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**Annie:** Hi friends! Welcome to a special episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today on a Wednesday. Yes, a Wednesday.

**Intro:** Today on the show, I get to talk with my friends, Amber and Seth Haines. Amber and Seth live in Fayetteville, Arkansas with their four boys. They just released a book together called *The Deep Down Things: Practices for Growing Hope in Times of Despair*.

In 2019 as Amber resigned from her position as church's curate and walked out the church doors for the last time, she entered her own season of pain and despair. That season taught her and Seth that the journey toward hope starts with first recognizing the deep-down things.

This is one of those books and conversations that's going to meet you right where you are no matter what you're walking through. And it's an invitation to think truly and critically and kindly on your own story in your own faith, especially in the middle of a series where we are talking about the voices that are speaking into our lives and our spiritual growth and our spiritual leaders and conversations we've had recently on the podcast.

Today is a really special opportunity to hear from Seth and Amber. And their book, *The Deep Down Things* is absolutely beautiful. Go ahead and order a copy of that and enjoy this conversation with my friends, Amber and Seth.

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**Annie:** Seth Haines, welcome back to That Sounds Fun, but Amber Haines in a way I cannot believe, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

**Amber:** Thank you. Excited to be here.

**Annie:** How have you never been on?

**Amber:** I don't know. We do a lot of talking on Voxer.

**Annie:** That's true. It's true. Seth, welcome back, my friend.

**Seth:** I am so glad to be here. You know, the first time was the feel-good episode of your career.

**Annie:** Of 2020. The feel-good episode of 2020.

**Seth:** Yeah, zero tears shed. So I'm glad to be back for another feel-good episode.

**Annie:** Seth, you cannot imagine how much people reached out to us and talked to us about your episode. Just the power of a conversation at the beginning of a year about addiction is kind of unmatched. So thank you for that. I'm really grateful. So I plan for us to cry a little bit less this time if y'all want.

**Amber:** Great.

**Annie:** It's truly whatever y'all want. Okay, also launching a book and moving into a new house, what are y'all doing?

**Amber:** It's a lot. It's a lot. We're building a home, and then we're gonna move into it with four children and all our animals. It's fun.

**Seth:** You know, they say, Annie, that the two biggest stressors in marriage are if you do try to work together or if you try to build a home together. We decided to collaborate on a book and write a book together and build a house literally at the same time.

**Annie:** It's insane. Okay, Seth, will you talk to me a little bit about that? Will you back up and tell the story of what made y'all decide to write a book together?

**Seth:** Oh, we definitely didn't initially decide to write a book together. Now, I will say this. We've always said because we're both writers, we've always said we would never write a book together on marriage. And it kind of seems like that's what the Christian market expects of married people, right, is that you would write a book on marriage.

So we just always assumed we would never write a book together because we are vehemently opposed to writing a book together on marriage for a variety of reasons, including the fact that we are not experts on the topic despite being married for so long.

So we just kind of always assumed that we wouldn't write a book together. And then we went through just this really hard... It was a hard, dark season. It was a very dark season for Amber. The truth is she was under contract to write a book and she was sort of working through her emotions and working through what she'd, you know, kind of gone through. It became pretty clear that the story really had sort of two facets. So she just said, "Hey, would you come along for the ride?" And I said, "That sounds fun."

**Annie:** Hey, yeah, well done you. I loved it. Amber, when you were originally... so you're contracted to write a book because you've written other books. And you're contracted to write a book... and we're going to talk about what's in this book here. Just a second. But what did you think you were going to write about before your life kind of turned over?

**Amber:** I mean, it's always going to be beauty from ashes. Not that that's not an overused cliché, situation, but we're in the resurrection around here. So I always thought that it would be, you know, around that, around having those kinds of eyes, but I didn't know that it would mean like a death. And this is, you know, how we can all have mini deaths in our lives. I didn't know that I would have to go through something to get to the other side of it and that that would be the content.

**Annie:** Had you already started writing? Had you outlined a book? Were you kind of like, here's what I think I'll write about, and here's a couple of chapters, and then your church story happens? Were you like, Well, no, I can't write right now, or let me write something different right now? Will you talk about what your writing was like at that season?

**Amber:** You know, when I got my book deal, it was, you know, just for a couple of books, I didn't really know what the book was going to be about. I had presented something, I don't remember what that was. I just knew that I would. But then ministry to me moves from the stage and speaking around my first book to I want this to be real life, I want my ministry to be hands-on with people in my real life.

So I really transitioned that way and assumed that my book was going to come out of my lived experience. I didn't know that it was going to be a negative lived experience.

**Annie:** Amber, give us a high level of what *The Deep Down Things* is about. And then we'll kind of dissect some pieces of it that I think really matter deeply to so many of us.

