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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. Happy Labor Day to those of you here in the US. Whether you're traveling today or laying by the lake or enjoying some time at home, thanks for inviting me along for the ride. Jim and I are very grateful. You are gonna love today's episode.

Before we dive into this conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Athletic Greens](#). As my body continues to heal from surprise surgery, you know I'm still all about drinking my AG1. AG1 by Athletic Greens truly makes it super simple. You can incorporate all the nutrients you need in your day with just one scoop.

AG1 was designed with ease in mind so you can live healthier and better without having to do a lot. All you do is mix one scoop of powder in really cold water once a day. Y'all know I like to shake mine up with a couple of cubes of frozen lemon juice for a little extra something special.

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Intro: Today on the show, I get to talk with my friend and one of your favorite humans, Jim Cress. Jim is one of our very favorite therapists around. You probably remember him from our Valentine's episode last year, Episode 365. Truly, I think it is like one of our top three episodes in the history of the podcast. I mean, y'all loved him last year. Me too. We call him the therapist of the pod.

Today we're diving in to all the questions you sent us after the Summer Lovin' series back in June. Okay, if you haven't listened to that series, this is a great way to do it. Go back, check it out. It is all about how to date healthy in 2023.

But today, we're doing some rapid-fire rounds of your questions with Jim and yes, we are going there. Y'all sent us all kinds of questions about going on dates, how to get a date, what to do with your sexual desire when you're single, and so much more.

Because of the topics we're gonna cover, this is one you will probably want to listen to when there aren't MiniBFF ears around as we literally don't hold back. Some of these questions, especially revolving around sex, which is the literal second half of the show, are things that we wish people, especially Christians would talk about more often. And, gosh, I'm so grateful that Jim is helping us address these things head-on.

Listen, you might not agree with every single thing we talked about. But my biggest hope is that this episode would spark a conversation with your people, that you would call a friend after listening and talk about what you each think. This is the episode today to hit "share," send it to your crew, put it in your group text, drop it in the single thread, and then say everybody listens in the next two days, and let's talk about this. This is the one.

We grow together when we first bring things into the light and when we bring other people into it with us. So buckle up, y'all. This one runs a little bit long, but it's a holiday and we tried to hit as many of your questions as possible. And we have a lot to talk about when it comes to sex and being single.

So here is our Summer Lovin' Q&A conversation with our friend and our therapist at the pod, Jim Cress.

[00:04:06] <Music>

Annie: Jim Cress, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Jim: I'm glad to be here. I had to go through a virtual flood to get here.

Annie: It is raining so much.

Jim: I've been baptized. I am freshly baptized from top to bottom.

Annie: Well, listen, we're about to baptize you with some questions too. Because after our Summer Lovin' series in June, we opened up the floodgates and said, "Okay, what did we not talk about?" or "What did we talk about that you wish we could talk more about?" And boy, did the questions come in. Why is it, Jim? What is it about dating right now or say to me, "Annie, I've been doing therapy for 50 years or whatever and people have always had this many questions about dating."

Jim: Well, one of the things, Annie... Thank you, by the way. So good. Anytime I get to hang out with you, it's great. It really is. We're still in a global mental health pandemic and we say COVID is over, we're unmasking all like that. So things are at one level worse for all of us than we are aware of. We're maybe a little bit more fearful and can we trust this person?

And the landscapes often I found littered with people who've had a series, maybe clear back to high school, of some bad relationships or they thought this one for sure was going to work out and then it didn't. And is it about me? What's the problem? So I think there's a low level of ambient anxiety that's like, what does dating mean? And how can I trust someone? And how can I even trust myself?

Annie: We've heard from so many women and a few men, but a lot of women who are saying, I'm in my mid-30s, I'm in my mid-40s and above, and I have never dated at all. How does she start?

Jim: Well, I'm gonna say this, and it's almost corny. But I think I would start at 30, 35, 40 with dating yourself. Meaning Socrates said, Know thyself. It's one of the biggest things I've seen in counseling is that I'm often... a person would be disconnected and unaware of their interior world. You've been to Onsite, you've talked about that publicly. I'm fixing to head out to Onsite after this recording.

And we try to help people, as we've said, often collect the dots, connect the dots, and then hopefully correct the dots. But starting off with, Do you know yourself? And do you know what you even want? Not like, well, here's my checklist of what I want in a guy or a man or a woman. But the idea of am I aware inside if I've not done my own story work, Brene Brown says, it sets you up to hustle for your worthiness. And you can do that in dating really easy.

Annie: Not even in a physical way. You can just hustle for your worthiness. Am I available? Am I talking enough? Okay, so we have taken all the questions and kind of split them up into categories based on how they came in. So let's do a couple of 101 questions.

Jim: Sure.

Annie: We have people who live overseas and have no options and dating apps don't work there. What do you do?

Jim: Read that question. As I told you coming into your studio, I said, I read through all the questions, or at least many of them, and decided that kind of when we did that Valentine's Day program, I did not come in over-prepared. I want to be as your

good friend, but also as a therapist sitting. And I'm not going to try to formulate all my answers on a sheet of paper.

So when I read the one about being in a foreign country and all like that, I find some people feel like they're in Dubuque, Iowa and they're in a foreign country. Right? And the dating app there, or it may not work or there's no big church, or I'm in a small church or feel called to be in a small church. I think part of that is to look... I just work with people, they say, I really would like to be dating someone or even being married. This is going to be kind of a real one-on-one thing. And I said, Are you putting yourself, not necessarily in a meat market somewhere, but in the crossroads? Are you in a place, whether it uses a dating app or not?

What I've seen including with some missionaries I've worked with, they did a dating app, and then but wait a minute, everything lines up. I really want to be with this person but the other person, quote, "didn't feel called to be on the mission field." So do you let go of that dream?

I talk to people about willingness. No matter where you are, are you willing to move yourself or move somewhere else? Because some of it is there's a scarcity reality that there's no one around today. But that can happen in middle America just as well

Annie: That's right. It can happen here. If you move to Nashville and don't know anybody, it doesn't feel like you've suddenly in a sea of singles. It feels like you know no one. I mean, that's a little bit of the rub of dating, isn't it, Jim, that people say I want to follow God to obey God, I also want to get married and want to be dating. And when those two things don't meet, it can feel really challenging to like, am I folding on my obedience of God to make sure I'm in a place where I can meet someone?

Jim: I'd like to speak to that, if I may. I do not do black-and-white thinking. I mean, I can. But this is a thought I've had for a long time. If someone says "but I feel called..." I went to a Bible college here in Tennessee. And women wives would come in, they were allowed to, or women would come and say, I feel called to be a pastor's wife as a single woman. I go, I guess you can. I'm not going to fault that.

But if someone has a longing to say they want to be married and yet they would have a longing or quote, "a calling" to both be married and be a missionary or be doing some other service work, I don't think they have to be mutually exclusive. And I put as much gravitas and weight on someone saying "I have a desire to date and be married as I do in the mission field."

Because one of the greatest mission fields, as Mother Teresa said, if you want to go out and save the world, go home and love your family. So I think that's a high and worthy calling. I don't think that one has to x the other one out.

Annie: That's good, Jim. How do we encourage our guy friends... this is from a female I assume. How do we encourage our guy friends who are absolute catches to ask us out? So what our friend is actually saying is how do I get him to ask me out?

Jim: Well, two couple of things. I remember we did that Valentine's podcast we talked about, you know, men are really the spiritual leaders by default or women are. All that to say, get someone to know... I want it to be the law of attraction not promotion. I mean, our manipulation or whatever Enneagram number you might be in as you listen today. But how do I get someone to do that? I have no problem... maybe I'm 61 and I got older and I've seen a lot. I have zero problem. And we used to call it Sadie Hawkins Day, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Jim: That if a woman says, including my dear friend, Annie Downs, if a woman says, "God's amening this right now.

Annie: Yes, He is. The thunder of the Lord's like, Go do.

