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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 and for this whole month. Listen, today we kick off a special series called Build Your Board, a That Sounds Fun podcast series in which we want to help you find the voices you need to live the life you want. In a world of influencers, you get to decide who is influencing you.

So do you have a board of directors for your life? Sure, you don't have to give them an official name or make them attend to meetings as a group of you times a year. But the people who speak into your life matter. The community you surround yourself with helps you grow as a person and grow in your relationship with God. We want to help you figure out who you need right now, and how to find them.

You're going to hear from real people who speak into my life and experts who you will love learning from. And we've created a Build Your Board guidebook for this series. There are pages to take notes for every episode starting the day and questions to walk through and process so that by the end of the series you will have this completed resource and the answer to the question: Who is the next voice I need to help me build the life that I want? You can get that guidebook at [anniefdowns.com/buildyourboard](http://anniefdowns.com/buildyourboard).

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Athletic Greens](#). Listen, y'all know I'm in packing mode for New York. And you know my AG1 by Athletic Greens is coming along with me. I want to get my normal healthy rhythms while I step into my two months in NYC.

AG1 is truly such a simple way to incorporate all the nutrients you need into 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 of steps, except those 10,000 you want to get every day.

All you do is mix one scoop of powder and cold water once a day. You know my favorite way to drink it is to shake mine up with a couple of cubes of frozen lemon juice. Just a little extra something special. Every scoop is filled with 75 vitamins, minerals, and whole foods source quality ingredients that provide all of these major benefits.

AG1 supports your gut and mood, boost energy, helps your immune system, and even supports healthier-looking skin, hair, and nails. And their single-serving travel packs are so helpful. Just throw a pack in your bag and they'll make it so easy to bring along with you. You don't have to set a reminder to order or worry about

running out because aging AG1 is delivered like clockwork every month so it's so convenient to make it a daily habit.

If you're looking for an easier way to take supplements, AG1 is giving you a free one-year supply of vitamin D and five free travel packs with your first purchase. So go to [athleticgreens.com/soundsfun](https://athleticgreens.com/soundsfun). So check that out.

**Intro:** Today on the show, as we kick off our Build Your Board series, we are talking with Al Andrews. Listen, we knew before we started talking about the voices you needed to add to your life we wanted to get to the root of it all: loneliness. It's at an all-time high.

We know by now that loneliness isn't about relationship status. You can be lonely even when you're dating someone or married, lonely when you're in a crowded room, lonely when you feel like you have all the people in your life that you need.

So Al Andrews is the perfect person to help us start this series. You're going to love him and the wisdom he brings. He's the founder and executive director of Porter's Call, a nonprofit here in Franklin, Tennessee that has offered free counsel support and encouragement to recording artists since 2001. He was the right voice for us to sit down and start this series with.

Now, you don't have to have the Build Your Board guidebook in order to enjoy the series, of course. But if you do have your Build Your Board guidebook, we are going to be taking notes on page five. So here's my Build Your Board conversation with Al Andrews.

**Annie:** Al Andrews, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

**Al:** It is great to be here.

**Annie:** What an honor. I mean, I do not use this lightly. You are a legend. So to be in the studio with you is just such a gift. So thanks for making time for this in a busy schedule.

**Al:** Well, and thanks for referring to me as a legend. That's just an honor and a little odd to me.

**Annie:** Truly you are.

**Al:** Well, you know this, but I don't know if our audience knows this story, that I am with the counselor I'm with because of you. Do you remember? In 2013 I really

needed a therapist, and your Porter's Call has very good boundaries about who you can see and who you can't see. And I did not meet all the requirements.

**Al:** You're not an artist who records and sings.

**Annie:** That's right. I don't sing. I remember you saying, "You travel enough but you don't do the right thing on the stage." And I said, "Okay, I'm on the road as much as them but I don't sing."

**Al:** Oh, well.

**Annie:** Oh, well. And then you gave me a list of therapists that you knew could work with my lifestyle, and it has just changed my life.

**Al:** I'm so glad.

**Annie:** So thank you.

**Al:** You're welcome.

**Annie:** Thank you for that. We are going to deep dive into the question 'why am I lonely?' But I want to start with one of your legendary quotes that everyone talks about. Because I think whether someone has a public life or not, they have some version of public life because of social media. But there are a lot of younger men and women who listen to us that are hoping to get public.