**Amber:** Okay, so when people ask me what the book is about, I always say despair, and Seth always says hope. So indicative of our personalities a little bit, maybe. But it really and truly is my voice coming back to me after a long season of feeling like my voice was removed. Some of that was just in grief, just kind of a flatline of my ability to tell my story. But a lot of it came from telling my story and asking for help in a hard circumstance and not being heard.

So me experiencing that my voice didn't matter. And I didn't understand how much my voice was my identity, like my ability to tell a story was how I understood

myself. I think that's probably true of a lot of us. But I'm a storyteller, and I kind of went blank for a while.

So the book is coming to a little bit and actually living out this desire and this great need to tell my story. That being said, it wasn't easy to do. So I think the fact that the essays go back and forth between me and Seth really helped carry me forward because it turned into a bit of a conversation, even though my essays weren't like, Dear Seth. But they were a bit of a response to what he had written.

So the structure of the book was really actually healing for me. So my desire is that when someone reads the book they're going to feel the same thing: carried along, in a story, but also with some beauty and some humor, you know?

**Annie:** Oh, you made me... You know this. You made me laugh like four times out loud when I was reading that book.

**Seth:** What?

**Annie:** In fact, y'all know this, that one of our yes-nos for 2023 is I am not endorsing books. And I finished reading... because you have to read it and really know it so you can put your name on it. And I said, Yes... Well, y'all were different. I said yes to one other friend and I said no to a friend that asked. And y'all I asked you if I could endorse it when I finished reading it.

I said, "I don't know what the intention was, but may I please write an endorsement for this book. So part of it is it made me laugh. It's like, well, thank you for letting me. I don't even know what you've done with it but I hope it has helped somewhere.

Seth, why don't you say this is a book about hope.

**Seth:** The season was really dark for Amber. And we can get into the ins and outs of that. But you know, we came out of a really, really bad church experience and then we went right into 2020. So we were sort of out of that church experience in the tail end of 2019. And then, you know, as you know, February, March, whatever it was, of 2020, the world just turned inside.

You know, the entire world was in despair. It wasn't just us, right? It wasn't just those people who had come out of negative church experiences, or the people who had been fired from their jobs or people who were on the downside of advantage. It was like everybody was in a season of despair.

And I just remember in that season looking out and thinking, like, there has to be some reason to keep going forward. There has to be some reason to get up out of your bed and you know, go sit at your kitchen table and do eight hours of work or, you know, go work in the garden or, you know, some reason to keep moving ahead when the entire world was sort of thrown into despair.

So I think for me, it was this idea of like, I gotta carry hope, you know? Amber's in a dark place, the world is in a dark place, like, if we're gonna keep moving forward and staying alive and staying connected somehow to each other even in isolation, if we're gonna somehow stay connected to God, there's got to be this overarching sense of hope. And we have to be like sort of on a tail off towards that hope. So that's why for me this book is about hope

**Amber:** I say in the intro that hope is not some ethereal thing out in the great beyond. It's something that is here now. It's present. And there are going to be seasons that we don't feel it and yet we get to participate with hope, anyway.

So that is our aim in the book is to walk through some practices where we felt like we could actually participate with in our real lives, in our bodies with hope, even when you don't feel it. And then in doing so, it brought about the feeling of hope.

**Annie:** Right. It's a little bit of like stepping into the water and the water will part.

**Amber:** Right.

**Annie:** One of the things I love about the book is that when you talk about God you say Divine love. And that really matters to me, because I think often I forget that that is His leading characteristic is God is love. So every time when you're walking through this really dark story as a family, not only the church story, but there's multiple facets of things going on in your lives that are really hard at the same time. But Seth you keep going back to God as divine love. How did you feel? Did you feel loved in that? What made you say, Divine Love in a book about a really sad season versus just calling Him God?

**Seth:** This goes back to my second book, actually, *The Book of Waking Up*. That was a book about my sobriety journey, some additional writings on my sobriety journey. And in that book, by the time I'd written that book, I had run across the writings of St. Francis de Sales. And St. Francis de Sales constantly returned to this idea of God as the divine love. And in fact, in that book, I write of God as the Divine love.

And I know this can make people a bit squeamish because you're not referring to God as Him or He or God or whatever the typical name of God.

**Annie:** Oh, really?

**Seth:** Yes, yeah. Oh, yeah. We've had some pushback on this, Annie. This is actually a thing. Yeah. Yeah.

**Annie:** Okay, great. I mean, I'm glad to know the reasons people might not love that.

**Seth:** Yeah, they done-

**Annie:** I thought it was a beautiful reminder of who He is.

**Seth:** Some people say that God has a name and that you're adding to the names of God, to which I say, in the Old Testament, there are tons of names of God: God the healer, God the provider. And they're all you know, all these el names. You know this better than I do.