Jim: Go, Jim. Go. But if a woman says, "Hey, I'm interested, and I would like to be able to have coffee with you?" Is it really asking someone out on a date? Maybe it is. Or on a dating site, if someone makes the first move. I have no problem with that. And my goodness, you know this very well, there are a lot of dudes that are just petrified to think that they're not going to make the first move and it doesn't mean they don't want to.

So I don't see a written law that a woman cannot say, "Hey, I would love to get coffee with you," and even follow through with it. "Would you be willing to do that?"

Annie: I've used the move before of like, "We should get together and talk about that." And then it just says I am willing to be in the same place you are. I would enjoy being in the same place you are and then see how his response is.

Jim: Can I kick that up one notch?

Annie: Yea.

Jim: Our words frame our reality. Fine. We should get together. I would tell my dear friend, Annie, I would say, Okay, maybe. I don't know. The next time you say that, start with the I. "I would really like to have coffee with you." It's clarity. What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas. We should. It's like, well. The bit of "I'd really like to have coffee with you, what do you think?" And see how they respond.

Annie: Yeah. Okay, how long do you wait to introduce someone you are dating to your married friends or to your community in general?

Jim: I would say the first date. No, I'm kidding.

Annie: Make sure your friends are at tables nearby.

Jim: "Hi, FaceTime. My mom and dad are here. I know you're wondering who that is."

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Jim: So what I think is... I have a number. I just made up one day, I said, I don't know. 13 to 16 dates. In other words, keep defining where this relationship is. Not obsessively. We're dating. We've had 11, 12 dates like that. I think-

Annie: So a month or two?

Jim: Yeah, maybe a month or two. But with that is to say, I'm believing... and I tell people, again, please communicate. "I'm believing," because somebody's gonna believe it, "you will, the guy will, whoever..." "I believe that on my side of the street that I'm thinking we're exclusive." I've seen that Vegas kill people. "I'll just let you know, in my book we're exclusive. I have no plans with anybody else. How about you?" And we've had 10, 13 dates all like that and I would... Let me get out of the family for a moment.

I have some really close friends. You and I've talked about everybody having a personal board of directors. And there's some people around in that inner circle that I just want to go out with and let them just be around you. Not necessarily a double date or a group day. But let's go out and go to our favorite haunt. And let's just be around. Because people can read the energy, body language, all like that to see if someone in that natural environment of having fun or whatever else.

But I don't think if I have a tight group of friends that after maybe 10, 11, 12, 13 dates. I mean, you are together. You have that much. That's not vague. That's like, we're a thing. We're an item. I think that's not too early to do it.

Annie: So I have two soccer tickets to Nashville, SC. I have two season tickets. So is it too early if I've been on three dates, and then the next Thursday is a soccer match but we're going to sit with 10 of my friends? Is that too early? Because to me, "come with me to the soccer game" is a little different than "come sit at Annie and Dave's house around a table".

Jim: Oh, yeah.

Annie: So does that feel too early, to three, four dates in to go to a public thing together?

Jim: No. What I like about that, Annie, is can we ple... I have a goal as a therapist. I tell my clients I want to take the weird out of therapy. I really do.

Annie: Yeah. You do it really well.

Jim: So the idea is... Well, thank you. It's like, Let's just go to soccer game. It's just a soccer game. And then others are there without anybody talking about it. They're there to be able to observe and see the interactions. See what goes on. Even cheering or yelling or whatever at a game. But it's just like, Hey, here's the thing. Keep it normal. I know normal's just a setting on your dryer. I know that. Really. But it's like to say, Hey, just go to soccer game. It's just that. And see what happens.

That would be different than you... say you have some friends over here and say, "We're gonna go over, we're gonna have dinner or whatever. That's a bit more intimate.

Annie: That's an interview. That's being interviewed.

Jim: Yeah, it just is. Same way if you were dating a guy and he says, "I'd like you to come around my friends. I know people are gonna be checking me out. They're gonna be looking and listening.

Annie: That's right. Oh, man. One of the girls who sits with us brought a new guy to the soccer match. And I mean, the text string blew up when we got home because everybody's-

Jim: Of course, it did.

Annie: He was great. What is this? I mean, because we sit together all the time. So I just was wanting clarity for my own life.

Jim: Annie, what I call it-

Annie: I'm like, how long do I have to wait to bring him to a soccer match?

Jim: See, we just gotta be more normal. And you are. But there's a normal organic vetting process. We're just kind of coming around and seeing and whatever else. Just being around the people and it kind of continues to move maybe into some deeper intimacy with everybody around to see. But it's not just overt. Now our friends are going to interview you and check you out.

Annie: Right, Right.

Jim: Keep it simple.

Annie: Okay. How do I reenter the dating world when I'm scared of getting my heart broken again?

Jim: Oh, I would start out with why do you want to. And I'm curious, not furious there, I'm saying, Huh? Tell me more about why you would want to reenter the dating world because our words again frame our reality. You're saying re-enter. That means you once were in it. How did the last relationship end? What is there to glean from that? Did you end it?

When couples I work with say, "And we broke up," I say, "I've never seen it. I'm sure it's there somewhere. One person moves first to break up. Very seldom is it we both said we're there. One person's been thinking about it.

So to say, how did the last end? I do fact and impact as you know. Fact: it ended. What's been the impact? And then have you done any personal work? And it doesn't have to be with a counselor. You have a good friend, coach, anybody. How are you different now from when you got out of the river of dating to where you're about to step into? Let's start with that first-

Annie: That's a great question.

Jim: ...and then we go from there.

Annie: That's such a good question. How am I different going back in than I was when I left? What's been the transformation?

Jim: Mm-hmm.

Annie: Okay. A quick conversation on dating apps. People feel like they're scary. They want to know which ones are safe, which ones are best. How do we know which apps to use?

Jim: Well, trial and error probably. I was sitting very, very recently with a friend and she made the comment that I just love. She said, "I went on a dating app..." She's never been married before and she went on a dating app and lo and behold, she liked it and things seemed good, and had no idea. But the guy she started dating, that she is dating was in the exact same church in the same city and they had probably crossed paths, but didn't know.

So the idea of what dating apps, I've seen people, you know, I've talked... I'm not here to name dating apps because it all depends on the region you're in and all that. We know there are people who are basically, as far as I'm concerned, perpetrators or scammers. They're out there. But I would say trust, but verify. That's what Reagan and Gorbachev talked about. Go on.

And I've seen people grandstand and they're allowed to do it and saying, "I am not using a dating app." "Tell me why." "I just think it's dumb or whatever." And I'm like, "Here's my salient point around dating apps these days." And I've never said this to you. Right now there's a reality that people are using dating apps and some people close to me have used dating apps and they have connected. My own son and my daughter-in-law did, and they're married.

So I think the field is shrinking for potential candidates for people to date because I might be in East Nashville and West Nashville or somewhere else. And now it's taking more and more—and I know this, by the way, in the therapy field—a lot of younger therapists are troubled because certain times we can counsel across state lines. And then people are like, You're doing video, so now bigger, better counselors are more available.

Annie: Oh, interesting.

Jim: So I think the dating field potentially is shrinking at one level because people are having success. I've had many clients I've worked with found dating apps to be very successful. Others have some horror stories.

Annie: And so much of it is what is talked to your community. Who else in your church or in your friend group or in your town. I mean, there are Facebook pages about which apps work for what town. So I'm the same way, Jim. When people ask me, "What have you tried? What has worked for you?" I'm always like, "Well, you don't live in Nashville. You don't live in my community." So it's hard to recommend them. So that's great.

Jim: I want to add to that too, which we've said again, trust but verify. In other words, I've seen people I've worked with, so many clients, and most of these are women,

and men, but who have been married once before and they're in their like 40s or 50s. And they'll say, "Go on the dating app and say here are my boundaries. I talk about Jesus. I have sexual boundaries before this and all like that. They get in and somebody says, "Sure, me too." And then they do one little tweak and say, "No, really, could we just maybe stay all night right here?" And I say, "They're already testing your boundaries." When someone shows you who they are, believe them.

Annie: Believe them. Okay. I think this is the question that brought tears to my eyes. "How does one navigate not being a conventionally attractive woman when dating?" My heart broke for this woman. "I've learned to accept being a Leah in a world of Rachels as I enter my 40s."