One of your quotes that could be a tattoo on my body is "the human heart wasn't built for fame". Can you talk about that for just a second? I feel that but...

**Al:** Yeah. You know, I think I didn't come up with that early along in this thing. But as I watched artists that I work with move from not fame to fame, it's really hard. It's really hard to be separated like that, to be lifted up, to be seen for what you show publicly, and not to be known. I think there's so many things that come with it.

I liken it to the time that for the first time in my life, I was bumped up to first class in an airplane. And I got up there and it didn't take me about 15 minutes to start being annoyed at the people making noise with their peanuts in the back.

**Annie:** Right, right.

**Al:** You know, don't use our bathroom, there's one back there for y'all. And I was just bumped up by accident. I laugh about it but it was kind of true that I could get used to this. And it makes me become something that I'm not.

Now, if somebody gets famous, we can help them with it by bringing them back to reality as much as we can, and help them to do things that will make things real. But it's a very, very difficult thing. I just don't think we're built for it.

**Annie:** My experience... I'm not famous compared to many of our peers. But I'm not invisible either. I have a very public life. And remembering that when I feel the tension of 'I don't know if it's supposed to be like this,' I'm like, "Well, Al says my human heart was not built for this. This is not how it's meant to be."

**Al:** Well, yeah. I think there's a loneliness in it. For instance, when you're on stage doing your best, everyone fantasizes about your life. They go, "Oh, my gosh, she sounds so great." And you are. But "she sounds so great. She must have the best life. And oh, gosh, I would just..." And they dream about what it's like to be you.

And that can create loneliness in you. If a lot of people dream the same thing and think the same thing, it's harder to be real.

**Annie:** Yeah. This has happened more times. Well, here's a perfect sample. Last summer when my nephew passed... I had a nephew that lived for two months. And when he passed away, the whole time we are going through it my family did not want it to be public. Understandably. That was great. But I had to do my job.

**Al:** Wow.

**Annie:** So I was getting on social media and recording podcasts and doing everything during the week and then Thursday would drive to Atlanta and be with my family all weekend and be with my little nephew. We weren't public about him until two weeks after his funeral.

So the disintegration of that season was very... I don't live that disintegrated. But I did it out of... I mean, I wouldn't do it any different. That's what my family needed, what I needed, honestly. My Enneagram seven loves to turn that light switch off, turn this light switch on. I mean, you know that. I was kind of like, "Great. I'm back in Nashville where my life is great," you know?

**Al:** Yes.

**Annie:** So I didn't hate it. That's a very grief-centric story. But I can have that disintegration if I'm not careful on any stage or in any airplane of like, "Here's what's happened in my private life. I can pretend like everything's great."

**Al:** It's that distance between how you're perceived and what you know is true.

**Annie:** Right.

**Al:** And sometimes when that distance has to be... like, I don't go to a concert thinking that someone's going to talk about their depression. I go to the concert to be entertained, to love it, whatever. And that distance between the person on stage and the person observing them, or the person they know they are is kind of a tedious conflict. Like, where do I go?

**Annie:** Good. I mean, the truth is moms have to do that. You know, they've got to get the kids ready for school even if she and her husband had a massive fight the night before. And she's got to get them up and get them ready for school and take them... or the doctor. Surgeons have to do surgery even if their private life is falling apart.

**Al:** That's true of everybody.

**Annie:** It's not unique.

**Al:** I can't tell you the number of times Nita and I have had a disagreement or argument and then I have to go preach or speak somewhere.

**Annie:** Right.

**Al:** And it's like, "Oh, oh, this is really hard." But there is that distance. The distance can make you lonely.

**Annie:** I was about to say. So as we dive into this question of why am I lonely, is part of our loneliness that we never get to be... 'never' is a big word. I hear myself. ...that we never get to be fully integrated, and so we're the only ones who know us?

**Al:** Yes.

**Annie:** Okay. That feels terrible, but I think that's true.

**Al:** I do think it's true. I do think it's true.

**Annie:** So what do we do if we're the only one who knows us?

**Al:** Well, that statement is a problem obviously, because if we're the only one who knows us, it doesn't take us long to start making up stuff.