So we just looked back to church history, and for me, looking back at church history and saying the church has for centuries had this name of God, which is God is Divine love, it grounds me and roots me in like, Oh, that is actually the hope.

The actual hope is not necessarily that God is going to vindicate me, it's not necessarily that God is going to provide for me. He may do those things. It's not necessarily that I'm going to see justice, you know, before I die. But what it is? The grounding hope for me is God is Divine love, He is love and His love is so much bigger than I can imagine, it's bigger than I deserve, and it works things out in ways that I can't see or understand. But at the end of the day, I know that I am deeply and unapologetically and 100% loved.

**Annie:** Yeah. Amber when your church life imploded... exploded? Imploded? Which way to go?

**Amber:** Both. Both ways.

**Annie:** Fair. How did you still feel like God was love? Or did you?

**Amber:** I did. I did. It's all that remained.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Amber:** Which I mean, you could say is a beautiful thing, but it really was kind of torturous. It's all that there was. It's interesting... I mean, you could call that season my deconstruction season. It really wasn't that I was deconstructing anything. It all just fell apart. I don't think I'm alone in that. I see that everywhere.

And I think a lot of people whose lives have fallen apart, people who have had real serious grief have met God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, in God's fullness as love in a really unexpected way. And I have heard people who have endured much greater loss than I have say "I wouldn't trade what I lost for the love that I have in God".

So I wouldn't trade that. In fact, I kept saying, I need to thank the Anglicans. I need to thank the Anglicans because I wouldn't know the Holy Trinity like I do today were it not for a great, structural fall apart.

**Annie:** Yes. I think that's really interesting, Amber. Because often when we hear about deconstruction on TikTok or on Instagram it feels like, because of a thing that happened to me, I have decided to tear my house down. And I think what you're giving me a picture in my mind for is like sometimes you're standing in the house, and a bulldozer just comes through and you go, Well, what do I do now? Does that feel closer to your experience?

**Amber:** Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. Also, in the midst of that, even though I don't know that very much of what happened for us happened well. Nobody knew what they were doing in our experience. But these were people who actually loved us. And as we went through this thing, they did us dirty, but they still freaking wanted to do right and they kept showing up, and they kept coming back.

And the love of God was still very alive in our relationships, even though I could look at my girlfriend that, you know, I was like, I would literally die for you and tell and tell her she's ripping my heart out. And she would look at me and say, "I know," and then we just would sit there together.

So that love was actually alive in some places, but it was really painful. I mean, I think that helped. I think that helped. It wasn't just us. There were a lot of people hurting.

**[00:18:00] <music>**

**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.

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**Annie:** Seth, when you're watching this story happen to your wife where it is mainly her interaction with the church that caused pain for all of you, but you've also got these four boys, right? Like you're raising kids and you gotta keep raising kids. And you've got to have a desire that they would still know the God that is love.

So I'm thinking about our friends who... I mean this has happened in my church more times than I wish were true, where parents are suffering and one of their big desires is that their kids will still have a connection with God even if the pastor has left under a moral failure or someone has mistreated the parents and the family or the church splits. I mean, I grew up in a church that split when I was in college, and it tore relationships apart. How do you disciple kids in the midst of that?

**Seth:** This actually goes back to the Divine love. Can we return to that for a second?

**Annie:** Yes.

**Seth:** And I'm gonna tell you a quick story about St. Francis de Sales. And for any church history scholars or Catholic scholars out there, I may be taking creative liberties with this story. So, you know, for whatever it's worth.

**Annie:** Okay. Cool.

**Seth:** But we're in the middle of the Reformation, so set yourself in the middle of the Reformation, and there was an entire region, entire village that had left the Catholic Church. Why? Because the Catholic Church had done them dirty. End of story. Full stop. Some reform needed to happen, right?

So the Reformation sweeps through this village. And St. Francis de Sales, is a Jesuit, and he's sent out by the Jesuits to go into this region and to sort of be a missionary again for the faith, for the Catholic Church. So he goes into this area, and from a spiritual formation perspective, he just teaches over and over the divine love, the divine love, the divine love. Like, here's how we have practices that bring us closer and in more alignment with the Divine love.

You know, I don't know if he went in there and said, "Yeah, you're right. You know, the church did you dirty?" I don't know if he went in there and sort of critiqued. I don't know what his construct was outside of continuing to go in and saying over and over again, This is how we connect with the God who is love. In the middle of a circumstance in which it was very clear that an entire community or region was sort of disaffected with what the church had done.