Jim: I read that.

Annie: "But it does make it harder to even get a date, let alone date widely enough to find someone compatible for marriage. How does one work with that reality," is the word she used, "and not get discouraged?" Jim?

Jim: Well, that last part's a zinger: "And not get discouraged". I believe, again, in a very redemptive, if you will, Christian view of the law of attraction. And if I have an itty-bitty pity committee inside my head, or I have a view of myself, a) are there things I can change? No proponent of weight loss. I've lost 60 pounds doing my little thing that works for me. I had a breakthrough. It's what I want to do and wanted to do. I feel better. And when you do therapy and theology, the podcast I'm on, all my weight loss is documented. I go back and look at early ones and go, Jimbo, man, you were big there. But what I won't do is shame myself. Remember I say shame, S-H-A-M-E, is self-hatred at my expense. I literally hate myself.

So I can say, "Okay, I'm overweight or I don't have the best hair" because fellows do it too. I don't know about the vanity issue here. But fellows will do it. And as we get older and say, Can I believe enough in myself that I believe that I am attractive far more than even the physical or I may not be walking a runway somewhere? Or for me, I'm not gonna be on the cover of GQ. I think about such things still at my age because of video stuff I do.

I think that part is, what are you believing about yourself? I just believe a person, if they've got a very jaundiced view of their self or their appearance or their weight or whatever else, I think that's going to come out as they try to move towards someone. Because there are people who—I see them on social media—can be quote, "overweight" or maybe not.

And I've seen it in my office. I've seen it quite frankly in the field of infidelity where people are traveling, doing medical sales, or whatever and guys will come in

and say, "I've got teeth that aren't in the best shape but you wouldn't believe the women I've seduced to be able to be sexual with."

And the point is then I have had some women that would come in that no person, male or female, would say, "That's not a very attractive woman." And she says, "You will not..." But this is by a lot of experience. So you wouldn't believe the man who... they're just not even... they're not very handsome at all. But that man spoke to me. He was kind to me. He said, Tell me more. He was curious. All like that.

So I think there's a bit of a farce at one level, I understand it at one level, but of saying, I'm not attractive. I would say, is there anything you can do to make yourself more attractive? I don't know.

Annie: Is it true? I mean, is-

Jim: Is what true though?

Annie: Should we decide if we're a Leah or a Rachel?

Jim: Well, that's, to me, a black-and-white thing. There's nothing that I can see in scripture. You know, you may trump me on this. But I see nothing that Rachel definitely definitively was guaranteed to be more attractive. I mean, Jacob had that bond. He wanted-

Annie: But it's what Jacob was... Yeah, it was just what one guy decided.

Jim: That's exactly right. But there again, we're naming ourselves. And that's what I call a personal objectification. I have objectified myself and say, I'm just a loser or I'm just a Rachel. I mean, I'm just a Leah instead of a Rachel. I would stop naming myself there and say, "My name is Annie. My name is Julie. My name..." Or for a guy, "My name is Jim," or "my name is George," or whatever else. People say George is a weird name. Have you seen George Clooney?

I mean, the idea of just saying... and of course the Lord Jesus Christ was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief and we have nothing against John-

Annie: "I'm not attractive to anyone," it says.

Jim: Well, Jonathan Roumie, I think, he's attractive.

Annie: Jonathan. Well, listen.

Jim: Okay, whatever. But the idea of saying that he was attractive, I think that's a piece of being able... and I don't even know how much it's impacted, real quickly, by culture, but my internal culture, my internal operating system. Let us speak words of life over ourselves. Something about your appearance you can change? Be gentle with yourself. Do it.

But if you're not... I've seen, it's funny, some relationships I've dealt with where someone would say, we'd never put those two together, but the man says, this woman is so hot, so beautiful to me. She's just great. Or a woman says, "This guy..." And you can look at him and say, "We've all done this. And somewhere we've looked and said, I would never put those two together. You know? And to say, but there's something much more attractive there than just the physical.

But if I'm putting off a vibe that I just think, Jim, you're just a fat butt, you know, your hair's getting gray, you're whatever else. I've struggled with that shame. Don't think I haven't. And I begin to say, "I'm gonna speak words of life over myself and say, you know what? If there's something about my appearance or my breath that I can change, then I will.

Annie: There is something about taking the natural resources the Lord has given you, calling them good, and saying, this is good no matter what. How God has made me is good. And what can I do to feel the best about myself-

Jim: There you go.

Annie: ...that I want to feel. I mean, you know a lot of my story, but I don't know that I've ever told this story. I may have told you but-

Jim: We didn't hit breaking news sounder?

Annie: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jim: Tu ru tu ru tu ru.

Annie: Probably 14 years ago, I'd probably lived here a year, maybe two, I went to a guy friend of mine that we were very platonic, there was never interest. And I said, "Do men not want to date me because of my body?" Because I was like, "I just need a man to answer this." And he gave the be... He was like, "Some. There are some men who will care about a body and care about a body looking a certain way, bigger, smaller, wider, taller, shorter. Yes, there are some men who you do not fit." He said, "The majority of men that you and I are friends with," he said, "I hear what they say. People..." You know, like said nice things, blah, blah, blah.

All that to say, it was a good moment for me because my friend, Adam, said yes and no. No for the ones that matter. And my friend Kelly, everybody heard her already this summer when she gave her a piece of advice for dating. She said, "Be as weird as you can on the dating app. Be as weird as you really are. Be fully you because then you attract the people who are really gonna like you."

Jim: I love that.

Annie: So I feel like that's physical too. Like be you. Be you. And the people will be attracted to you when you first identify that you are worthy of being attracted and let me be attractive and attracted.

Jim: I'm both of like attractive and attracted at that point. Let's just be honest for a moment. Let's not be ahistorical here. In our very American culture and in cultures that go back to the Elizabethan time and other times, this is more of a modern thing in many cultures that we want a skinny mini, male or female. Right? There were people-

Annie: That's not global right now

Jim: Yeah. Yeah. It's like there's a sense that, okay, what's this all about? So the idea is a modern thing. Secondly, now there is a word, it's a clinical word and I'm gonna nuance it, but it's called an arousal template. I don't think of arousal as a bad word. It's like, what is it? I do a lot of work in this area with men and women. It's what is it that's on your template, and everyone has one, usually affected by family of origin or your earliest girlfriend or boyfriend will be like, "I am attracted to a woman."

There are men who I know who are sharp and the idea... Hugh Jackman might be one. Who knows. But a woman who might be a little bit overweight, they would actually be more attracted to that woman. And someone can be... we work with people, I do in workshops and say, what's your arousal template? Same for women. And I'll say, well, why do you want a guy with more hair? Some people say bald is sexy. I like this. But you'd be surprised the men who say, "You know what the most attractive thing is? This is one of your good qualities. I've never said this, but you don't mind, is your eyes.

Annie: Oh, thanks, Jim.

Jim: This is true. So then men say, "I'm not worried about the weight." Others would. "But I need to know... sorry, sidebar. I need to know some of these men who are objectifying women, if they're also active porn addicts where they're wiring their

brain with that, those, you know, neurons that fire together, wire together and therefore it's harder to look that way.

But I just think we need to stop and take a breath about what is it that I... who and what shape or whatever I'm attracted to and why. And usually, you'll find somewhere back... One of my tricks is everybody listening, I always say, go back to the first little love you had, that puppy love, that girlfriend or boyfriend. Most people never get totally over the first little love they had. It was the first tabula rasa clean slate and say, I see that I've kind of pursued, I'm chasing that.

Annie: To me, when this question came in, I thought, I'm not sure this is a dating question as much as a date yourself question. This woman, the Rachel-Leah question, she needs to fall in love with who she is and how-

Jim: Well, the Imago dei—bearing the image. And I like what you did with your friend, Annie. You're vulnerable, I'll be vulnerable. I said to Jessica, I said, "Again, excuse me, because when I've lost my wife-

Annie: It's your wife.

