you can't feel, you can't hear. So you have to decide who you trust more.

And when we decide in the night, I trust you. When we decide in the night, I actually want you more than I want out, I want you more than I want answers, I want you more than I want healing, I want you more than I want anything, we fall more deeply into love, the kind of love that truly changes the world from the inside out.

Annie: Yes, yes.

[00:41:18] <Music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to share about another amazing partner, [Simple Modern](#). As the weather starts to cool down, fingers crossed, it's happening, right, it is time to bring out our best coffee and tea tumblers to keep our drinks hot. And Simple Modern has some great options.

With football starting back, bless the Lord, they even have options repping some of your favorite NFL teams. Let's go. Plus, as always, they have their ever-popular 40-ounce trek tumbler with the handle, one of the hottest tumblers on the internet.

Simple Modern is one of the top drinkware providers to Target, Walmart, and Amazon and they are the perfect brand for getting back into your routines this fall. They have everything from tumblers to lunch bags to packing cubes and totes. But maybe the best part, the best part is they give 10% of their profits to nonprofits that are committed to causes like solving the water crisis and fighting human trafficking, education, ending homelessness, and helping underprivileged communities.

So if you go to simplemodern.com/thatsoundsfun and you share your email, you will get a unique discount code just for you. Or you can bundle and save for back to school. This can be your go-to brand for your family. Again, that's simplemodern.com/thatsoundsfun.

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Finding great talent is so important. But the time it takes can become a second job. No, thank you. That's where Indeed comes in. You can hire faster and better with their matching platform. I'm speaking from experience over here because many of my friends on the That Sounds Fun Network team and the AFD Inc. team came to us through Indeed.

Indeed is the hiring platform where you can attract, interview, and hire all in one place. Instead of spending hours on multiple job sites for candidates with the right skills, Indeed does the hard work for you. They show you candidates whose resumes on Indeed fit your description immediately after you post so you can hire faster.

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And now back to finish up our conversation with Alicia

[00:43:58] <Music>

Annie: I'm glad everybody else is getting to listen to my counseling session. I'm glad. I'm like, This is why the Lord needed me to hear all this today. I mean, I want to replace the fears of God's quiet with... I mean, the reality of it happened. I mean, it's going to happen. It has happened before. It will happen again. So I'm almost afraid of a guarantee, which feels... It's like when people talk about fear of death, you're like, there's a promise here.

I think what I'm hearing you teach me is there's this opportunity to say, God, would you mature me to appreciate the reality of what you offer in the night?

Dr. Chole: Yes. We look at Jesus and say if you love Jesus enough to send Him into nights, multiple nights, I mean, 30 years of anonymity, that's a whole other book, that wilderness of temptation, that's a night of being misunderstood, misrepresented,

rejected. Garden of Gethsemane, that's a night. If you love Jesus to send him into a night, then you must really love me to send me there too.

I would love to be fearless, Annie. I really would. But I think that that perfect love that casts out all fear is probably waiting for me on the other side. I don't know that I'll have perfect love here. But I can still follow. And I think that's gonna be enough.

Annie: Yes. I can still follow. All throughout the book, the sections on God and other people and ourselves, you go back to the Gospels a lot. We have a podcast called Let's Read the Gospels that it's literally me reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, every month.

Dr. Chole: Oh, wow.

Annie: We've done it every month this year. So this month in September, we're reading in chronological order, which is really cool because you get such a different experience when you're not reading all of Matthew and all Mark. Will you talk a little bit about the spiritual pain in the Gospels? Because in the God part, you talked about their pain with Jesus? And then in the other people part you're like, They had pain with each other?

Dr. Chole: Oh, absolutely.

Annie: So will you talk a little bit about why is it the gospels that we can run to when it comes to the night part of our lives?

Dr. Chole: Well, you know, I'll back up a little bit. One of the studies that I did, I was talking about all the studies that I did, in a long, long, long, long time ago, I did a study, Genesis to Revelation, of every instance of spiritual pain I could find in the scriptures. Every one. Genesis to Revelation. It took forever and it was absolutely fabulous. That's the kind of study that I feel like I'm at peace with.

Annie: Yes, yes.