And as the story goes, those communities returned. And this isn't to say, you know, returning to Catholicism is the be-all end-all. I believe what they returned to was the Divine Love of God that has the ability to sort of reorder life.

I use that as a template of saying, you know, there's this huge article that's been making the rounds this week about a pastor who's left his church and his deconstructing and is talking about all the ways that his congregation essentially has turned him into a commodity. I read that article and it feels true. Like, there's nothing about that article that feels false to me. I think the guy's probably legit, and probably saying it like it is.

But when we leave a place over and over again and ultimately end up saying we're deconstructing even past God, like we're leaving God because this has happened to me or that has happened to me, or, you know, I've been treated this way, or I've been treated that way and so I just give up, I'm done with God, what we end up doing is removing a very important piece of ourselves, that part that needs connection with the Divine.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Seth:** I've seen so many people do that to the detriment of their kids, and then their kids grow up in this space where it's like the church sucks, we're angry at the church, we're never going back, we're not going to have a framework to connect with God. And that ends up bringing up another generation of people who are just as disaffected, just as angry, just as unable to connect with the Divine love.

So for us, we're not... like I would never tell you we're model parents for spiritual formation of our kids. Like, we don't typically sit down and like, Look, today we're going to read this Bible verse about God's love bla bla, bla bla bla.

But what we tried to model is, hey, listen, man, this is hard. Hey, listen, this church was difficult, it was abusive, it was wrong, you know, justice has not happened. And yet, despite the actions of the people, despite the actions of the institution, we know that we know that we know that there is a God who loves us supremely and He is for us, and at some point, He will vindicate, at some point that will be justice. We don't know when or where that will be but we do know that God loves us.

So if you want to deconstruct, if you want to go, you know, undo your church affiliation or whatever, okay, that's fine. But don't deconstruct so far that you deconstruct past the bones of belief.

**Annie:** Wow

**Amber:** I still think you can say that kind of stuff to your kids all day long and it doesn't amount to faith. So we can say, Hey, don't deconstruct. That's never helped anybody not deconstruct, you know?

**Annie:** I wish. "I wish" is all I'm saying to myself and other people.

**Amber:** That's right. I took a class in seminary called Knowing Self, Knowing God. This may be another crossing-the-line topic, I don't know. But the idea of the class is that you really can't know yourself without knowing God, and you really can't know God without knowing yourself. So how both feeds into each other?

The part about knowing yourself is the ability to say, Here is what really is. Here's what is really true about what I've experienced emotionally, what has happened to me, what I've seen happen in the world, how the church responded. That's the true story of me. And then how did I see God show up in that or not?

So it's actually just serious honesty. So when you make space for your kids to be honest about what they've endured or what they're questioning, it actually gets really scary. Because when you make that invitation and they do it, then the invitation becomes for us that we have to be present to their pain. And their pain in this world right now is a whole lot darker than I ever dreamed that it would be. It's dark.

So acknowledging that with them has been actually... We've witnessed faith in our children in a way that has ministered to us.

**Annie:** Seth, when people read this journey in the book, it's just brutal and beautiful. But what ends up happening is y'all end up converting to the Catholic Church. Am I saying that correctly?

**Seth:** Yes, that's our story. Yeah. Yeah.

**Annie:** And our friends listening know I'm very... you know this. I'm very Catholic-curious. I'm falling in love with the similarities between Catholicism and Protestantism. I mean, I am finding while there are some very big differences, which is what I want you to talk about, there are some very big differences, there are so many similarities based around Jesus. Weird. Same God. Weird.

**Seth:** Who would have thought!

**Annie:** Will you talk about that journey? Like when an Anglican church really lets you and your family down in a really profound way, why was Catholicism the right next thing for you?

**Seth:** Man, this is such a massive conversation. This is probably like a two-hour conversation on its own. This is long form.

**Annie:** Everybody, buckle up. Buckle up. People are looking at their timestamp right now. They're like, Did it go two hours? We don't know you guys. We're in minute 28. We don't know.

**Seth:** That's why the editor is amazing here.

**Annie:** Y'all know more than us.

**Seth:** That's right. So I was raised in a Baptist church, and I'm very grateful for my Baptist roots. Very, very grateful for the Baptist roots. But I was also raised in Catholic school. And there was a reason for that. And educationally, it was just like the right move for my sister and for me.

So what I say all the time, like growing up, I had this real sense that all of my scriptural formation was really in the Baptist church, but all of my spiritual formation, like those moments where you're captivated by God we're really in the Catholic Church. I can take that everywhere from just the smell of incense to attending a John Michael Talbot concert in high school. There were just so many-

**Annie:** Why do we not all do incense?

**Seth:** I know.

**Annie:** It's so beautiful.

**Seth:** It's like smoke machines before smoke machines were cool. You know what I'm saying?

**Annie:** It changes the whole atmosphere-

**Seth:** Yeah, it does.

**Annie:** ...when the room smells different. I need to talk to Pastor Kevin about that. We're gonna implement that at Cross Point.

