

[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 with you today.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible partners. This episode is sponsored by BetterHelp. Y'all know we'd love therapy around here. And spoiler alert, we're going to talk to a couple of more therapists during our October Build Your Board series.

Okay, have you heard about the Build Your Board series? Go listen to the trailer on this feed and hear about what is coming in October.

But therapy is such a helpful tool in processing grief, trauma, and just those everyday moments when you feel stuck or overwhelmed. Counseling has had a huge impact on my life. Y'all know this. I will always be an advocate for it. If you've never given therapy a try, consider BetterHelp where your session can be done right from home.

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**Intro:** Today on the show I have the honor of getting to talk with Dr. Scot McKnight. Dr. McKnight is a professor of New Testament and a recognized authority on the New Testament early Christianity and the historical Jesus. Y'all know I love hearing from people who are experts on the Gospels. He's also the author of more than 90 books, y'all. Like nine-zero. What?

Today we are talking about his latest book co-written with Laura Barringer, his daughter. It is called *Pivot*, which is an important read if you're a pastor or a church leader, or business leader. *Pivot's* a practical guide to help you build a culture in

your church or organization that resists abuse and cultivates goodness. Gosh, this message is so needed and so important when it comes to leadership in any capacity. I think you're really going to love learning from him today.

So here is my conversation with Dr. Scot McKnight.

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**Annie:** Dr. McKnight, welcome to That Sounds Fun. Thank you so much for making time for this.

**Dr. McKnight:** Well, thank you. I'm honored to be with you, Annie.

**Annie:** Well, it's a huge honor for me. I'll tell you, you know what sounds fun? Let's talk about the church falling apart. Yay. Here we go! I got to hear you speak at Lisa Harper's conference last year, not long after your first book, *A Church Called Tov*, came out. Will you talk a little bit about that book? It kind of feels, in a lot of ways, like the predecessor for *Pivot*.

**Dr. McKnight:** Yes. It is. We wrote *Tov* and... I often say my daughter wrote it with me, that she pestered me till I wrote that book. I wanted to write less important, less significant things. But we experienced firsthand the explosion of issues at Willow Creek.

As a professor of seminary students, my students were asking me questions. But also as a blogger, my readers were asking me questions. So, all of a sudden, I thought, "I've got to figure out what I want to say about this kind of topic."

What happened is I wrote a blog post that sort of went viral about Willow Creek. And then I began to talk more and more with my students. We sat and talked for hours, students who are in churches, students who have experienced things like this. And we came up with a kind of a strategy, Annie.

The goal was, in part, an exposé of what happened. You got to talk about what happened. We relied on newspaper articles that had been vetted, and so we wouldn't get sued. But I said to my daughter, Laura, I said, "I don't want to write a book that's an expose. I want to try to help the church in a redemptive way.

So we flipped the characteristics of toxicity into *tov*. So we started using the word "tov", which is the Hebrew word for goodness and "good". And so we said, what does the church look like that's *tov*? It's not like we went to the fruit of the Spirit, which we could have done, or the Beatitudes, which we could have done.

Instead, we took the toxicity problems, like narcissism, and flipped them and said, "What would this look like instead if it was tov? So that's what happened to that book. And I gotta tell you, it changed our lives because of the number of people who've read it and have written to us about it.

**Annie:** I love how in *Pivot* you say, "The solution is not for your pastor to do a series on the word 'tov'." The way you fix this is not a sermon series on the word tov.

**Dr. McKnight:** We're committed. I mean, you know, I can get excited about this. But the topic is serious. It really is. I mean, this is a major problem. But we think that the solution is the transformation of character that starts with sort of individuals and groups that can form over time, just the way toxicity formed. It didn't form overnight.

**Annie:** That literally is the first question I wrote down is how did we get here? How did we get here? What happened? I mean, was it like this in the 90s when I was in youth group and I just didn't know?

**Dr. McKnight:** Yes. Probably somewhat.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Dr. McKnight:** But I think a couple things have happened. Number one, human beings are sinners. We got this problem. The second thing is, though, I think in the 1980s and 90s, church changed toward the models of very successful charismatic platformers who successfully put forth an image on the platform and could create very interesting and clever and helpful ideas on the platform.

**Annie:** And you just mean platform, meaning the local church, like on the Sunday morning?

**Dr. McKnight:** Yeah, yeah. That's right. You know, you see them on the platform. People didn't used to have such raised platforms.

**Annie:** Right.

**Dr. McKnight:** Ours is only six inches, which is pretty good. Like, well, two stairs I guess. But I think that we created a culture in which, let me put it this way, hyper-charismatic, even unspiritual people could succeed because they could perform on that platform in ways that pleased the people in the congregation, in the pews.

**Annie:** But they couldn't have known they were gonna get famous off of it at the time, right? The guys in 1991 who were just really good in their local town couldn't have known that fa... I mean, I guess, was it just... I'm like, did narcissism exist before the internet? I guess is my question.

**Dr. McKnight:** Narcissism hasn't been a problem. There were greater checks. But it is the case that in the late 80s and early 90s, mid-90s, pastors started becoming pretty famous. And then with social media and conferences and huge screens, they became celebrities.