Jim: ...and you know Jessica, I said, I'm just asking. She's so kind and sweet. I said, "Were you less attractive to me physically, sexually when I was 60 pounds more overweight?" And she said, "Yes. But," she said, "you're sitting not just overweight, but you would sit and we would watch whatever." We've been watching The Chosen now. "But sit and watch a show and fire down a whole bag of chips." I mean, I can put down some food. Lemme tell you.

And I said, I ask and I wanted to know. You know, I've asked some other women that who are very kind and I trust, and they say, "Yeah, when my husband maybe is that much more overweight, I love him and we can still be sexual, but I'm less attracted when he's that overweight and not doing healthy self-care." Overweight's not the issue.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. It's not the size is the thing.

Jim: It's self-care.

Annie: It's what you're doing and how you're caring for your body.

Jim: Are you just like you don't care?

Annie: Yeah. When I'm dating someone, his size never matters to me. It is how are you caring for... Can we go on walks together? Are we gonna enjoy living life together? So it is, to me, never about that.

[00:29:08] <Music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to share about one of our amazing partners, [Brooklinen](#). Is there a season better than fall college football? Go Dawgs! A crisp breeze in the air. I mean, we're praying for that to come soon, right? And all the fall colors, mainly red and black.

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Now back to our conversation with Jim.

[00:31:38] <Music>

Annie: Okay, here we go with some friendship questions. Is it a good idea to date your best friend to the opposite sex?

Jim: Short answer for me is, I read the question, no. And I've done a lot of work in this.

Annie: Really?

Jim: It doesn't mean it's a bad idea. I watch out for this binary black and white. It's all this or all that. Here's the problem. You have bonded together, good, and laid a foundation down that we are good friends. I tell people, don't date a really good close friend in some cases and don't date a coworker. Because if it goes bad, that's just a hot mess for everybody.

If you want to do that, Old King James word, be circumspect, be wise. And look, talk about it openly and say, this will change probably like Phantom of the Opera song, Pass the Point Of No Return. If I date my best friend, then that has the ability that we'll never be able to go back to what we once had. I'd say, be willing to say that. If on the other hand you can date your best friend, both of you are honest and all that, and say we are both changing the contract, I think it could be awesome.

Annie: How do you navigate being great friends with someone who you... This is a particular woman saying, being great friends with a guy who you think would be a great husband, but you don't think he's for you.

Jim: Well, I think part of that is when I read that question too and I contemplated it, so I said as a therapist, and people are honest, they do it. Friends, pastors have... I work with so many pastors, they've talked about you are going to be attracted to a lot of people. Annie F. Downs, James Anderson Cress. That's normal. We get weirded, "Oh my gosh, what if my friend knew." And I go, "Hey, normalize it." We're freaking out. And I can be attracted to a person and it doesn't mean woo woo as I call it. I must go do something about that.

So I think, pay attention, journal, look inside, talk to a friend, say, "I find myself really attracted to this person." And that may be all there is to it. Because you're attracted to someone doesn't mean you need to close the deal or take the next step.

Annie: That's gonna have me skip around. There was a really interesting question I thought that came in because we had a whole conversation about married couples friends with singles.

Jim: Yeah. Right.

Annie: In that conversation with Jess Connolly and I talked about what happens when someone grows feelings, the single person suddenly realizes they're attracted to the husband to some degree. And again, that could happen. Every man-

Jim: It happens a lot.

Annie: ...I look at their face and I can decide if I'm attracted. Then I look at their hand. I don't look at their hand and then their face. I look at their face first

Jim: Sure.

Annie: ...to see if they have a ring. So that's gonna happen. But this friend is saying, Okay, so if you find yourself in a situation where you are attracted to one of your married friends, what do you do? Do you sit down with the couple and tell them? No, surely not. Right?

Jim: Ew. No.

Annie: No.

Jim: Yush. No.

Annie: No. But I appreciate them asking that because I-

Jim: I can see that. You'd be... No, Annie would not be. But some people would be surprised how many pastors I've worked with who have said, "I am attracted to someone in my church and I just really think the right thing to do, even if I let my wife know and they're single, they're married, another woman. And I was in the counseling session in my pastor's office, and I just said, "I need to let her know that nothing's going to happen here but I'm attracted." Never do that. Nobody in the therapy field would advise that.

Annie: Say why.

Jim: Because just because you think a lot or just because you see a lot doesn't mean you need to say a lot.

Annie: Great. Because if you walked right now through just a shopping mall, this place is a wonderful place called Onsite, we know. People are in there because they're telling their stories. And all of a sudden I think I'm in love with that person. No, you're not.

Annie: No, you're not.

Jim: Here's why. Because you don't get that back. The emotional self-regulation is, "Okay, I'm attracted to this person." Therapists that are honest get attracted to various clients.

Annie: I'm sure.

Jim: But we know what to do because we're talking about intimate things. So to say, that's my thing. So if you're listening today and you feel like I'm attracted to a married person, I know, Therapy 101, again, I would take that to some good friends who aren't maybe in the same circle. But go to a therapist who's trained and say often if it's hysterical, it's historical, what's going on?

Because you can do what I call fantasy contamination. You literally can contaminate the fantasy and give that person who's married their face and say, Oh yeah, there it was. I was attracted and I'm no longer. As soon as you go there and say, "I need to let you know," even if your wife or your husband's present, "I'm attracted to you," it's hard for people to handle that. Right?

Annie: Yes.

Jim: And you talk more about it.

Annie: Well, it just makes it... I can't imagine it. Would make it-

Jim: Awkward.

Annie: Weird. So do you need to put up some new boundaries with that couple?

Jim: I think, well, if you're that person, that's why I've said, I would do some own work around it. Everything doesn't have to be therapy. But if you do therapy and often you can find that, oh, that's why I'm attracted to them far more than the physical. That's why I'm attracted.

I've seen men who are just duds at home, but the pastor's in the word of God, man. He's up there. So I say, whoa, whoa, whoa, you're getting a neurochemical spiritual high. It all makes sense. And people say, "Oh, that's what it is." I go, Yeah.

Mary pond... may I say it? I use it a lot. Mary pondered these things in her heart. And you can hold that. If it becomes a problem, like, I'm sitting in the Bible study or we're in a friend group and I can't get past it, Onset has this whole program on love addiction, we call it, relationship stuff. And that is, I need to go do some deeper work. And it usually fundamentally won't be about that person.

Annie: That's right. For me, anything that bumps in this area, I tell my mentor-

Jim: There you go.

Annie: And I say, "Nancy, I'm not gonna do anything about this but I did find myself thinking about this, that, or the other, or about this guy that I shouldn't even think about because he's dating a friend of mine, or he's an ex that I have moved on from. But I just am wondering, da da da. Why am I doing that?"

Jim: So you're going to the why.

Annie: Yeah. So I'm going to the why.

Jim: Right away.

Annie: I'm confessing it because I need it out of me.

Jim: We stay as sick as our secrets. And you've just broken probably 50% of that hold by confessing it and saying we've brought it into the light.

Annie: So I say it out loud to one person or to Jennifer or to you. And then I say, Now let's figure out why. Because I don't want to actually be in a relationship with that person. But there's something here that is making something in me ping up and I need to pay attention.

Jim: I want to add to this. If it sounds contrary or sounds like it's doublespeak, I don't mean it that way, you may be in relationships, folks listening today, and it may be that you never get all of that out. You may say, every now and then I see her eyes, see his eyes, his voice... That's normal. It's okay. That's part of it of just the law of human attraction, right? It just is.

Annie: That's right. Okay, here's an interesting one. "I'm single, 29, I love the Lord and I really struggle with desiring marriage or having kids. Is it okay to not want marriage or kids as a believer?"

Jim: Well, is it okay with you? Not Annie, but this person. When they do that, I would put back to them and say, What's your truth around that? Because I read that question in reverse. And that is to say, it sounds like it's versus says, you know, I am actually okay with it.