**Seth:** Make it happen. Make it happen. So that was kind of my early experience. And then there's actually a pass... I keep bringing it back to *The Book of Waking Up*, but only because there's a passage in that book in which I talk about this very visceral moment that I had. It was a communion experience in which there's no other way to say it, other than it tasted like the bread became flesh and it tasted like the wine became blood. I know that sounds weird. It is what it is. Let the reader understand.

So anyway, after that point, and at the time, we were not Anglican, we were still in the Bible Church. And at the time, Amber and I went on this long, long journey. And the journey was, man, I've got to make sense of that. Like, I don't understand what just happened, but I need to make sense of that.

So pretty quickly, we picked up a book by Alexander Schneemann called *For the Life of the World*. It's about sacramentality, the sacraments proper. And as we were reading that we just said, "Man, we need to find a place that really practices the sacraments, the sacraments proper." So these are the church-ordained gifts of God for the people of God that sort of bestow a particular grace.

And if you go to that kind of church, Anglican, Lutheran, Catholic whatever. You know this right? So we really fought and this is, you know, part of Amber's story, but really fought against Catholicism for a variety of reasons, most of which were like family side eyes. You don't want to raise the ire of the inlaws.

So that's kind of how we landed in the Anglican Church. But pretty quickly, I mean, it was within a few years, it was clear to me that, like, Man, my trajectory was towards Catholicism. And even the priest who sort of started the issues with our church, started the unraveling of our Anglican Church, like within a year or so of him being there, it was clear to me like this has the feel of something, but it is not the thing.

So for me to say like, what does it mean to participate in the sacraments... I mean, I looked at Amber once and I said, "Listen, you can do whatever you want. You can stay trying to work it out with this priest, you can stay trying to be on staff and trying to be ordained. But for me, I've got to make a transition."

So I enrolled in classes to join the Catholic Church, and we got all the way to the Easter Vigil. This was the year before we both left. We got all the way to the Easter Vigil, and the priest said to me, "Hey, man, you need to wait on your wife. There are more important things than becoming Catholic. You need to wait on your wife." Which I thought was insane.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Seth:** But for me, it was really like trusting God, one, that He was leaving me where I was supposed to be. But for me, the Catholic journey was really about like, Where can I go that I can experience the actual goodness of God in the actual land of the living through the tangible stuff of Earth, the bread, the wine, the confession to another person, the kneeling in prayer on a kneeler to the point where your knees feel it, your back feels it? What are the ways that I can get in my body and actually participate with God?

And to me, that was sort of the beginning of the Catholic journey. And then Amber's journey is sort of parallel but different.

**Annie:** So here's a tough question. Either of you can take this. Someone says, there are things that Catholics believe that I'm not sure if Catholics and Protestants are on the same page. So someone's listening and going like, "Hey, there's some pretty big... like I don't pray to saints. I don't pray to Mary." And there's a lot of other things... not a lot. There are a few other things like that. How do you reconcile the differences? Or do you have to? Do you not even have to reconcile the differences? Or is it none of our business?

**Seth:** I think that's really interesting question. It is only our business to the extent that for instance, people say this book isn't Christian because you come from a Catholic perspective, or I won't affiliate with this book, because I'm, you know, fill in the blank Protestant, and you're Catholic. Which we've had-

**Annie:** Meaning *The Deep Down things*? Meaning your book?

**Seth:** Yeah, that's right. That's right.

**Annie:** Oh, wow. Are there Catholics who say that as well because you were Protestant?

**Seth:** Not yet. Maybe. Maybe there will be. But not yet.

**Annie:** But Protestant saying we can't because you're a Catholic now.

**Seth:** Yeah, that's right. And we've experienced some of that. So what I would say is typically, I'm like, man, if you really feel it necessary to have the conversation about what makes us so different, let's grab a cup of coffee and sit down and talk about it. But for the most part, I feel like it's none of my business except for the fact that Amber and I have now written a book. And so now people are going to ask us-

**Annie:** Yeah, sadly.

**Seth:** ...and you know, disaffiliate. So I would say, you know, there are a couple of really great thinkers. The first thing I would say is just go listen to Peter Kreeft, who is an amazing thinker and will have tons of... you know, he has done a ton of work in ecumenical spaces to say, Hey, you know, Protestants say this, and Catholics say this, and it sounds very different. But when you get underneath it, it says actually very much the same.