**Annie:** Ah, wow.

**Al:** Because there's no reflection of another person, there are no words from another person. If we're the only one who knows us, then it goes bad. It just goes bad because we start thinking of things that are not true about ourselves. "I wonder why I'm lonely. Well, maybe it's because I'm not as interesting as people. I wonder why my phone doesn't ring. Well, because not that many people like me." You know, you can keep on going but-

**Annie:** Are they hanging out without me?

**Al:** Yeah. You're gonna love this. That's the reason I'm not on Facebook.

**Annie:** Really?

**Al:** Because years ago I got on Facebook because I was supposed to. And I would look on there and see all these people who were friends having fun at a birthday party, I'm going, "I wasn't invited. I'm so mature like that."

**Annie:** Yes. I'm the same way though.

**Al:** And then I saw other things going on and other people having fun, I went, "I'm just not mature enough to do this Facebook thing, because I see things and I make stuff up. And then it makes me lonely." Most of it's not true but when you're by yourself, you make things up.

**Annie:** Is everybody lonely?

**Al:** Absolutely. But here's the thing. I think there's a loneliness that we're built with.

**Annie:** Oh, yeah. Talk about that.

**Al:** And a loneliness that comes with the territory but doesn't have to be. I think the loneliness we're built with we can go way, way back to the garden, to the story of the garden where God builds all these things, and then He builds a man and He goes, "Well, He's not meant to be alone." Notice He didn't say He's lonely. He's not built to be alone. So He created Eve to be with him—and they were together.

And for a while, there was no loneliness in the world. They spoke to God, they spoke to each other, they got each other, which is fascinating, they understand what each other was like, there was no anger, there was no separation between them at all, not even close, nothing-

**Annie:** And they had work to do.

**Al:** Yeah, they had work to do, and good work that always was successful. There were no bugs that ate plants, there was no floods, there was no drought. So they were together. There was never a time when one of them came home from working and said, "Hey," and the other person said, "It's about time you came home." They never said that. "I've been here all day." Or something like that.

But because there was communion, because there was conversation back and forth, and because there was no shame, which I cannot imagine. There was no loneliness, because they got each other and they were communicating. After they ate the forbidden fruit in the story, they were disconnected from each other and from God. God had to go looking for them. And they hid, they were afraid.

So I think from that point on, it's never gotten completely back. Otherwise, we wouldn't feel loneliness. We wouldn't be having this conversation. I read a book by Curt Thompson, the psychiatrist-

**Annie:** Yes, we love him.

**Al:** ...who's one of my favorite people. And in one book he said, "Everyone is born looking for someone who's looking for them."

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Al:** And I think that speaks to it. We're born hungry for relationship. I want to say we're born lonely, and we're looking for someone who's looking for them. And that's so important because when a child is born and someone is not looking for them, it impacts their whole life. Because we want to be seen, and we want to be known.

So to me, I think, without going into a dictionary definition of loneliness, I would feel like loneliness is the feeling of being alone and the feeling of being unseen. Notice I said "feeling" rather than "reality". Because it is a feeling.

**Annie:** You can be lonely in a room full of people.

**Al:** Right. Right. So it's a feeling. And there's a difference between loneliness and being alone. Loneliness is wanting. I want something I don't have. Solitude is having. But we can get into that later. But there's a difference between loneliness and solitude. And there's a difference between loneliness and being alone.

**Annie:** I'm having two thoughts about the book of Genesis I've never had in my life. Everybody else is probably like, Duh, Annie. But I've never thought about when you're talking about Genesis and talking about Adam and Eve, it wasn't like one day they were made and the next day they ate the apple.

**Al:** Right.

**Annie:** All of a sudden, I'm going like, Was it weeks? Was it years? I have never thought about that, Al. But they existed for amount of time.

**Al:** Oh, I would think it'd be a good while. And you know-

**Annie:** Never thought that.

**Al:** If you think about that, you think, there was a season where nothing went wrong, nothing went wrong, which feels like a fantasy to me.