If you're not okay with it, then that's another conversation. I don't even know what okay means. Like, Well, can I be celibate? I have a term. You know, people can be celibate normally, and this is in the Bible. So if it gets edited out, I'm gonna say it. But people were celibate for the hell of it. And it's like, No, the true celibacy, which is not one of the questions that you've put out right now. But is it just something here that I feel like I give myself permission? I use this a lot with people I work with, I give myself permission for what? To be single and not trying to date right now or I believe I want to date. Okay, then you're free to go do that.

Annie: Can we talk about attachment styles first?

Jim: Oh, yeah.

Annie: I know you know a lot about that. So a couple of questions that came in said, "Okay, I have an attachment style. I'm avoidant in dating, but I'm really anxious with my family." Or I'm anxious in dating, but with my friends, I feel super secure. Is that possible for attachment theories for different attachment ways to happen based on the relationship?

Jim: I look at that differently. I'll answer the question.

Annie: Yeah, go.

Jim: So I have had an anxious attachment style. That's what I was either born with or born into, right? Can I have some avoidant moments? Yes. But I don't believe that's my attachment style changing. Can I become more securely attached when I've done 15 years of therapy as a client three and a half years of EMDR brain trauma healing? I've done my work and still do.

So the idea I'm not really so sure that that one's attachment style changes, but I change. Think of the Bible, the Holy Spirit progressive sanctification, that I'm there and I can avoid certain things. But if I'm going to default, Jimbo still has an anxious attachment style. Nehemiah 5:7, he said, "And so I took counsel with myself." I'm

saying, "Jimbo, you know what this is? Don't do that. What's going on for you? I'm doing my own interior work." But I don't really think my attachment style changes.

Now, others may be out there and say we believe it does change. Good. But I don't need it to change. I'm just mindful that I'm operating almost in a different operating style. I know how to jump over to a PC, but I'm a Mac guy. I can jump over to that but I'm fundamentally a Mac person.

Annie: I mean, it feels like people who are saying, well, I'm secure in these but not but I'm anxious in these, I'm like, "Great, the goal is get secure. I'm way more secure in friendships than I am in dating.

Jim: You know what I do? I love how you did that. I want to get out of the public arena and then get it home. Blaise Pascal the philosopher said what? All of people's problems stem from one thing: the inability or refusal to sit alone with yourself quietly in a room. So, therefore, as I'm out there, and yet your peeps have made it feel secure. Annie, we love you, all like that. Jimbo. But I can get alone with myself and I'm having to reach for things to medicate or whatever else.

So sometimes the environment helps me feel more secure, which is awesome. But I don't know that my attachment style has fundamentally changed. It has grown but there's a core me that I don't know that changed. I don't think my Enneagram number is gonna change. I can be an unhealthy seven, Lord knows. But I'm often a really like you, a really healthy seven. So it's just both ways. But I don't think I move primarily. I go to a five in strength but I don't think I'm becoming a five.

Annie: We're not becoming PC people.

Jim: Right?

Annie: Okay, what do you do when your friends are dating somebody you don't like, brings out the worst in your friend? They're dating someone you don't like. Do you tell them? When do you let them learn from their mistakes? What do you do?

Jim: Well, great. I want to use that line. Remember when I say hysterical folks, that doesn't mean nuts. It just means I got some energy around this. It's hysterical, it's hysterical. I would stop right away. Psalm 39, it's search me O God and try me see if there's something I don't see here. What I found and not shooting from the hip here but a lot of experience, I found often not always when someone says, Hey, we don't like this person like that. If it's hysterical, it's historical. Where are you-

Annie: What is this pinging in me?

Jim: In me. What is that? And I want to know if five friends go, "Annie, we're on your board of directors, we're concerned," trust but verify an interview. What are you concerned about? You know what I found in many times amazing? What are you concerned about? Blaalalala. You don't know. It's hidden, something in you you don't know. And often people don't know.

Annie: That's right. Okay, let's jump into what do I do if I desire marriage, but there are no prospects? How do I know if God is calling me to a life of singleness?

Jim: Pray. No. I think part of that I'm going to go into the 21st century that we live in. I'd never mean this in a weaponized way or a shameful way. I've said to some people. Back to the dating apps, or you're in a major city, I live in Charlotte, you live in the Nashville area, then, you know, are you willing to consider not to go to a meat market, but going to a different church?

I've seen people, "There's nobody, I'm in a church and there's like, 30 of us." And I'm going, You know what? I would consider moving. Some people have said, "Well, I don't want to do the dating app, or I don't want to leave my church." I'm saying, it's so practical. For me, I'm like, You're not putting yourself in an arena where you're even going to bump into somebody else. It gets very practical for me.

Annie: That's right. Henry Cloud has a How to Get a Date Worth Keeping book and his thing is get your numbers up. You've got to get... If you meet one person this year, the chance of marrying them is miraculous. If you meet 70, the chances are a lot.

Okay, how do you recommend finding out whether someone you meet out in the wild is a Christian? Do we need to know before a first date if someone shares our faith?

Jim: Some people say absolutely. I probably would have said that years ago. I don't believe that anymore. If you're going to try to bond together, usually you'll be able to bond with our same level of health. But sometimes.... may I just say what does it even mean to be a Christian? Jim, that's a whole nother podcast. But do I say, if you died tonight, would you go to heaven? Here are the four spiritual laws or whatever else.

I think you can meet someone and organically faith conversations come up. If I'm four or five dates in or someone says or they posted on the dating site, I am an atheist, you're a Christian, I don't know why you would date that person. But sometimes it's like, what does it mean? You know, Beth Moore has left the Southern Baptist Convention and she might be in an Anglican church. Well, they're not even create... You see how that all goes? I'm like, Just breathe, take your time.

If you have three or four dates in and you see that you're not on the same page or close in the same book, I think that's something worth considering.

Annie: If you're using two different maps of how you make life decisions. Okay, let's do like two more and then we're going to jump into all the sex questions.

Jim: Oh, Lord.

Annie: So it's single dad reached out to us. And he's like, there seems to be a real network for women. There seems to be single women who get together. There seems to be divorced women who get together. And even at church there's like single moms groups, but there's not a lot for single dads. So how do we help them? He kind of just says, there are so few single dads who are like a unicorn. We're different than single men, because our responsibilities are so different.

Jim: Well, I need to ask for verification. Do you think he is hinting at the idea of the question is so that I would be able to meet a single mom?

Annie: How does single dad navigate the dating world?

Jim: So my thought is, you just announced, sir, good, that there is the single moms network and all like that. So I wouldn't worry about Well, let's start in creating the single dads club. Be around. Be available. I can't tell him the question if there's some bump, some speed bumps, something there that says I can't you just announced there's a single moms network. Why don't you go? Are you afraid to go ask? The network's already there?

I think it's part of the mother-nurturing thing. And I see that and MOPs and other things. I just think that's just a natural phenomenon that the women are going to be able to, there's gonna be more groups like that. And I just think go to MOPS and date somebody.

Annie: There's Instagram accounts that are coming to my mind. Like Kelly's Corner for Singles and Jackie Dorman has a Single Nation where they post people that submit their stuff. And those are both private accounts. So for single dads, that's probably also a really safe place. Like, hey, there are gonna be a lot of women who line up to help you. If they know you're out there.

Jim: Yes.

Annie: Okay, Jim, we're gonna finish our non-sex questions with divorce.

Jim: All right.

Annie: Okay, as a single Christian woman in our 40s, I keep hearing Jesus's words about divorce. I've never been married, but I'm interested in a man who is divorced. Do I not even pursue this? Because if marriage is in the future, am I committing adultery?

Annie: Well, we have our passages, don't we? In the Gospels in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19 hotly debated, there are people now who are reputable in the Christian world who say if a woman's having the daylight's beaten out of her, or just under severe verbal emotional abuse, that's still violating a marriage covenant. I understand who's listening or what Bible you're reading, but you may say, No, there's only one exception clause for divorce. I've just been reading through the Gospels. I know you do too. And say, Jesus said, then that would cause that person to commit adultery.