So when we talk about things like salvation by works versus salvation by faith alone, or justification by faith alone versus justification by works, we're actually saying something very, very similar. And we can go back to the faith without works conversation is dead that James was trying to have with the early church.

And we can say actually, you know, what we're saying is very much similar. It's the grace of God alone that saves us. And if the grace of God alone saves us, here are the things we are going to do. Those are very similar conversations. There's some nuance there. But like someone like find good ecumenical thinkers like that and let them make the arguments because I'm just really tired is the truth.

The second thing I would say, though, is church history didn't start with the Reformation. Let that sink in for a minute.

**Annie:** Right. Right.

**Seth:** Church history started with Jesus, and then it went from there through well over 1,000, 1,500 years of iteration. And there was plenty of thoughts about what was the Eucharist, there were plenty of thoughts about what does it mean to venerate saints, there were plenty of thoughts that were wholesale dismissed for no other reason than they were not Protestant. So that's the other thing I would say is go back to church history.

**Amber:** Go back to John 17 and Jesus's prayer for us. I think that's the challenge. Because the enemy has been at work at this for 2,000 years to divide. And the whole goal would be that we don't hear each other, that we wouldn't see it when actually we're saying the same thing.

A lot of times things are boiled down to like, well, I couldn't do that because I would never pray to Mary. There's a whole lot to look into there. That's actually really, really beautiful. And even if at the end of the day you don't agree with it, actually just be careful before you start digging. Because you might meet Jesus there.

**Annie:** Get them Amber. You're right

**Amber:** I mean, it is the same thing. I'm never going to put down what was put into me, as a kid growing up in the church of Christ. I'm never going to put that service down. In fact, I'm like, That's so Catholic. So I just think we have to fight for unity. And sometimes we have to be like, you know, I don't get that.

I still in the Catholic Church hear people say stuff and be like, "That's weird. That's weird. I don't know. I don't know what I think about that." But I give the benefit of the doubt. I don't know that that is worth the fight still.

**Annie:** I'm with you. I have found Jesus continue to get more interesting the more I learn about Catholicism and other branches of Protestantism that I do not know well. So the option is to assume everyone that didn't grow up Methodist and then become nondenominational is doing it wrong. Or the option is to assume there's something to learn because...

Hey, listen, y'all, if we weren't recording, we could have lots of conversations about other branches of Protestantism that are doing things that are as ungodly as anything. So they ain't just one line cutting down the middle, right? So I'm just real moved by y'all's move into a place where Jesus is that brought you health and healing.

It mattered a lot to me as I've lived this with y'all to some degree and read the book that our friends listening hear the generous offer of Jesus in a lot of different ways when you're hurt where you are.

**Seth:** Yes.

**Annie:** Right? So, sometimes obedience is leaving, and sometimes obedience to staying. There's not one right answer to that.

**Seth:** I think that's true. And I think, for me, it's not just a fear. This is a great fear of mine. I think we've actually talked about this before. It's not just a fear. It's actually a motivator. And that is, if I'm not constantly asking myself what is the source of this thought, what is the source of this thought, what is the source of this thought?

If I'm not constantly open to refining my position when new information becomes available, then what ends up happening is I become stagnant. And I become stagnant personally and I become stagnant in my spiritual life. So I think, for me... and I think Amber too—I think I could say this—like continuing to explore and to ask questions, and to look at church history.

You know, at some point, we got to a place where we looked up and said, this really is where Jesus is. And we can be a unifying voice for what we believe without ever saying like, Yeah, but you have to come to this too.

**Annie:** That's it. That's exactly right.

**Seth:** That's never been a super winning a proposition. "Hey, if you want to be a real Christian, you have to come over here and be like this." That works for some people. But most of us are kind of like, I don't know about that. But what I can tell you about my Catholic journey is that I've never felt more connected with Christ than where I am. I've also never felt more spiritually attacked than where I am. And you know what? I think there's something to that.

**Annie:** Wow. Seth, one of the gifts you've been to our team is as we were deciding about this month's Let's Read the Gospels, and wanting to read the NRSV Catholic Edition, when we wanted to read what our Catholic friends are reading, we got you on speakerphone in front of God and everybody on our team. You're one of the Catholics that I called to say, "Hey, is the Bible the same? Is the Bible the same?"

And what we learned about the NRSV is the NRSV and the NRSV Catholic Edition in the gospels are exactly the same. So I think my question is, did you have to buy new Bibles?

**Seth:** Well, that's actually a very interesting question. Because there are some deuterocanonical books that were in the Bible for forever and ever and ever until the Reformation, and then those books magically disappeared. I say magically. That was kind of tongue-in-cheek. Maybe a bit snarky.