And when pastors become celebrities, when speakers become celebrities... I mean, you and I have done this. We've been on some pretty stinking big platforms. It's kind of intoxicating at times. You get up there and you think... I remember being at Andy Stanley's church thinking like, "25,000 people are gonna listen to this. This is a little bit weird." I teach classes, Annie, that have 30 students maximum. I know everybody in the room. And it was really weird for me.

I think that right there is a major shift that has occurred is the hugeness of the platform and the moving toward platform by some of these young pastors. Their models became not the great Bible expositors and not the deep devotional sound people like A. W. Tozer. But models became people with great success based on numbers and money and buildings and baptisms.

**Annie:** I'm gonna ask you a lot of questions in the middle, but I want to skip to the end of the story. Do you feel like it's getting better? Do you feel hopeful about it yet?

**Dr. McKnight:** Some days and some days not. But I think what's happened in the last several years, and it's not just our *Tov* book, it's Diane Langberg, it's other people who've written... Katelyn Beaty's book on celebrities. People are being given a language to describe the toxic stuff that they're experiencing in churches. And it sticks to the wall when you throw it and it pierces the heart. And that, I think, is changing.

And I think pastors are fin... I get some nasty letters from people. When people tell me they don't like *Tov*, I think, so do you like evil? I mean, come on. What's the option here? But to me, what's happened is people now almost have categories to detect problems in churches. And it's made leaders in churches, people on the platform more conscious of what they're doing because they can be called out.

**Annie:** That's what I think.

**Dr. McKnight:** This, I think, is redemptive.

**Annie:** Yes. Because I just keep thinking, if you watch a pastor, male or female, have an affair, I just think, did you not know that the internet would figure this out? I just think, how in the world? Help me get in their minds, Dr. McKnight. How in the world is any Christian leader, not assuming everything will be found out? Because everything gets found out.

**Dr. McKnight:** Well, this is a big issue. And furthermore, there's people on Twitter who might be calling you out even when you don't have anything to be called.

**Annie:** When you haven't done anything.

**Dr. McKnight:** That's right.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Dr. McKnight:** I mean, it can get pretty brutal out there. I tell my colleagues, I tell my students, one mistake can go viral and it can ruin what you're doing. So be careful. Be genuine. Don't try to fake things. Be ready for criticism because it's coming your way. That's what blows my mind when... I mean, you and I talked a little bit before we started that I've been up close to some of this in my own story.

And every time I think, Did you think we wouldn't know? Did you think this wouldn't become public? Did you think you have some magic pill or spell that keeps... that your story is gonna be different than every other one of these that comes out and blows up your family and blows up the church and blows up your life? How do they sometimes think they're different, Dr. McKnight? How do they think they're different?

**Dr. McKnight:** Well, I think they think they've probably had a practice of deceit and a practice of hiding things and they think they can hide it. But there's some, you know, that are so powerful that they can silence their opponents. And they have probably successfully, in the past, silenced some critics, silenced some people who've asked questions. I know stories like this where people came to them and they went to the right people and shut that person down or paid them off, you know-

**Annie:** And then they get X amount more time. Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're exactly right. That is it. I know the power of someone being unhappy with me, and I say to them, "No, no, no, you're misunderstanding." And then they get quiet. Whether I'm right or wrong, it's not like I was right. But as you're saying that, I'm going, Oh, no, I, I do understand that part of when you're able to move past a person who is unhappy with you, you feel like, "Well, I'll be able to move past the next one too."

**Dr. McKnight:** That's a good observation because that's what happens, is that we do have platform, we do have power and we can respond. We want to be honest as much as possible, but sometimes we'd rather... Instead of remembering the past, we'd like to tell a story about the past that would prefer that other people would believe. There's a big difference.

**Annie:** And ourselves believe sometimes too, right?

**Dr. McKnight:** Yeah, eventually.

**Annie:** So many of our friends listening have been in a complicated spot with a church. When do we leave and when do we stay and be a part of? If we're not on staff, if we're one of the people attending, how do we know when to leave and when to stay?

**Dr. McKnight:** This is maybe the most common question we get.

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Dr. McKnight:** You know, it's very rare that a senior pastor will say, "Our church is toxic. What can I do to fix it?" Because if they're the ones who created the toxicity, they're not the ones to fix it.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Dr. McKnight:** So it's often people who in some ways have tried. I've met with a man several times in the area who has been through this. My experience is... the question is when to leave. And here's what I say. I say, give yourself realistic expectations of what can actually happen. If you think you're gonna go into the pastor and say, "You're toxic," and the pastor's gonna say, "I am. I'm gonna confess that sin in the church and I'm gonna change tomorrow," that's not gonna happen.

One realistic explanation is I want you to get to the position where being heard is what you really want. Not changing things but being heard. And that is not that easy to do. But you can go to, let's say, friends of friends who know the leaders, or maybe you know some elders, or maybe you know friend of the elder somehow and have a conversation. It's not a conversation to change things, but it's a conversation to say, "This is what I'm observing. What do you think we should do?"

Now, Annie, the sad thing is that frequently that person then is silenced or gaslit or kicked out, removed from any kind of leadership. I'm sorry to say that that happens. But I would say first, develop some realistic expectations.

The second thing I say is give yourself a time limit. Say to yourself, If I don't see some changes in 12 months or 18 months, then I have to seriously consider leaving. And then a third, I would say that it's important to find people that are safe for you who can be your advisors and friends and advocates as you go along so that you know that you're being heard and that these people are giving you feedback and saying you're doing the right thing.