Dr. Chole: And when I stood back, and I was like, "Look at all of these instances. Did any of them have anything in common?" It seemed to me that there were three different streams of spiritual pain. Spiritual pain with God when He isn't who we thought he was. Spiritual pain regarding ourselves when we aren't who we hoped we were. And a whole lot of spiritual pain with each other, when we're not what we need each other to be.

Then I overlaid that with another study just about that type of pain in the Gospels. The disciples were regularly disillusioned with Jesus. He was always saying things that they were like, "What? What? You know. They were regularly disillusioned with themselves.

We think, you know, most notably of Peter, you know, "I will never deny you, I'll die before I deny you," and then the rooster crows three times. But there were several times where they're like, Why couldn't we drive that out? Or "we don't understand what you're saying here." And then disillusionment with each other? Oh, my word. We're all the one another's throughout the scriptures, but especially in the New Testament, were anticipating the fact that being together guarantees being wounded. However... So wounded is a given, but infection is a choice.

Annie: Wow. Wounded is a given, infection is a choice. Wow.

Dr. Chole: That's right. So that's what that whole fourth part of the book is about. Wounds are given, but being infected is a choice. So how do I navigate disillusionment with all those other dear people who say they love God? And wounded but not infected.

Annie: Peter is my guy. Paul, I can take or leave. But Peter is my guy. I love Paul's writings. The whole Bible is true. But I just said, like, when we get to heaven, I'm not going to be first in line to have coffee with Paul. Y'all can have him. But I love Peter. I just taught at a college ministry this week. And I said to them, I feel like that moment where so many disciples abandoned Jesus and Peter says, "Where else would I go?"

I feel like that is much the core of Peter as he's reinstating in John. I feel like Acts happened because of where else would I go? As much as anything, right? Those kind of words when the disciples say that, when Peter says, "Where else would I go?" is that one of the things we can tie ourselves to when we're disillusioned with other people, when we're disillusioned with other Christians, with churches, with leaders? I mean, we've all experienced leaders who have blown their lives up and hurt us in one way or another.

Dr. Chole: Oh, yeah.

Annie: Is that one of the phrases I can tie myself to is, where else would I go?

Dr. Chole: That's right. I agree. I think that's beautifully said. Where else can we go but to you? I keep thinking... and I think I mentioned this or maybe I just thought it. But you know, whenever there's something that's so painful, like you know, take your breath away, there's nothing like pain that comes from around the table. There's just

nothing like pain that comes from around the table. If I could ever make a case to Jesus why somebody else shouldn't be sitting at that table-

Annie: That's exactly right.

Dr. Chole: Like, oh, shoot, no, I can't. If I'm here-

Annie: Yeah, that's right. If He let me, can you be here.

Dr. Chole: God knows. That's right. So I'll be honest. There's some people I hope I'm not sitting next to at that table for eternity. I'm not gonna lie. The Lord knows. But we're all there equally by grace. We're there by grace.

Annie: You do such a beautiful job writing about grace in the book that you're like, it is the power of grace. I mean, where you say the principles for navigating disillusionment with self all share a common thread. Grace. Grace appears 131 times in my study Bible with 94% of the occurrences in the New Testament. I mean. Anything goes, religion abuses the gift of grace, but overcoming expecting too much of ourselves in order to avoid expecting too little of ourselves misses grace as well. I mean, your grace work is incredible, the work you do on grace and this book and in your own study.

How do we do that? Well, how do we do grace well? You know, in the last five minutes of the show, Alicia, tell me how do we do grace well with God, ourselves, and other people.

Dr. Chole: You got it. Okay. Here's a thought. Here's a thought. You know, the night is one of the original residents of Eden, we've already established that. Well, another one of the original residents of Eden was our humanity. From the beginning, in the beginning, goodness of God, we were human. It means that we were designed to grow, to develop, to mature. It means that I hopefully will know more in 10 years than I know today. It means that it's utterly unrealistic for me to punish earlier versions of myself for what this version barely is now grasping.

So let me say this. Though Jesus died for our sin, I suggest to you that He did not die for our humanity. Wow. Jesus died for our sin, not for our growth curves.

Annie: Wow. Wow.

Dr. Chole: So I'm growing. I'm growing in knowing God. I'm growing. I'm growing in following Jesus. I'm growing. I'm growing in learning how to love others. And Jesus died for my sin along the way. But He didn't die for my growth curves, nor

did He die for yours, or for that person next to me or that other person across the table who just wounded me because they're still growing.