**Annie:** Martin Luther made them disappear. But yeah, okay.

**Seth:** Yes, yes, that's right. A knife and a man made those things disappear pretty quickly. But what I will say, and I'll say this, too, I mean, I haven't read through all those

books still to this day. Some of those books I'm like, Man, I don't know. I have enough with the Protestant Bible, much less the Catholic Bible to keep up with. So I haven't read all those books yet.

But I will also say there's some real beauty in those books that was missing. This is a little bit of an aside. But it kind of relates to our story a little bit. Like, go read the book of Judith. The book of Judith is a story about a woman who uses her power as a woman to behead the powers of the world. It is a beautiful story.

And the fact that that story is missing from, you know, the Bible that I didn't have before it carves out a big piece of feminist literature that existed for a very important reason within the scriptures. So did we have to go buy new Bibles? No, we did not. Did we choose to go buy new Bibles because there are pieces of literature like this that have gone missing and that are important? Yeah. Yeah, we did. And I think those stories are important to read.

**Annie:** Last year, when I listened to Father Mike read the Bible, he read those books as well. And I remember so clearly walking on the beach summer of 2021, and just sobbing listening to Tobit. And I'd never heard that story at all. But here's this man and woman who have decided to get married and all her other husbands have died. So the father-in-law is digging a grave for this man while he... you know, I mean, I was sobbing. I was sobbing. It's just beautiful. Just beautiful.

[00:42:56] <music>

**Annie:** Friends, have you gotten your copies of So Happy to Know You!. It's the book I wanted to write for my miniBFFs to remind them God made each of them on purpose. It's a kids' book-size reminder that we need them just as they are. Their voice, their heart, their talents, their unique selves that no one else has. Jennie Poh beautifully brought it to life with her illustrations, and So Happy to Know You! is just the encouragement your kids need today to live confidently, and honestly, probably a message we all need no matter our age.

And you know, when this book started rolling around in my brain? When I started telling you always Annie stories, things I would do that were a little and a lot. I realize the stories that make me me are your favorite ones and mine too. So this book hopefully helps your kiddos and you see yourself as perfectly unique. And we are so happy to know you. So get your copies of So Happy To Know You wherever books are sold. Available right now.

[00:43:54] <music>

**Annie:** Amber, how much healing came from writing this and from this new experience? I mean, your newfound faith in the Catholic church? I'm going to ask a question that's a dumb question. Are you healed? Are you healed from it?

**Amber:** I don't know if I know the answer. Are we ever all the way healed? You know, it's a wound? I don't know that I'll ever not feel that wound. But can I move forward? Do I have forgiveness and mended... different but mended relationships? Yes. And that's really beautiful. So yeah. I mean, Jesus still had His wounds. So I don't know why we would think we wouldn't. You know?

**Annie:** My business coach said today "not every problem is solvable". And I felt that is like a sermon, actually. Because the places that I have felt wounded by people in my church, my church now, my church 10 years ago, my church whenever, I want to do the right things to heal those wounds. And then you still see the person on Instagram and it makes you cry. And you go, "Oh, man, I thought I was healed." But not all problems are solvable.

**Amber:** No. No. There are some things that we can do. In the book I say in spite, just out of sheer spite we feast. And it's not a feast if you're always feasting.

**Annie:** Yes. Yes.

**Amber:** But you have to know when it's time to make a big, sloppy play of the most delicious food and say, there is good here on my plate and I'm going to eat it up with people that I love. And not everything is right. And we're not with our loved ones yet in glory, you know, but we're gonna feast here.

So we have a lot to celebrate and a lot of like... I don't know. Sometimes I feel like a covert spy. Like, we have a lot of underground, awesome work to do with one another in the realm of hope as believers: Catholic, Protestant, whatever. We have work to do together to live out that hope. I think the people who have often experienced the most pain are the ones leading the way in that—the ones who are really leading the way in that.

**Annie:** Yeah, yeah. It's beautiful. I just looked up the text I sent you all the day I finished reading the book. And I literally said, "You may not want it or need it but I wrote up an endorsement." I didn't even ask your permission. That's the kind of terrible friend I am. I did not even ask your permission.

But Seth says this book goes into hands this week... I mean, this is like a very typical question, and I'm sorry to ask it. But I genuinely am curious. And I try to chase my curiosity here. As this book goes into hands this week, what are you hoping happens?

**Seth:** You know, there was a time in my life, particularly as a writer, where I was like, "Man, I hope this book hits the New York Times bestseller list." I literally don't care about that anymore. I think I'm at the place where my hope is that it finds the right reader, it finds the person that it was meant for. If that's the 10 people, that's fantastic. The publisher doesn't want to hear that but that's fantastic. If it's 10,000 people, that's great.