And then I think they need to know that the break from the church is gonna be far more painful than they ever expected. Their friends, their sermons, the music, the worship team is you're losing that, but you're also joining a new group that you don't belong in.

And how long does it take to feel comfortable, let's say with a group of people? It can take a year or more. It can take three years. If you're an introvert, it takes... Okay, we won't go there. It takes a long time. I think people need to sort of plot and plan their procedure. And if they don't, I think they'll just go for two years of utter frustration and then it's almost overwhelming in pain when they do have to leave because they didn't... I don't think they had realistic expectations.

But if I would say the first thing is forget changing the church and think first of all about being heard and then probably planning your exit strategy. I've never thought about that until your teachings. But the idea of planning exit strategy to help prepare for the pain. I mean, the pain of leaving a church where you've worked, but it isn't healthy for you anymore, the pain of leaving a church where you've volunteered, where you've just served in the kids' ministry, or you've served in the greeting team or you've led a small group. Can you put words to why that pain is so devastating when we leave a church? It's not that devastating when we leave a swim team, and it's not that devastating when our kids switch schools, you know?

**Dr. McKnight:** Yeah.

**Annie:** Why is it so...? Because I felt that too. It's so devastating to lose that church community.

**Dr. McKnight:** I was speaking in Virginia to a bunch of Baptist pastors. It was a big group. And I said, "I don't want to move because of my connection to our church." And I just started tearing up. It was the first time I ever thought of leaving. And I thought, These are the people we know. You know, we've built relationship with dozens of people in our church. We meet for dinners. We know their children's names, we know their stories, we know their families, we know their spiritual likes and their spirit... You know, we know who they like or what they like in sermons and what they don't like. It's just over and over.

And I realize that we are so enmeshed in a good way in a church as a family, that when we leave, we are... It's like a divorce. It's not like a change of jobs. Although sometimes job change can be that way because of relationships. But it is the fracturing of a network of relationships that have sustained us, brought us joy, brought us information, brought us spiritual growth, brought us everything. And then it's hard.

**Annie:** The church I grew up in... we went to church our whole lives. I always say that if the door was unlocked and the Coke machine was taking quarters, we were there. And two parts of it. One, my mom was a whistleblower of a situation that... It is one of the things that makes me most proud to be her daughter now as an adult. At the time I didn't understand it. I was 18.

But now when I see what she lost... and our church split. I was in college. It was my freshman year of college. Dr. McKnight, I felt so church homeless because even though a good percent of my friends and all my family had gone to this new church, I had never gone to this new church. And the church I grew up in, I could no longer go to because even though there were people there... I mean, there were people there I never got to say goodbye to because I had just gone to college.

I thought I was coming home and gonna go to summer camp. I didn't realize there was no coming home. I didn't understand the church homeless feeling very well, so I stayed in my college town longer than I planned on. I just ended up living there for some years after college because I was in a church there that I felt at home in.

**Dr. McKnight:** Wow. Wow.

**Annie:** So will you talk to people who were in that church homeless place? How do you find the next church? It was easier for me because I was a 19-year-old who was going to church with my roommates and I ended up staying there. But for the people who their families are church homeless now, they were a pastor, they were on staff, they were the whistleblower, how do they even start to find a new church?

**Dr. McKnight:** You ask really good questions. This is pretty good.

**Annie:** Thank you.

**Dr. McKnight:** This is the real stuff here. We have a couple advantages. Well, not advantages, but a couple things. Number one, we can lurk today at churches because of internet.

**Annie:** Sure.



**Dr. McKnight:** So you can watch a church and say, you know, I don't like that one, I like this one. You can take three or four months and watch 5, 6, 7, 10 churches. That'd be one thing. I would lurk on the internet to find something you think might be comfortable. But remember that churches do their best to present themselves the best they can on Sunday morning. It's not the reality. The second thing-

**Annie:** And on their website.

**Dr. McKnight:** Oh, yeah. Yeah. The second thing is, this is the... what I've learned recently in going to church is people are looking for friends, and so they find their friends and find out where they go to church and start there. And that can be a very helpful strategy for finding a new church, is to say, I'm a good friends with so-and-so, this is where she, or this is where he goes to church. I think I'll try that out. Because when I go there, I could sit with them or I know somebody. There's a face I recognize." So that would be two things.

I would also say, in being realistic, is expect it to take a year at least to find a church where you're comfortable. And don't expect the church to be perfect. I'm a big fan of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who taught us that we have to destroy our wish dreams for churches. The church should be a hospital for centers more than a country club for already achieved saints. So it's not gonna be perfect, but it's gonna take... give yourself a lot of time.

Now, some people have a personality—I'm more this way. I'm an extrovert more—to commit themselves right away. They can get involved right away. Others just have to hang back a while. If you're a hanger backer, then go ahead and hang back for a while. And then you probably can't join a church of 75 because you're gonna be known too soon.

**Annie:** You don't get to hang back in that size. Yeah.

**Dr. McKnight:** That's right. That's right.

**Annie:** Is a small church better than big church?

**Dr. McKnight:** I'm concerned about this issue. I'm nearly 70 years old. I have over the years defended the value of megachurches because of the different ministries that they have because of the resources and funds. It's wonderful. And their teaching and music is always the best, you know.