Here's what I believe about it after a lot of work and work with a lot of people who've gone through it is there is an exception clause for divorce including abandonment by nonbeliever. That gets its own interesting thing going there. And I think that grace covers a lot of that. That there are people because Lord knows it has covered me as a former recovering pornography addict myself, 18 years sober from that, you know, Jessica and I have that in our story of me basically... not basically but betraying my wife in adultery.

So with that is, I think if someone says he was divorced, and maybe he had an affair, but he's done his work, he's repented, he's changed, then here's the reality. I think he is absolutely free to remarry. Bigger issues relationally is, be sure you find out what was truth about the divorce, what went on, and is he owning his stuff if it's him?

Annie: Do you get your community involved and stuff like that? Is that like, you sit down with your pastor and ask him too? And he says, yeah, that's committing adultery. How do you get your community involved when it comes to dating when you're divorced or dating an... I mean, 50% of the men I meet are divorced.

Jim: Well, let's face it. On any theological term you can put out just in the Evangelical church right now, good men and women who are scholarly even are going to disagree on certain issues. You gotta be honest about that.

Annie: That's good.

Jim: So the idea of, say, what if my pastors there? Then you don't have to. In the multitude of counselors, God's word says, there's wisdom and safety. So it's like to

say, there's where that person is. I don't have to fault him for his belief. But to look at where things are.

Here's the thing. There are a lot of people getting married. There's a whole lot of people in the Christian church still getting divorced. And there are people going to go get remarried. So I think you can talk to some people to get various opinions. I think you got to get a little also in your prayer closet and decide what do you believe about that. You have to decide for yourself.

[00:49:11] <Music>

Sponsor: Hi friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to share about another amazing partner, [Nutrafol](#). Ever wished you had visibly thicker hair? How about less shedding? Maybe stress is causing your hair to thin or is it the other way around? There are multiple root causes for hair thinning, and Nutrafol addresses key root causes through a whole-body approach to hair and health.

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That link and pretty much every other link you could ever hoped for are in the show notes, or are in Friday's AFD Week in Review email. So be sure to check those out.

And friends don't forget on Friday, we just started a new month of reading the gospels together over on Let's Read the Gospels podcast. So if you're not already subscribed, come join us. We're reading the NIV, which a lot of us love and use in our daily lives. But we're going through the Gospels chronologically. It really brings scripture to life in a new way when we read these stories from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in a different order.

We have a guidebook and a reading plan that goes along with the podcast so you can keep up with what we're reading each day and have a place to process at all. You can find that at Anniefdowns.com/gospels.

It may be September 4, but you are not behind. Trust me. If you want to catch up, each episode is like 20 minutes or less. So you could do it. You can do it. Just head over to Let's Read the Gospels and subscribe wherever you're listening to this episode. And let's read the gospels together this month.

And now let's go back and finish up our conversation with Jim

[00:51:57] <Music>

Annie: Okay, let's dive into the six questions. We had so many people send in questions and have sent me in that episode with the Tomlins had some scuttlebutt around. There was a lot. There were people who agreed with us so wholeheartedly, they were shouting from the rooftops; people who wanted my head on a stick, they were shouting from the rooftops.

Jim: I mean, you did that series on purpose, didn't you?

Annie: Yeah.

Jim: You're about to go into this now on purpose, right?

Annie: Yes, yes, yes. Yes.

Jim: Here we go.

Annie: Here's the thing. I want us to talk about this. I want people to yell in either direction. I want people to be going, yeah, what is right for me, and for us? So I'm not scared of any of it. People will get mad-

Jim: Well, when Satan was kicked out of heaven, he was kicked in the bedroom. Let's just be honest. That's where he fell into. Yeah, it's just this idea. There's so many

shameful sex-negative messages going on. I used to have them too. So it's really a red hot topic. I think there's a lot of misinformation.

Annie: We're gonna start shallow.

Jim: Please.

Annie: Physical touch is a human need. What do you do when you're not getting enough of that physical connection?

Jim: I deal with it all the time. It's called oxytocin. That's the body chemical when your body is touched. So I tell people, no joke, that's not the only thing I say. Go get a therapeutic massage.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jim: Absolutely. Absolutely. Because your body's getting like for an hour mega touch. The other thing is Cracker Barrel, this is a point, and the Charlotte Douglas International Airport you've been in, has white rocking chairs. Cracker Barrel knows that we are all designed by God to even as adults to be held and to be rocked. Rocking is very soothing. That's where I'm going with that.

So the skin-to-skin touch even in the Word of God it is there in the New Testament. Greet each other with a holy kiss. So I think there is healthy touch. Now, what happens for me if I'm not getting that healthy... you know, where a lot of the touch is not happening, don't you? Marriages. People are upset. They're mad. The only time you want to touch me is you want sex. Maybe that's true.

So where do I get healthy touch and not just to every now and give someone a hug but with safe people to literally be held? I'd work with groups of men or on Onsite will do that and they just love to... Don't just go boom, boom, boom, pat on the back. But to be held. We all long to be held.

Annie: Okay, one of the mistakes I made in our first episode about sex is I interrupted the guest and we never went back to the question and people have been chirping at me since that day.

Jim: So you're laying this at me now?

Annie: Yes.

Jim: Okay.

Annie: What do you do if you have a high sex drive and you are not married?

Jim: Well, I've got to do that with married or singles. We'll get to your question. One is I interview people all the time on this topic and say, whoa, whoa, whoa, what, how do you know you have a high sex drive?

Annie: Oh, that's a good question.

Jim: Oh yeah. I hear more from men, but I love when I hear from women too. I said, Well, how do you know you do? How do you know you're not using sex or masturbation? We're gonna get to that. Thank you. Or something else, to self-medicate? Because it's self-soothing. We have videos in [Utro?], we do, on [inaudible 00:55:01] of little boys, little girls in Utro masturbating. Masturbation is not a dirty word. I'm not jumping to that question yet, just so you know. So I'm thinking, I've got a high sex drive. I go, How do you know that?

So there is a study, if you get on Google right now, the only creature we know that will die from lack of having sex, you're gonna think this is funny, true, is a female ferret? Because her hormone levels rise so when it's time to mate, if she doesn't mate, she can die.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jim: Oh, it's like, well, how do you know? That's side A. Side B, I think I do have a high sex drive. So I don't know. What do you want to do about that? Because you can be single and that but you get married, "I've got a low high sex drive, and you want to be sex on demand.

Annie: Say that.

Jim: That is a hot mess. Because people are gonna say... so most couples I've ever seen they do not have the same level. And sometimes the woman has a higher sex drive. Statistically, they're in the man. I'm saying, I don't know you negotiate that? You talk about that. But first, I want to explore how do you know you really have a high sex drive? Like, some people could be sexually addicted even. I just have to have that.

Annie: Yeah, I think that is a really interesting point. Because it's not like we can take our temperature.

Jim: No. You can get a blood test or blood panel and come in and say it's there.

Annie: Because as I'm hearing you respond, I'm thinking, so many of our friends who say this, and when my friends and I talked about... I mean, this has also caused a lot of conversations in my friendships, which has been awesome. Of like, we just want to do a thing that we aren't doing. Right?

Jim: Very simple.

Annie: So it can feel like a high sex drive because it is... we aren't allowed... I'm putting that in quotes, everybody. Putting in quotes. We're not allowed to do the thing we want to do.

Jim: Yeah, right.

Annie: So I'm 43, Jim.

Jim: I get that.

Annie: What do we do as people get older and the Bible feels like sometimes the instruction around sex was for 20-year-olds.

Jim: I get that.

Annie: And not expecting... If Mary was 13 or 15 or whatever, right? But they're expecting... they. Who's they? I don't know. I'm just saying it to you like we're not recording. I'm just talking to you like we're like... They say, Jim, that no matter your age, you should live by the rules we heard in middle school of the "don't have sex, don't do anything, keep your paws to yourself until suddenly both have rings and now all is legal." What do we do?

Jim: I want to just get out there with a microphone and interview all these people because anecdotally what I found and I'm very gracious as I say this. You know, I don't want to say everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it like masturbating or whatever else. It's not my point. We'll get to that when you're able to do that question. I know it is coming up.