Annie: Right

Dr. Chole: So for the sin around the table, He covered it. He covered it well. He covered it fully. He covered it with more sacrifice than we could possibly ever imagine. He covered it so well I have received so much that I have plenty to share with others and with myself.

Annie: Will you talk for just a second to anyone who's listening that is just in the night, that they know it is with God, it is with other people, it's that they are not in a community of faith right now because of whatever's happened at their church. It's with themselves for the mistake they made. They're not in a community right now because of their own sin, that something has happened. Or someone who says, I have no idea how this could have happened but it is the middle of the night.

Dr. Chole: I would say, please don't fail. Please, don't give up. Please don't mistake the night for failure. Some of the most powerful voices that have gone before you were right where you are now. In fact, some of the voices that I've ever wanted to hear more than once or twice, some of the authors that I read in the past, they have walked right where you are walking now.

So know that God is with you. Know that Jesus is with you. Believe it by faith if you need to, but be certain you're not alone. And remember that He sees really well in the dark. So just follow, stay close and you're going to be right where you need to be.

Annie: And the night is normal.

Dr. Chole: The night is normal.

Annie: The night is normal. I mean, the night is normal. I mean, I get to read a lot of books in this role and I'm not sure I've had a title that told me what I needed to hear clear than *The Night is Normal*. The night is normal. Oh, it's normal.

Alicia, is there anything we didn't say about the book, you want to make sure we cover?

Dr. Chole: Oh, well, just that it's really the overflow of 30 years. You know, every once in a while you're graced with opportunity. And I didn't know that I would be to write a life work and-

Annie: This is it.

Dr. Chole: This is it.

Annie: Wow.

Dr. Chole: If there's one thing that I wanted to leave, one of my greatest concerns for this generation is that they would inherit a spiritual framework for processing the night. Because without a spiritual framework, we interpreted as failure in the enemy siphons us off into an abyss. So I pray that it speaks and I pray that it speaks after I can speak.

Annie: It does speak. It has already greatly impacted me. It is going to deeply affect my Sabbath this weekend. It's really gonna mess with me on another day. Well, I mean, I'm so grateful for your work. These kinds of theologies, the ones that say, We know you've been okay so far, and we know you've had hard seasons so far but there's a language for what you've experienced. It is just infinitely helpful.

Dr. Chole: Thank you.

Annie: So the last question we always ask, to turn a sharp left and you won't be surprised. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you. You know I had to end it like that. I had to bring it back around.

Dr. Chole: Yes, that sounds fun. Well, to be honest, sitting down with you for some tea face-to-face sounds really fun.

Annie: To me as well. Next time you are here, I would love to make that happen. I think it would be fun.

Dr. Chole: I would love it.

Annie: So thank you. And I'm also not a coffee person. I'm a tea person.

Dr. Chole: Here we go.

Annie: Can you imagine me on coffee? What the world! [inaudible 00:56:02]

Dr. Chole: I love the way coffee smells but then it stops right there. It just stops.

Annie: I love a coffee shop. Thank you for offering tea, coffee shop. Well, Alicia, I'm so thankful for you. Truly I can't wait to buy you a cup of tea to begin to thank you for

the work you're doing that helps us better process what is natural and reality and not as scary as I think.

Dr. Chole: Yeah, absolutely.

Annie: Thank you.

Dr. Chole: Well, thank you so much.

[00:56:27] <Music>

Outro: Oh, you guys. Isn't she brilliant? So helpful. Just so therapeutic and spiritual and kind. I'm telling y'all, this book, this book. Just the phrase "the night is normal. Make sure you get a copy of it. Get a copy of the night is normal, and sit with it. Sit with it and read it. I think you're just going to absolutely love it. Be sure you're following her on social media, tell her thank you so much for being on the show.

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

Don't forget you can find the That Sounds Fun podcast on Instagram as well @thatsoundsfunpodcast.

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 is Friday night football coming up tomorrow. I'm loving some of this Friday night football with my high school friends who are playing. So I'm cheering for them.

Y'all have a great weekend. We'll see you back here on Monday with one of my favorites, you're gonna love him, Noah Heron. We'll see y'all Monday.