But we're a part of a smaller church, small church. I don't know how many we even have. Maybe 75 to a hundred. Maybe a hundred, sometimes 125. I think it's a

completely different experience. You're more vulnerable because you're known. You can be liked in a deeper way and unliked in a deeper way.

But I believe that a church that does not focus on fellowship and instruction and fellowship in the sense of "I know you, I know your story, you know me, you know my story" if that's not happening, it's not really church. It is go and watch.

And I believe that a lot of people are in a go-and-watch phase in their life. They need a big church. They can sit in the back and they can heal from some wounds in churches. Some people will never want to go back to the small church. But I really do believe that the small church offers the fullness of what a church is supposed to be.

[00:24:24] <Music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to share about one of our amazing partners, [Liquid I.V.](#) Y'all know I love Liquid I.V.. I literally have a Liquid I.V. energy multiplier every morning when I get to the office. It is just the best.

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**Sponsor:** And one more amazing partner to tell you about, [Kitsch](#). I know you guys love talking about some good hair products, and there is one brand that has taken it to the next level. Kitsch has created game-changing essentials that beauty enthusiasts swear by.

Starting in 2010 by selling hair ties door to door, let's go, Kitsch literally started as a hustle and a dream Kitsch is self-funded, female-founded, and now carried in over 20,000 retail locations. Maybe you've seen their satin pillowcases, caps, and eye masks, which are all great for your hair and skin while you sleep. Or have you seen their heatless satin curling rollers? I live for them.

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Okay, now back to our conversation with Dr. McKnight.

[00:27:07] <Music>

**Annie:** An interesting experience I'm having. When I was reading *Pivot*, which I just loved, I thought at least... here's what I thought. I thought at least Dr. McKnight and Laura have some hope that the church can do something that you took time to write *Pivot*. I was like, At least you didn't go, "Sorry, good luck, everybody." At least you, like said, there is a path, which gave me hope.

I'm at a megachurch. I'm at CrossPoint in Nashville, and what I am experiencing is a new level of discipleship on the staff and a new level of discipleship on the staff in a way that is focused on their character, like you talk about in *Pivot*. So it almost feels like we have a small church inside of a leading a large church, and it's trickling down hopefully. Are we doing that correctly, do you think? I'm discipling staff girls and staff girls are discipling attendees at the church.

**Dr. McKnight:** Annie, this is why I've never been a big fan of criticizing megachurches because they're megachurches. The real question is, are people experiencing fellowship? Are they experiencing instruction? Are they experiencing discipleship at the personal level? I don't mean listening to a great series of sermons. I mean, what you're talking about?

I know of mega-churches that are really small groups that meet together on Sunday. That to me is very healthy. In fact, that might be the healthiest thing of all. Because it does allow people to just sit and watch. And I'm not being critical of that.

**Annie:** No, no, no.

**Dr. McKnight:** Here's a question. If you died, would there be any pastor who knows your story? If your mother dies, is there someone who's gonna call you and actually know your story enough to talk about this? This is one of the most significant pastoral moments ever. And it's in everybody's life in that sense, as a believer. They're gonna die, and will there be a pastor there to attend you and your family and your children and your relatives? If not, find a way to make that happen.

**Annie:** Yeah. Because it feels like the option, as a pro-mega-church person as you are, and I as I am, you know, we're both saying that that's... I think it's a good thing too. I think there are good parts to it as well as harmful parts of course of anywhere.

But I just think, man, if you plug in and plug in and plug in, you're going to get disciplined. If you only show up on Sundays anywhere, if you only show up on Sundays and sit in the back row, are you gonna be disciplined? I don't know. I haven't been in a small church in a very long time, so I don't know if that happens, if you get pursued better when there's a hundred people in there from the five staff people, or if you get pursued better if there's 8,000 people there from the 60 staff people. I don't know.

**Dr. McKnight:** Well, if you talk to... I have a lot of pastors, students pastors who pastor small churches. They know everybody in their church, but a lot of them know everybody in their community because they're, you know, from some small community in Kansas. So that's a little bit different story.

But you really can't hide in those churches. But if you're trying to hide... I like to have a church where you can hide if you need to hide—I think that's healthy—and give you space to become who you need to be. And when you're ready, you'll be ready. I find in our church, which is small, there are some people who, they're not lurkers, but they're also not well-known. They come and then they go and they feel safe, and they're beginning to form relationships, and over time they'll become an integral part of the church. I think our church is good at making people feel safe.

**Annie:** When I was reading *Pivot*, I mean, it is such a beautiful and hard directive of what to do. I mean, there's no playing around of like, this part will be easy. It's like no, no, no, there's a coalition and there's a person and there's a... and it is a slow process toward becoming a church of tov.

But I wondered, as I was reading it, whose work is this to do? Is it the attenders' work to do? Is it the staff's work to do? Whose work is it? If you're sitting in a church that you know is toxic, are you the whistleblower? Do you just go?

**Dr. McKnight:** This is a question I can get excited about, but I don't want people to think that there's any quick solution. I'm nervous that if it becomes the senior pastor is the, let's say... We call them a transforming agent. The agent of transformation. A top-down approach is not gonna work. We gotta have somebody who's off the stage.