**Annie:** That's right. That's right. That we won't get through today-

**Al:** Right, right.

**Annie:** ...without something going wrong for somebody.

**Al:** Hopefully not. But-

**Annie:** We've tried to control all the factors in this room. This is our Eden for the next 30 minutes.

**Al:** So far we're doing great.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Al:** But if you think about that for a little while, that really does mean no shame, feeling no shame about anything, your body, what you said, feeling total connection with one another. Total connection with no exceptions, and a total connection with God with no exceptions. There was never a time when they said, "I wonder where God is. I wonder if he's listening." Because He was.

**Annie:** He was there with them.

**Al:** I want to think that it lasted for a while. That's just my own fantasy. That it lasted for a while and it just accentuates what happened and it accentuates what happened afterwards. Because there was a moment where Adam and Eve were sitting outside the garden and they could smell the garden. And in their hearts, I could sense them say, each of them in their own way, both angrily and with sorrow, "I just want to go home. I just want to go home." And feeling that I want to go home.

So in loneliness is a homesickness that I think we all have because we're not in the garden anymore, we're not home. And we will be home one day. But there's a chronic homesickness that we have, and that's okay.

I think that's one thing we have to admit. Because if we admit that, we won't feel bad about that. There's sometimes I just want to be home. I don't want to take my life. I just want to be home. But I'm not there yet.

There's a film, an old film—When I ask somebody, "Have you seen this film?" I look back and I was like 45 years old—called *Trip to Bountiful*.

**Annie:** No, I haven't Seen it.

**Al:** She won the Academy Award that year. It's about an old woman who lives with her daughter and son-in-law in a little apartment in Houston. And she wants to go back to her home called Bountiful, Texas. And they won't let her go, and she sneaks away-

**Annie:** Oh my gosh.

**Al:** ...and starts to go back and goes back. It was a play at one time. But anyway. But she seeks to go back and all this little adventure to get back. And she gets home and she sees the old buildings that used to be and she weeps because it's not like it used to be. But she gets in the car and the theme music of the whole movie is *softly and tenderly Jesus' calling*.

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Al:** Calling of sin. Come home. And she basically says, "I've had my trip," and she rides off. It's beautiful. It just says there's a homesickness in us all and we want to go home.

**Annie:** I told you this when we were talking about this before, but there was such a shift in me maybe five years ago, a little bit more possibly. There was such a shift in me when I swallowed that pill that said, "You are actually going to live with loneliness forever. Stop trying to medicate. Stop trying to change. Stop trying to fill." I said to you, when loneliness stopped making decisions for me and instead was just a companion that is with me, at times louder and quieter.

**Al:** That's a great line. I'm gonna totally steal that.

**Annie:** You're very welcome.

**Al:** Thank you. You stole one line from me.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's exactly right.

**Al:** That is a great point to... invited as a companion. There's a loneliness that is good and there's a loneliness that makes you feel like a victim and you become isolated.

**Annie:** Okay, great. How do we know which is which?

**Al:** Well, usually I think shame is involved in the second. Because if I'm lonely, and like you said, let it be a friend, let it be a companion, that just feels really healthy. And that feels like an honest admission that I can never be truly known by anyone. Because I feel that loneliness. I'm married and I love my wife and she loves me, but there are times when I feel really lonely.

Sometimes it's because we have something going on that's not good, but sometimes it's because it's just true. And it's that one. I love the idea of embracing that, because then you can let that one go as a problem and go to the other one, which is I would say a little more whiny.

**Annie:** It is in my head. That's a great way to do it.

**Al:** Yeah. Because, you know, when I feel that one, I want to go, Gosh, I don't know if I have that many friends really." And you get to lying to yourself. And I'm not sure what that's all about, except for usually there's just something that triggers it. You feel lonely, and then you take it to another level that doesn't exist really. But that leads you to isolation. And isolation never works because you don't have voices telling you the truth.

**Annie:** An interesting thing—I'm sure you've seen this in your work as a therapist—but an interesting thing that single people do, particularly single women that me and my friends do, is when loneliness says, "I haven't met anyone," when it turns to the isolation loneliness is, "There is no one. There is no option. There is no one in this town. There's no one in my life. There's no opportunity."