I've also wrestled a lot with what would happen if this book is only read by Catholics? Or what would happen if this book is shunned by Catholics and only read by Catholic-curious Protestants? Any time I start to start wrestling with those issues of market and audience and whatever, I think I just keep coming back to like, the book is going to do what it's going to do.

And my hope is that everyone who's listening, if you're prompted to go read the book, go read the book. It's not for everybody, but it's for a lot of people. So I think my ultimate hope is just that it ends up in the right hands.

**Annie:** Amber, do you have different hopes, same hopes?

**Amber:** When I wrote my first book, *Wild in the Hollow*, a lot of people responded that my story wasn't their story, but it was all at the same time. I actually think that that's what I hope is that even if you haven't experienced, you know, emotional and spiritual abuse in a church, that if you have lived through a season of grief, or if you have someone in your life that you love a lot that you don't know how to pull out, that there's actually work for us to do together. And I hope that that comes through clearly in the book.

**Annie:** Your story is not my story, and it is. And I'm Protestant, I'm not going to be Catholic, and I find your story so inspiring to my faith. So it just feels like such an important read. Even if people just read it for understanding, even if it doesn't change you, it's such a good thing to read to understand someone else's story. And the two perspectives that y'all wrote from were really beautiful.

**Seth:** Annie, just to build off of what I said, what Amber said, what you said, my ultimate hope is that somebody who is like right now saying, "I think I'm done. I think I'm leaving," like read for understanding, read and ask yourself like, do I need to be done? Is there somewhere I can stay? Can I stick this out? Like, is it important that I stick this out? And if it's important that I stick it out, do I need to go somewhere else to stick it out? Like my faith? Read to ask yourself, like, is deconstruction all the way past the bones really where you want to be or is there still hope in the faith that you held close and hold close?

**Annie:** Yeah, that's beautiful. I can't wait for people to get this this week and to hear more of your story and to connect in the ways they connect. Everybody can connect in a way or another. And we're going to do the leftiest left turn here because I am not hanging up with you until you both answer the question that we always finish with.

So Seth and Amber, each of you, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, besides deconstructing and becoming a Catholic, tell me what sounds fun to you.

**Seth:** What sounds really fun to me is... Can I just make it up?

**Annie:** Yeah, yeah, it's what sounds fun to you.

**Seth:** Like a dream scenario?

**Annie:** Sure.

**Seth:** What sounds fun to me as you getting on a plane, flying to Fayetteville, Arkansas and joining Amber and I at Orthodox Brewery, which is a little slice of paradise on earth. And I know the sober guy saying come visit us for Orthodox Brewery is kind of weird, but I'm saying like that sounds fun to me to come and share a little bit of a feast, a little bit of space with you in a beautiful area that's return to the [Ozarks?] sort of place.

**Annie:** Oh, I would love it. Can we do that? I want to come on when the farmers market is going on.

**Seth:** So every Thursday... that's my fun thing. Every Thursday... we live kind of down the hill from Fayetteville in a place called Goshen. And I have helped with an awesome group of women start a farmers market down there. And it is people come out of the hills, we have amazing vendors and just flowers and vegetables. And it's in a field next to a community building that is falling apart, and where people remember going to forage there in the 1950s. And it is just home to people. And people come to our market. And then as soon as market's over people pack up and they drive to Orthodox Farmhouse Brewery. And that's how we spend our Thursday evenings.

**Annie:** Put me on the schedule. Put me on a Thursday schedule and 2024.

**Seth:** Absolutely. Yes, please.

**Annie:** I've got to come to one. I would love it. Thank you all for making time for this and for writing this book. It costs you to write this book, so thank you.

**Seth:** Thanks for having us.

**Amber:** Thank you.

[00:53:07] <music>

**Outro:** Oh, you guys, aren't they awesome? I know. I'm so thankful for them, for their journey, for the way they talk about it honestly. Man, the book made me laugh and it made me cry. It was just really... They tell you to draw a timeline of some certain things. Grab the book so you can do it. But make sure you get your copy of *The Deep Down Things* right now.

Follow them on social media, tell them thanks for being on the show, and get to read and so you can draw that timeline. It really helped me a lot. I took it to my next counseling appointment after I did it.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find on this Wednesday. 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 with a lot of interesting bonusy things over at @thatsoundsfunpodcast on Instagram.

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 seeing that musical MJ, you guys. I'm getting to see MJ today, that Wednesday matinee. I love it.

Y'all have a great day. We will see you back here tomorrow as we continue our Build Your Board series with two of my favorite pastors, Micah and Shireen Eldridge, and we are talking about a practice that has really changed my life, building a prayer team. So y'all come back and join us tomorrow as we talk about how and why and who needs a prayer team.