When you say the whistleblower, the average person, there's not going to be a pivot. There's a funny story about I did not know about the scene in Friends about pivot.

**Annie:** Oh, yeah. I bet you've gotten that a lot, haven't you then?

**Dr. McKnight:** That's Right. My daughter said, Dad... I said, "Laura, no one's gonna know what that is." She goes, "Oh Dad, everybody knows what that is." I said, "Well, I've never seen it." So she sent me the video. But if you're gonna pivot, this is what's so important is it's gotta start in some sort of, I would say biblically formed, theologically formed, spiritually directed group of people who are helping to form a vision for the church of transformation.

And then it has to build and grow. But it has to grow not by saying, This is our vision. Do you want to join? It is, This is what we're thinking now. How can you contribute to this? So that there is a multilayer of ownership.

Now, there are some people who are gonna be on the outside circle who are just gonna be watchers. But if it's going to be a genuine transformation in a church, it's gonna have to be owned by all—I hate to use these terms—all the stakeholders. All the people who really love this church need to be involved in the formation of the vision so they can say, I contributed.

And then here's the thing I learned. I was teaching about tov one day in class, and a student at the back of the class says, "Scot," he says, "I have a PhD in organizational transformation." I went, "Oh, brother, what is that?" And then he introduced us to a book that was amazing by Edgar Schein.

But here's what he said in class. I'll say two things. He said, "Scot, you have a lot of good ideas, but all the wrong terms." And I said, "What do you mean by the wrong terms?" He said, "You're using biblical and theological terms, and in the organization of business world, we don't use any of these terms."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Dr. McKnight:** So he said, "I have to translate them." But then he said this, "It is standard knowledge and wisdom in businesses, in the business world of organizational transformation, that it takes seven years for an organization to be transformed when people are committed to it."

**Annie:** It takes seven years for an organization to be transformed.

**Dr. McKnight:** So this is not for the lighthearted people who think we can do a six-week series on tov.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Dr. McKnight:** It's not even a six-week series or a 12-week series on the fruit of the spirit. This is a long-term commitment of mutually informing and growing with one another, listening to one another to form a church that is unlike the church that exists but that is more like Jesus, it is more Christ-like, because we're trying to base it on character transformation and discipleship.

So the great church in California that my daughter wrote about with Mike Lueken and Kent Carlson, the Renovation of the Church is a great story and it took a long time. And as Mike wrote to me, he was a former student of mine, he said, "I sure wish we'd have had your book when we did this because we didn't know what we were doing."

**Annie:** Yeah. Yeah. He's like, "We did that in about a year shorter if we'd had your book." I mean, one of the things I loved about the book is at the end you really kind of give a... I was gonna say quiz, but you call it the tov tool of really a survey of where you are and where your church is. I didn't do it. I didn't do it because I thought, "I don't have time for this to not go well." That's what I thought.

**Dr. McKnight:** Oh, that's a good one. That is so honest. I love that. Okay. The tov tool developed, and a pastor said to me, "Scot, everything is about assessment these days. Do you have an assessment tool?" I said, "Okay, I'll work on this."

Now, this is not a normed test for sociologists and psychologists, but this is a conversation starter based on the tov attributes of *A Church Called Tov* that is now turned into a tool that we would hope small groups and let's say leadership teams, you know, it depends on how your church is organized, elder board. Yeah. That they would go through each one of these virtues. Let's say it's about empathy. Does your church have empathy? And you don't do all eight of them or seven of them in one weekend. You have to do no more than one a month, I would say.

And you have to be really honest, and you have to create safety for people to be transparent and authentic and honest and say, you know, I think we have fired too many people without explaining what's going on and we have lied publicly by saying the Lord called them to a different place. That's not what happened."

We need to ask ourselves a question, why we're spinning false narratives. I believe that if churches will patiently, honestly, and safely go through these questions with groups that are safe for one another, nobody gets retaliation, that the right things will perk up through the power of the spirit to reveal and illuminate things, they can discern where, where this church needs to improve and work and I think that we can move in steps forward.

But this is something that we think could be maybe the most significant part of the book when it comes to church life. Your answer was perfect. "I don't think I want to take this if it's not gonna go well."

**Annie:** I love our church and I think we're being pastored really beautifully and we've been through some really painful things too. So I guess another question that I'm bringing to you as part of my own healing is, is all of this worth it? Is the church worth what we're all going through?

**Dr. McKnight:** You know, I don't think people understand how significant a group can be, and that is a group has the capacity to make you the kind of person that fits in that group. And that's a pretty significant idea. And if that group is really healthy and spiritually formed and loving and peaceful, whatever words you want to use, it can constrain you to become you know, what we say in at times, more like Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers' workplace was a transforming place to work because of the culture of the place. But we all know that the business world and toxic traits can become cultural so much that when we get in this group, we become meaner than we really are and nastier and more demanding.

I think it's worth it, but it's hard. And it's worth it in the sense that this is the body of Christ. Jesus has identified Himself with us. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6, "You are the temple of God." Now, that's pretty serious stuff. Because there is for Jews one temple in Jerusalem at the time, and He's saying, we've got mobile temples now all over the Roman empire because the spirit of God is in you. The glory of God in Christ is in you. The kavod.