And you go like, "Well, that is just not true. Even the smallest town. Get on an app and extend your mileage. It's not true. But that's what we hear in our heads is my loneliness will never be solved.

**Al:** And it's not only about there is nobody. But you add to that there is nobody and it's because of me. Shame is always involved in that kind of loneliness.

- Annie:** Yes. I mean, what I'm learning from you today is shame seems like the evil stepsister of loneliness. If loneliness is Cinderella, shame is the evil stepsister.
- Al:** That's a great way to... we have a book in line.
- Annie:** Yeah, that's right. That's right. We're getting to work right after this.
- Al:** That's right. That really is true.
- Annie:** That's it, right?
- Al:** It really feels true. Because with shame, you make up things that are not true. It's just the strangest thing. You've talked often about getting people in the right seats.
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Al:** To me, that really is an important antidote to the wrong kind of loneliness.
- Annie:** That is... Gosh, Al, that is so good. Because what we hope happens this month is that everyone gets to the end of the month and goes, Here's one seat I need to fill. Yes, it's time for a counselor. Yes, I need a financial coach. Yes, I need more adult friends. Fill just one seat. But do not expect to stop feeling lonely.
- Al:** Right.
- Annie:** Separate out the Cinderella from the stepsister, and live with Cinderella.
- Al:** Right. And because you live with Cinderella and you live with Cinderella because she's hearing things that are true. I remember there was a time I was lonely for a long time. I hadn't had any counseling and I knew when I was 19 I needed it, and I was like 32 and single.
- Annie:** Oh, wow.
- Al:** Finally-
- Annie:** That's like half your life.
- Al:** That's like half my life. There was a lot of shame, a lot of fear, and a lot of loneliness, the difficult kind. And a friend of mine noticed this, and he asked me the strangest question. I had all these friends who were my age. Most of them were couples because they were more fun. But I hadn't met you then. I was around a lot of couples and it kinda made me feel less lonely for some reason.

**Annie:** I think so too. Were you here in Nashville?

**Al:** No, I was in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Al:** And my friend asked me this question one day, he said, "So I have a question, Al. When you're with us, and as people my age are a little older, two things: How old do you feel? And what do you think we think about you?"

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Al:** I know. And it just came outta my mouth really quickly. I said, "I feel about 16, 17." And he goes, "Okay. What do you think we think about you?" And I said, "You know, I think you like me. I think you like me, but I kind of think you pity me." And I said a few things like that. Like, "I think you'd feel sorry for me. I kind of think you'd think there's something wrong with me."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Al:** And these big old cow tears formed in his eyes. And I'm sitting there looking at him and he said, "You know what makes me so sad?" I go, "What?" He says, "you believe that you're one of those little go-karts at the beach that have a governor on them that can only go so fast when they go around that little trail, that little, you know, the go-kart. But everyone else believes that you're a Formula One race car."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Al:** And I felt the rumble in my stomach, and it came up to my throat and I just lost it, put my head in my hands because somebody from the outside spoke a truth to me. I mean, I could lose it right now. It was such a pivotal moment in my life. Loneliness shifted a bit that day because I was going, "I have perceived this all wrong. Could I believe that's true?" And I didn't sleep that night just for the craziness of his statement, for the fear of it, as well as also the excitement that that could be."

**Annie:** That's beautiful.

**Al:** Long story about how a voice from the outside, which we absolutely need because we believe lies. I don't know why, but we believe lies, the whispers that come to us. They come to me every day. And on a good day, I'll go, "Thanks for your opinion. Now I'm gonna move on."

**Annie:** I mean, for our friends listening who go, "Okay, Al, but I have no one," what's the first move?

**Al:** Well, first of all, I would push back against that because I think just saying that it sounds shameful. It's like, I have no one. I don't believe that. That may be true but I think I would say, No, you haven't chosen someone. Because there are people around you. There are people around you that are accessible but you haven't made the step of, which is a strange step... My friend pursued me without me asking him.

**Annie:** But you were in his house. So you had made a step.

**Al:** Yeah, I had made a step. But it wasn't for that. I kinda wanted to go eat. But I think there is a sense of there are people around you and there are people around you who love you, even if that whisper says they don't. And I think one step would be to go to them and to actually say, "Here's what I'm saying to myself." I am lonely, and here's what I'm saying to myself that I don't deserve friends, whatever. And give them a chance to speak. It's a little frightening. It's very frightening to speak to that.