The fact is people are. They have a sex drive. You've got to watch this just real fast. Dopamine This is what God put in the body around sexual arousal. Dopamine, serotonin. PEAs, the chemical you're building up ready to orgasm because that's... God put that. We're so sex negative. PEA, whoo, I want this catecholamines norepinephrine, which is burns these images and things on our mind.

So the huge, incredible pharmacy, pharmacy around all these sexual things that came in young, it's not just about married people. So what do people do around

their sexuality? First, I would say if we're going to that, acknowledge you're a sexual person, does one go right away? Well, can I masturbate or not? Can I do this or not? I think those are fair bit. Acknowledge. What are you currently doing with your own sexuality? Do you realize you are sexual? The Trinity invented it. You're not just a person who has sexual desires, you are a sexual being.

Annie: I think that's important to say. And then I want you to continue because I don't want to get yelled at for interrupting you again. I think it's important for you to say because I felt this myself at times and I've talked to a lot of friends about the same age where we felt like our instruction caught or taught was turned off being a sexual person until it is, quote, legal.

Jim: Which has caused a bunch of problems later in marriage. The honeymoon night was a complete disaster.

Annie: Disaster.

Jim: Because it's like, turn it on now and go nuts. And it's like, well, no. It's been there the whole time.

Annie: So you can say, I am a sexual person-

Jim: You are.

Annie: ...and it is a very helpful thing for a lot of us. Even when I'm thinking about the Leah, Rachel girl or thinking about a lot of these... the single dad. Like lead with it is so good that your sexual person.

Jim: Absolutely.

Annie: Keep telling us. What's the practical things we do?

Jim: I'll see if you guys, you know, knocked me off the air here. But let's just be honest, if a man has a nocturnal emission, a wet dream it's called for some street language, or if a woman says I'm riding a horse and could have an orgasm, whatever. It's like, for goodness sake, we are sexual beings. And we've pathologized that and made that negative or we can't talk about that in the women's Bible study.

Well, it's just to say, these are realities that I'm not to get a human who has sexuality. I am a sexual. I'm a physical being. I'm a spiritual being. I'm an emotional being. And I am a sexual being. So well, yeah. People in grade school, little kids have had shame because they were climbing a pole or something. Because what goes on there just with their legs and I like, yeah, we're just talking turkey here and

like, wow, I got aroused. I go well, yeah. But there's a lot of sex-negative messages out there. People are like, it just sends them underground is what it does. Yeah, totally underground.

Annie: Yeah. But at the same time, we want to pursue holiness, Jim.

Jim: Of course.

Annie: I want to hold both right.

Jim: Of course.

Annie: I want to hold that I'm a sexual being who God made this way. And I want to match that or submit that. Do I want to submit that to the holiness of God? How did those coexist? What's the practical coexisting for people who want to walk with God in their singleness and not turn off their sexuality?

Jim: They pretend we're... I will tell everybody this. Annie and I are very good friends. She is not a client. So we're not in real therapy. Like you said, we're just having coffee. I literally am having coffee right here. So what's unholy about touching your body in a perceptual way? That's a fair question right back at you. Help me. What's unholy about touching your body? Anyone listening today... No, we're not gonna get to compulsivity, addiction, bringing all kinds of porn in or just using it compulsively thing where you just basically a person's masturbating every day, or six times a day or whatever. It's just like the idea of... And notice I'm asking you a question that is not rhetorical. It's a real question. I don't know folks, what's unholy, show me about touching your body in a sexual way.

Annie: So then let's talk about masturbation.

Jim: Well, if you want to. That was in a softball. I'm just saying, we sit here and say, well, we've been taught this and all that I get all that. But I'd rather go to show me... Well, don't use Hebrews 13:4, I used to use that. The marriage bed is undefiled but God is the marriage bed. But just about touching someone. Or if you experience something where people have things that happen in a dream, or their bodies aroused, they wake up. A man gets an erection every 90 minutes during the sleep cycle.

Annie: What?

Jim: Everybody get your Google out. Get your Google out. You think I'm lying.

Annie: Every 90 minutes.

Jim: Every 90 minutes. My urologist said his God's-

Annie: Does it wake you up?

Jim: Well, that's not a bad question. Some guys wake up. Testosterone is highest in the morning. Cortisol levels are highest in the morning. A guy wakes up with an erection in the morning. I tell guys, every erection doesn't need to be satisfied. When you wake up, get up. When you get up, wake up. It's just true. It's like you're there.

Now watch this. This is the last biology from Dr. Jim. It's true. So a man needs to get up at least the way the prostate works. This is all biology. We're so scared of it. And if he needs to have a bowel movement, and this prostate is being pressed on, effects are guys who've gone through a medical examination, prostate exam, you got an erection. So full of shame. No, folks, it's biology 101.

Annie: Right.

Jim: So we can normalize even the biology of it. Yeah, it's true, you can Google anything I've said, folks, or go talk to a urologist. So we're like, it's normal. It's okay. It's when I am aroused, what do I do with it? And what's going on in the theater of my mind, even if I'm not sinning but I'm shaming myself. It's sin that I'm aroused right now. Really? Is it?

Annie: Is it if you're watching pornography?

Jim: To me, it is not sinful that you're aroused watching pornography, being a recovering pornography addict. It is sinful that I am watching pornography. I know very many Christian therapists are here. But there are some good colleagues of mine who are non... they're not Christians, and some have written on it and all that. That they say, well, now we've pathologized pornography. If it's there in a marriage, and you like it, or you're a single person, you're doing that and it's fine with you.

What I know is and I'm just gonna speak out of my own recovery. But what pornography does is wiring a person into a cul-de-sac in their mind that... C. S. Lewis wrote a whole thing. Google C. S. Lewis' letter he wrote on masturbation and lust. Google-

Annie: *Gaps*

Jim: Oh, yeah.

Annie: I've never read it.

Jim: I've taught it. It's in The Weight collection. So he says, puts a man in a place, what he called, quote, the prison of himself or say, a woman, the prison of herself, where there are shadowy brides and all these women are adored, they worship Him, they require nothing of him, they require nothing of him. So that wires a brain that he can go in and get sex on demand or she can, a woman listening today, and do that in a way to escape reality using sexuality. I'm going to say if you masturbate, and that's not a dirty word, if you self-pleasure yourself, if you do any of that, are you doing to literally, listen, connect to your own body?

Are you free also not to do it? "I'm just gonna die if I don't do it tonight. Are you free to say, you know, once a week I would give myself the privilege as a single person to I don't take a bath or do something or lie down and be able to pleasure yourself without pornography because I think pornography is damning and dangerous. That's not even to cut anybody down who's struggled with that. But what it does, it wires all that neurochemistry towards someone who's not there. And that way, the body will feel like I'm having sex with another person versus I'm being sexual within myself.

Annie: I mean, one of the conversations we had with the Tomlins is how hard it is to masturbate without lusting. And lust is a sin. The Bible is so directly clear. We don't have to go left, right, or center about that. Can you do that? Can you masturbate and not lust? Because if you're thinking about someone... I mean, even someone submitted a question of like, we're married and we're trying to figure out, can we masturbate?

Jim: The answer is yes because I did it. So in my marriage, I mean, I was a pornography addict from young or sexual abuse victim, true folks, all this stuff. And the idea of being able to focus... And I've worked with a lot of guys that they could focus just on the feeling. They might be in the shower or somewhere else. And we're apparently getting really real on here, I like to be real. And a person can focus look on themselves, not in a narcissistic way-

Annie: But thinking about and act with anyone else?

Jim: I don't think you're going to be able to do it much. But along the way, and if you got shame, man, you don't want to shame yourself. That will just get... that's like gas on the fire. But to say I give myself permission to just think about the pleasure that I'm feeling in my body. Totally doable.

I think if it becomes compulsive or you sit down and watch a romcom or something, or you're watching something else, or get triggered by something, and

that image is already there... We're not talking about perfection here. But yeah, I totally believe a person can be able to, especially I want to speak to the single people. I mean, I'm telling you. Because I've changed my whole view on this. Jim Cress said everybody go masturbate. No, he did not say that. But there is a-

Annie: That's gonna be our pull quote we put on.