So, yes, the church is worth it. But the church is not perfect and we can't expect perfection. But what we have is a table called communion. We call it Eucharist in our church that we go forward every Sunday and take communion because we're

sinner. And we go up there and we want to express that we need forgiveness and that we're gonna get it right now because we are sinners.

But we want to be the kind of sinners who are being transformed by the grace of God, by the spirit of God in the context of community that helps us be more transformed. So I really believe in the church. I really believe in his significance. But I also believe that toxic churches can be really toxic and hurt us from the ground up.

**Annie:** A lot of your suggestions and the practices in *Pivot* and in *A Church Called Tov*, can these work in nonprofits and in ministries and in Christian workplaces? Because I mean, we run a company here. There's 19 employees across our three companies here. We're not a church, but we're run by believers. Do I need to be paying attention to this same stuff or is this pretty uniquely church?

**Dr. McKnight:** Well, I'm a theologian, okay? I teach seminary students and I write books for Christians. So I tend to favor everything in that direction. And I don't pretend to talk to business people. That's for people who know that world better than I do. But I do believe this, that as Rick Warren's purpose-driven life somehow exploded into the whole business world, I believe the principles of *Pivot* of working on character, learning how we use power, become an example, those are our priorities that we think are so significant that they translate very well into the business world.

Now, my daughter's a public school teacher. She knows that *tov*, the principles of *pivot*, and *tov* can manifest themselves in her classroom with kindergartners and in a relationship with fellow teachers. And if they want to change, they have to work at it and they're gonna have to work at it hard. I think it does translate...

I don't believe that, for instance, that my goal is to make the public school a Christian school. I think that we have to recognize that we live in a different kind of society than that. But I have watched so many good Christian teachers over the years. My parents... My father was a public school teacher. He taught Jonathan Edwards.

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Dr. McKnight:** He publicly read sinners in the hands of an angry God for like 15 years one time.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh.

**Dr. McKnight:** And he would publicly perform it. He was-



**Annie:** Oh, that's awesome.

**Dr. McKnight:** He was a speech guy. So to me, good Christians know how to translate and embody the way of Christ in a way that is within the expectations of a public world and a public school. But at the same time, it embodies the very virtues of pivot and tov in very Christian ways.

**Annie:** That is what I hope we're doing here. My COO often says, "The person at the top thinks it's going the best." So she's always like, Annie, you can't be the one who decides how things are going here. We have to ask everyone else how things are going here."

**Dr. McKnight:** That's good.

**Annie:** We're going for tov. Even though we aren't a church, we're going for tov.

**Dr. McKnight:** That's good.

[00:44:16] <Music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting one more time to share about another amazing partner, [Earth Breeze](#). I thought recycling was making a big difference until I learned this. Now hear me out. You know those recycling symbols on plastic containers, the technical term is resin identification numbers and they can be a little misleading.

Did you know that that doesn't always mean the plastic will get recycled? 91% of plastic doesn't even get recycled. Oh, that makes my stomach hurt. That's why I tried to reduce my single-use plastic consumption. And the easiest place to start is the laundry room.

You can do what I did and switch the laundry jug for Earth Breeze Eco sheets. Y'all, I love these so much. Imagine for a minute it is something that looks like a dryer sheet, but it isn't. And you have to really pay attention when you're deciding what goes in the wash. Because there was a time, you guys, where I put a dryer sheet instead of an Earth Breeze eco sheets. I caught it, but that's how much they resemble each other.

It is a liquidless laundry detergent sheet. It dissolves it a hundred percent in any wash cycle, hot or cold. No measuring, no mess, no heavy lifting. Just pay attention.

You can sign up for their subscription and have it delivered right to your door and you have full control to adjust, pause, or cancel at any time. I'm happy to never walk down a plastic-filled laundry all again. Most importantly though, I still get a powerful clean.

Earth Breeze is tough on stains, it fights odor, and my clothes come out clean every time. Trust me, I love my Earth Breeze sheets. Right now my friends can subscribe to Earth Breeze and save 40%. So go to [earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun](http://earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun) to get started. That's [earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun](http://earthbreeze.com/thatsoundsfun) for 40% off.

That link and pretty much every other link you could ever hope for are in the show notes. Or we send them in Friday's AFD Week in Review emails. So make sure you've signed up for that, and you can check for those below.

**Annie:** For the month of October, we are hosting Build Your Board, a That Sounds Fun Podcast series to help you find the voices you need for the life that you want. We're going to talk about finding friends as an adult, why counselors matter so much, how to find a mentor, and why discipleship doesn't have to be intimidating. And we're even going to host a week of daily episodes on some specific voices you might need, like a financial coach, a life coach, a health business, or relationship coach.

You're gonna hear from real people who speak into my life like my mentor Nancy, and experts that you'll want to learn from. And we've created a Build Your Board guidebook for this series. Y'all love a guidebook. We do too.

And this felt like one of those series where we need to really workshop and process through what you're needing and how to find it. We've laid out some really helpful steps and questions in the guidebook. And there are pages to take notes for every episode. So by the end of the month, you will have a completed resource and the answer to the question, who is the next voice I need to help me build the life that I want?

So go download your Build Your Board guidebook at [anniefdowns.com/buildyourboard](http://anniefdowns.com/buildyourboard) and subscribe to That Sounds Fun, if you haven't already, so you don't miss a single episode. Because in a world of influencers, it is so important that you decide who is influencing you. So let's build your board in October.