But you know the people that would speak. And not just to feed you a line or something, but that... Like if I would've said to my friend without his asking, "I just feel awful. I just feel so lonely and there's something wrong—and there was—but can you tell me if that's true?" I think he would've said, "I know you feel that but let me see what I see."

**Al:** Yes.

[00:27:46] <Music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to share about one of our amazing partners, [Brooklinen](#). Y'all know I love my Brooklinen sheets and yes, they're packed up with me to come to New York too.

If you're starting to feel some seasonal scaries from the sun setting earlier and the season's changing, let Brooklinen and bring some coziness to your life this fall. Luckily, they offer a whole fleet of sheet options from linen to flannel to accommodate all sleepers, cool, hot, and everything in between.

Brooklinen was founded by a husband and wife, team Rich and Vicki in 2014. Their mission is to provide their customers with hotel-quality, award-winning luxury bedding. And they are doing it. They're seriously so soft and comfortable. I have three sets I rotate through, and I know a ton of y'all love them too because Brooklinen's internet-famous sheets have over 100,000 five-star reviews.

With limited edition colorways dropping regularly, Brooklinenn keeps you well-rested and fresh. Use those old sheets of yours for your ghost costume for Halloween and upgrade to Brooklinen seasonal picks for linens and comforters and bath and more. It's no trick. Brooklinen's bestselling linens are sure to curb those seasonal scares this fall.

Visit in-store or online at [brooklinen.com](https://brooklinen.com). That's brooklinen.com and use the code THATSOUNDSFUN for \$20 off your order of \$100 or more. That's brooklinen.com, using the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN for \$20 off.

**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](https://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.

Okay, now back to our Build Your Board conversation with Al.

[00:30:34] <Music>

**Annie:** Our friends who are listening are gonna hear on Thursday from my four closest girlfriends here in Nashville that we've all become friends as adults. And one of the things that group does so well is say, I'm telling myself this story. Is that true?

**Al:** That is the greatest line.

**Annie:** It is so helpful. Because it doesn't put the blame on them for what they've done or said. It says, "I don't know what you meant. What I heard and what the story I'm writing that makes me feel lonely is this." And then the person goes, "That's exactly how I meant it." If they want to, right? Or "Oh my gosh, you are tired. Go to bed. You are not hearing me correctly."

**Al:** My words are "I'm making this up," when you said this. But also beyond what somebody said, you can just say it in general. Like, "Here's what I'm making up about my life today and here's what I'm making up that I'm like, Will you talk to me?" And to have somebody tell you the truth-

**Annie:** And believe them.

**Al:** And believe them. It takes a while. You might have to say, Say that again, please.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right.

**Al:** But it is a game changer. It's a game-changer.

**Annie:** One of the lies that I have heard a long time in my life is "once you're married, you won't be lonely anymore." So I think one of the problems with that is it makes single people feel shame that they haven't found the person to make them not lonely. And once you are married, it makes you feel shame that you feel lonely because I thought this was gonna solve this.

**Al:** Wow.

**Annie:** And so then married people don't want to talk about being lonely because they don't want to talk bad about their husbands, and single people don't want to talk about being lonely because they haven't found their husband.

**Al:** There's our second book.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right. We're about to have a series. Everybody, buckle up.

**Al:** No. I think that's so true. I believe that. I believe that we got married and-

**Annie:** There's some truth to it. Like, I won't go to movies by myself anymore or to football games or whatever.

**Al:** No. There is a truth to it. And there is a truth about Adam being alone and not being alone anymore. There's a truth that something is met, comma, in the midst of not being lonely. When you get lonely in a marriage, it's far worse than loneliness being not married.

**Annie:** Why?

**Al:** Because you've tasted it. You've tasted a connection with somebody.

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Al:** When you're at a place of conflict, I mean, maybe the kind of conflict that lasts for days or something like that, you just... Conflict ain't the right word. ...but a stress in the marriage and you don't feel connected, the fact that you've had that connection and now it's gone feels worse.