Jim: If he did, he did. But it's like, no, you are a sexual being. And yes, I know for a fact a person, man or woman, can pleasuring themselves. So the idea is, am I escaping reality? Am I using porn? Do I believe I just gotta have it? I don't think a person is going to masturbate every day and eventually not some lust to come in there.

Annie: Yes. Right. So what does it look like to get our community...? How do we talk to mentors, leaders, people who are discipling us through this? Is this the thing we can talk about?

Jim: We're sure doing it right now. I'll find out later when this thing airs "here's how much got edited out."

Annie: No. I mean, I've written down "no things edited." I don't think we need to edit. We need to talk about this because there aren't a lot of conversations publicly right now. But because they're not public ones, there's also not private one, Jim. That's the problem.

Jim: Oh, yeah. Your private thoughts going on and thinking do I, do I not?

Annie: But people aren't getting around a table at dinner with each other and going like, so, masturbation, what do you think? How are you feeling about...?

Jim: We'll be the people that does it. So I'm sitting with the New York Times bestselling author and dear friend who has bus tours. People know of my work probably with Therapy and Theology with Lysa TerKeurst. She's out at all that. People have platforms. That's one of mega. You've got microphones, you've got a podcast, you own a podcast network. You've got a place right to talk about sex-positive things, healthy sexuality.

Well, someone listening, they say, "I'm not Annie F. Downs. I have nothing." Be where you are, where you are and to be able to say, Do I have a network of friends? And we could sit down... The venue is important. You don't just do it over oysters or something. You know? But to say, can we talk about our sexuality and what we believe?

People are down on what they're not up on. Do you hear that, folks? People are down on what they're not up on? So they go to a pastor and probably 68% of Evangelical pastors, Rick Warren found this out and research and others, are struggling with pornography. So pastors, a lot of them, they don't want to talk about this. For them to say masturbation could be or not, they can't.

But I have to say that the idea of being very positive about sexuality start where you are, and with a good friend say, let's talk about it, if you're really close, do you really struggle with these questions? And with a good friend, do you struggle with masturbation? Howard Hendricks—I went to Dallas Seminary—he said you get a group of men in a room, I don't care what the group is, within a short amount of time at a men's retreat, if you leave them alone, they're gonna talk about lust. But they'll often keep it vague. Do you do it, you know the thing? Name it. But we've even pathologized the word masturbation just being self-pleasuring.

Annie: Okay.

Jim: Have we done enough damage or what?

Annie: No, I think it's great. And the good thing is like, one of the things we heard after the first episode about sex and a lot of our Summer Lovin' series is people saying, I sent this to my friend and it started a conversation. So let Jim and I say masturbation as many times as we need to. You just send this to your friends and then y'all talk around it if you need to. But let's have the conversation.

Jim: You see what you just said organically was so powerful. It's already happening. The shift is already happening. The movement is already happening. The people are listening to this podcast, listening to it before and the shift has happened. But we can talk about this issue. Already the movement will go. Folks, wherever you are today, be part of a conversation. You, you right there may need to start the conversation. Face the weirdo factor of it all. It'll get less weird the more you normalize it.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. Okay, last one, Jim. We'll finish up here. Thank you again. My gracious, you are-

Jim: Oh, my pleasure. We haven't gone to the ditch yet, I don't think.

Annie: No, we're doing great. Okay. One thing we heard from a couple of different people were talk about the logistics of engaged couples not living together. Because it's hard. You know, my lease is up at the end of this month, well, my lease is up in two more weeks-

Jim: All the time.

Annie: And how are we... It's gonna be annoying to move in right after we get married, can we just go ahead and move in together? What's the story about engaged people or anybody living together before they're married?

Jim: The famous theologian and philosopher Beyonce has a song about putting a ring on it. Now, here's the deal. There is research that I don't have time to get into. Don't make it binary, meaning it's all this, all that, it's black, it's white. When you are living together, we're sharing the toothpaste and the toothbrush, and we're doing all that, there is still not a ring on it, there is still not a covenant. I'm not being black-and-white with you, folks.

And everybody knows subconsciously I could peace out at any moment. So coming together, it is not still the same thing if you live together for a year. Now, granted, you can see each other and your habits, what you like and don't like in the sink, and the toilet paper coming up. Folks, you can see that just going over each other's apartment or house. There's plenty of stuff that you can see. By the way, when sirens go off, something important is being set up.

Annie: That's right.

Jim: I would say just be mindful that when you're living together... And then I think to go for on the practical level. I already said this on the Valentine's Day program a couple years ago. I work with couples who go, hang on just a sec, just for a moment, including the biblical thing. And Joseph and Mary, there's good data there. What will be special about the wedding day and the wedding night? And they've said, we've already cashed in all the chips. We've done everything you would do.

And I think there's an anticlimactic thing there. I would say Paul says, All things are lawful, but all things are not profitable. So my thought is, can you do that live together? I think even possibly not be in sin? Yeah, I think you can. But I don't know that it's advisable. And then why do you need to? And people say, well, it saves money. Well, you know, I get that. But maybe it's a worthy investment to not do that.

And if you are there and people say that, we live together, not have sex, I'm going... I don't know how you pull that off over a long period of time. But I think it might be okay to do that in some questions. If you ask me, Jim, just what do you think? I would say don't do it. Because what it can set... The thing comes in, you get married... I've seen it with couples, they get married and they're like, man, we lived together and thought we've seen everything. No, you got the ring on and now you know, that's it. You're married.

Annie: We're not going anywhere.

Jim: That's my thought. Not right or wrong. I can't say it's right or wrong.

Annie: Okay, anything we didn't cover, you want to make sure we help single people?

Jim: This is just a redo or redundancy, if you will, in a good way. Folks, please go do your own story work. Brene Brown says we are stories. We are data with a soul. Go in and explore. We say it in the therapy world, do your work to know yourself. And then your picker will get healthier of who-

Annie: We've seen it in me.

Jim: Yeah, I have. And there's a reality that we... water seeks its own level. Literally the torrential rain, I came down watching the water just flooding, the waters goes down, seeks its own level. And we're going to basically bond with nearly our same level of health. Do your own work. And I believe also that love relational attraction, you will not attract just some nightmares to you. Do your own personal work, knowing what you want, and be willing to be also good with yourself before you have to be able to be good with someone else.

Annie: That's it. Jim, will you please come back?

Jim: Oh, you know anytime.

Annie: Okay.

Jim: We need to have a meal the next time.

Annie: I know. That's right. I know. That's right. Thank you.

Jim: My pleasure.

Annie: Thank you for helping me. I mean, people know that so much of... I mean, January of 2018 at Onsite... I mean, I am two degrees different. And over six years, that is a big difference.

Jim: And you remember God's hand because you weren't supposed to be in my group.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. They switched me out.

Jim: Literally, in the hour before the group started. And my life's been changed because you're just a dear friend to me and Jessica.

Annie: Thank you. I'm really grateful. Thanks for doing this.

Jim: My pleasure.

[01:14:03] <Music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, ain't he the best? Man, I love his thoughts. What a gift! What a gift. I would love to hear what you think after hearing this. So please let us know how else can we serve you, especially our single friends. How else can we serve you? What other questions and topics and conversations do you want to have?

A great way to tell us is when you respond to the AFD Week in Review email we send every Friday. So if you sign up for that, and then you can just hit reply on Friday and tell us, or you know, Instagram, email all the places. We just would love to know how else we can serve you.

You can check out more from Jim on the Therapy and Theology podcast that he has with our good friend Lysa TerKeurst. And go follow him on social media, thank him for being on the show.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Like so embarrassing or easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that is how you can find me. And don't forget you can find That Sounds Fun podcast on Instagram with some more fun stuff over at @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 laying by the pool with my girlfriends and talking about this episode. Listen, it's sparking conversations for all of us. It's sparking conversation for all of us.

Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday with an actual hero of mine, Dr. Alicia Britt Chole. Oh, I can't wait for y'all to meet her. We'll see y'all on Thursday.