[00:47:25] <Music>

**Annie:** Dr. McKnight, we have another podcast called Let's Read the Gospels, where every month I am reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all the way through and doing it every month this year. So we are on our ninth round in September. We're doing it

in chronological order this month, which has been really fun to listen to. But you are an expert on New Testament things.

One of the things I love asking scholars and theologians when they come on is, do you have a favorite gospel? Is there one of those guys you like the most?

**Dr. McKnight:** Well you've stepped into the right room for this one.

**Annie:** I love it.

**Dr. McKnight:** I did my PhD on the Gospel of Matthew. I love the gospel of Matthew.

**Annie:** Really? Your whole PhD on the gospel of Matthew?

**Dr. McKnight:** That's right. And I taught Matthew for years and years. So yes, I have a favorite gospel. But I'm biased toward the Gospels because my favorite is Jesus. I've just translated the New Testament called the Second Testament. But I did something that no one has ever done in a gospel in a New Testament translation.

We have headers for every paragraph, right?

**Annie:** Right.

**Dr. McKnight:** Every paragraph begins with the word Jesus.

**Annie:** No way. For the whole gospels, all four?

**Dr. McKnight:** All four gospels. Every paragraph is about Jesus.

**Annie:** When do we get to read this?

**Dr. McKnight:** It's out. It's called the Second Testament from InterVarsity.

**Annie:** Oh, I'm ordering it today. The Second Testament.

**Dr. McKnight:** And it goes with John GoldenGate who did the First Testament. I call it chunky and clunky. It feels like the Greek text more than any English text. And sometimes you'll go, "Oh, I don't know what that means. And you'll go, that's okay. The Greek is a little bit obscure here. I hope you enjoy it.

But the point I'm making is the gospels are about Jesus. And we have a tendency to make them about ourselves. But the more we fall in love with Jesus of the gospels, the more it is about ourselves. Every time. Every time.

**Annie:** Oh, that's really good. You did your whole PhD on Matthew. Are you watching *The Chosen*? Do you like how they're portraying Matthew?

**Dr. McKnight:** Okay. No, I haven't seen. I haven't seen anything of *The Chosen*, but I've heard things and they make him sort of obsessive-compulsive guy, right?

**Annie:** Yes, sir.

**Dr. McKnight:** Exactly. Matthew's gospel has... you can virtually divide everything into 17 verses.

**Annie:** Really?

**Dr. McKnight:** I think it was the length of a page.

**Annie:** Oh my gosh.

**Dr. McKnight:** The length of a page. I think he copies from Mark. And all of a sudden he'll get toward the end and all of a sudden he'll reduce the last 10 verses of Mark to two and a half just to make him fit on the page.

**Annie:** Fit on the page. Oh, I think that's great. Oh, I think that is so cool. Listen, I gotta show you something. We have a button that I push when someone blows my mind. Wowie Zowie. And it says Wowie Zowie. That wins. The "Matthew tried to fit everything on a page" gets the Wowie Zowie button. That blows my mind that he tried to make it fit on a page.

Okay, here's the other question I like to ask. Do you think Mark... at the end of Mark, is the naked guy running away from the garden?

**Dr. McKnight:** Well, we don't know, do we? But yeah, I would say... This is the way the ancient people wrote is they didn't identify themselves. So yeah, I think that's a pretty good guess.

**Annie:** I think that's it. Because that means he's somebody who I witnessed Jesus being arrested and wrote it. I just think that's incredible. It has been so transforming to read the same four chapters out loud nine times so far. I mean, it has transformed my life.

**Dr. McKnight:** Now, do you do this every day?

**Annie:** We record a little bit more batched. I record usually twice a week. I usually do two days twice a week.

**Dr. McKnight:** Okay. That's good. That's good.

**Annie:** But we're releasing them every day. It takes 30 days... We have it split up, so it's about three chapters a day and it goes 30 days.

**Dr. McKnight:** That's absolutely wonderful. I'm thrilled to hear this. This is good news.

**Annie:** It's been beautiful. I mean, so far we've had over 4 million people listen this year.

**Dr. McKnight:** Oh wow.

**Annie:** I'm telling you, Dr. McKnight, it's nothing except the gospels and then I do a little prayer at the end to send them on their day. So it's not any of my dumb thoughts. It is just the Gospels.

**Dr. McKnight:** But you know, the Gospels, they're stories. Some of the paragraphs are pretty short, so you don't really get the feel of a plot. But there's a plot and there's something going on in every one of these if we would just slow down and watch what happens and let our imaginations go, to what? Think. What was this like? What was on the face of Jesus when He said, "Be healed"? And how do they know that He had compassion? Because there was something about maybe tears in His eyes, something in His face. I think we just gain so much from Jesus in the Gospels if we'd slow down and listen to the story and let it speak to us as it is. Wonderful.

**Annie:** The day we read a part... when they couldn't drive out the demons. So this bible, you know, is in chronological, so we have all of them at the same time. And the disciples couldn't get the demons out, Jesus kept saying, "You unbelieving in perverse generation. How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?" And every month it's been very hard for me to know what inflection to put on that, because I don't know what He was feeling when He said that to people who just wanted to heal someone.

**Dr. McKnight:** Well, this is a really good question, Annie. I mean, this is so important. And if you've ever done... You know, a lot of pastors will read scripture aloud. And the tone that we use shapes the response. So we have to work at this I think pretty carefully.

Here's a good example for me. Matthew 23 is all Jesus calling the Pharisees and scribes hypocrites. At the end of that passage, Jesus says, "I wish I could gather you the way a hen gathers the chicks. Well, that changes the tone of the whole passage

away from being mad and angry and yelling at them to maybe when He said, you're hypocrites. You know, that He said it with compassion. It wasn't just condemnation. But that's the way we get angry at the people who we think are like Pharisees. And maybe Jesus wasn't angry at all. It doesn't say He was spitting it out of His mouth.

So in that passage, I tell you, I tend to think that we need to stop and figure out, how can I say this in a compassionate way rather than an angry way, a condemning way. Because I think Jesus came to bring salvation not to condemn. John tells us that.

**Annie:** Yes. Yes. It's just such a complicated phrasing to say with compassion "You perverse and unbelieving generation." You're just like, how did He say that? But you know what's been interesting is so many people have said to me this year, I've never heard a woman read an audiobook of the gospels. And I'm having a different experience because it has female motherly tenderness. Like female tenderness to it that they haven't heard it. I never thought of that as just an Annie. I'm just me reading it, you know? And I've always read it in my head, in my voice.

So it's been interesting that you write the inflection has grown to matter so much in ways we couldn't have expected.

**Dr. McKnight:** We have a woman pastor, preacher. And she doesn't preach all the time at all. I'd like her to preach. I've noticed that there are things... the way she says things that I as a male cannot say. And I've learned this with music. Sometimes I feel like that song needs to be sung by a man. And other times I think, That song needs to be sung by a woman. But when we only have men doing it, you know, it changes. Whoever said that to you is insightful. And it's instructive for all of us, isn't it?

**Annie:** It was very encouraging.

**Dr. McKnight:** That we need to have this. Now, there was a Bible published by Zondervan that was all read by all African Americans like Denzel Washington and... who did *Roots*? Alex Haley. Who wrote the book? Whoever the actor was. I'm telling you that it is dramatic to have Denzel Washington reading the book of Romans or the book of Psalms.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Dr. McKnight:** It's dramatic to hear that voice. I think it's called the Bible Experience.

**Annie:** Okay. Thank you.

**Dr. McKnight:** I think it really helps. Okay, is there anything we didn't say about *Pivot* that you want to make sure we say, Dr. McKnight?

**Dr. McKnight:** Well, I think the big thing is that we want people to realize that churches should be about helping people transform into the character of Christ. And we've talked about this, you know, so far already. But we want that to be the focus.

**Annie:** Well, it is beautifully done. I really enjoyed reading it and just thought... what I was doing in my head was going, Okay, which elder at church do I need to get this for? And how do we start this? Because you also are like, Man, if a church is healthy, let's keep it that way. I'm just as happy having a coalition to keep us there versus we're in a different spot.

All right, well, the last question we always ask, Dr. McKnight, is because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what y'all do for fun.

**Dr. McKnight:** Okay, we do a number of things. We love to travel. We're gonna go to Greece in September for 10 or 11 days to an island that people don't go to very much called Naxos. But we love to take walks and we watch birds and we watch the local wood ducks. We've seen them when they're just little babies and now they're juveniles and they're starting to act like adults. So that's one of the things we do for fun. Every day my wife and I, we walk about almost 10,000 steps every day.

**Annie:** Wow. What is it about birds? Why do they show us so much about God? They're so irresistible.

**Dr. McKnight:** Well, there's so much color and there's so much variety, and there's such an activity. They seem to know what they're doing.

**Annie:** They do seem to know what they're doing.

**Dr. McKnight:** You know, like little hummingbirds that visit our place. They're bossy little things when you start watching them.

**Annie:** It's just beautiful. Well, thank you for making time for us today, Dr. McKnight. I feel so honored that you would join us, and I can't wait for people to read *Pivot*. So thank you. Thank you.

**Dr. McKnight:** Thank you so much for having me on.

[00:59:17] <Music>

**Outro:** Oh, friends, isn't he awesome? Oh my gosh, how lucky are we that we keep getting these mind-blowing [wowie zowie] guests on the podcast? I know. I know. I hear y'all right now on socials, how you feel about what's going on in the podcast right now. Me too. We are having the most incredible conversations right now.

Go check out Dr. McKnight's book, *Pivot*. Go follow him on social media, tell him thanks for being on the show. This is a great book to purchase and read for yourself, for wherever you are leading, and also a great book to purchase and pass on to the executives at your church or the place that you work. It is a helpful, hard, beautiful book. It is who we want to be. So I really, really suggest it. And make sure you follow him on social media, tell him thanks so much for being on the show.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me. And don't forget, you can find the That Sounds Fun podcast on Instagram @thatsoundsfunpodcast. And I think that's it for me today, friends.

Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me, listen, we are in packing mode at Casa de Annie, you guys. It is almost time to go up to New York. So that's what sounds fun to me is continuing to pack things. I have a lot of chargers. Don't worry, my phone will not die.

Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday with everyone's favorite star of the Food Network, Aarti Sequeira. Oh, I can't wait. We love Aarti. I can't believe she's back. Okay, we'll see y'all Thursday.