**Annie:** Wow. Because I guess in a lot of ways, I don't know what I'm missing.

**Al:** In many ways. But it feels as bad or worse just because you go, "Oh, I'm..." It's almost like Adam and Eve in the garden after what they experienced. And the distance between them hurt even more because they knew what was possible.

**Annie:** I would imagine... I mean, this is literally. I say 'imagine' literally, because I can only imagine this. I would imagine that having the level of vulnerability it would take to say to your spouse, "I feel lonely with you" must be like level 100 of vulnerability.

**Al:** That's up there.

**Annie:** I would think so.

**Al:** Really up there. And sometimes we don't say those words, but we find a way-

**Annie:** You're like, "Annie, don't say that."

**Al:** No, no, no. You can. No, no, no, no, no. I'm not gonna correct that. But sometimes the actions toward each other say it.

**Annie:** Right?

**Al:** You know, "I miss you." Or making known we're not together today, which means I'm lonely and I want to be back.

**Annie:** Is that something you should start practicing and dating so that that's part of your rhythms when you're married, if you can?

**Al:** Oh boy, yes. I didn't. But well-

**Annie:** I never have. I've never been like, "I'm lonely with you," and he's like, "Great. Can't wait to keep dating you. Sounds great."

**Al:** No. I think I'd pull back on the word "lonely" in those situations. But I think, you know, to say sometimes what's obvious. Because in dating relationships, you're gonna feel the distance at some point. Whether you have a disagreement about this, that, or that, or whether you really wanted to go get sushi and they didn't want to or something.

**Annie:** Right.

**Al:** But I think it's the healthiest of things just to go, "I'm feeling some distance between us and I'm wondering if you are too. And if you're not, can I tell you the distance I feel?"

**Annie:** Wow.

**Al:** Because I think that sets the stage for a deeper relationship just to get it out on the table. I grew up in a home that I just had great parents and for reasons of their own, they didn't do sad, they didn't do mad. Their deal was... And my dad was 19 years old when he stepped on Omaha Beach in D-Day, went through the war. My mother had an alcoholic father and they just wanted our lives to be happy. And they were.

But that means early on I knew that you didn't say things that would take us out of happy. And even though I'd gone through counseling school and all this kind of stuff, when we got together... Nita came from a family where there was a lot of fighting. So we're looking at something that's standing between us and I'm going, "Can't go there." And she's going, "There's gonna be a fight." So that made us more lonely until we learned that and began to speak to it. But it still arises. It's a little ugly head now and then.

**Annie:** I mean, that's so beautifully hopeful for all of us too in our friendships, in our work relationships, in our romantic relationships of like, This is a learning process too. You aren't going to suddenly know how to handle loneliness because you had one conversation.

**Al:** Right. Right.

**Annie:** It's a practice.

**Al:** It's a practice. I think in friendships as well.

**Annie:** That's really helpful.

**Al:** I wish I could say I was great at it. But I still feel like it's often a daily choice or a choice to make often to... if you feel disconnected, to reconnect, or to ask the question, what can we do to connect? Whether it's a friend or a spouse.

**Annie:** We had the most interesting thing happen when we were building this series. Our whole team's sitting around the table and we have built the series based off a lot of the voices that are in my life. And some would say I'm overly helped. I might agree. I might agree. I have gotten too many resources or too many cooks.

**Al:** There are worse things.

**Annie:** There are too many cooks in the AFD kitchen. But it was really interesting because a couple people on our team said, "I don't need anybody. I don't need any voices helping me. I just think about it and sort it out."

**Al:** Wow.

**Annie:** So my question for you is, for our friends listening who are very independent, who have successful lives in that, they are a person and they're an adult and they think, and maybe say, "I don't actually need any help." Is that true? Are there some people who don't need any help long-term?

**Al:** Are those people listening to us right now?

**Annie:** Well, they're going to at some point. Maybe.

**Al:** I'm kidding. You know, I don't know a person that doesn't need help. And it may not be at the moment. Again, we're outside of the garden, but I don't force people to get help. I think I would just make the statement "when you need help, here's some resources". Or "I'm here when you do." Because I'm jealous of people that say that.

**Annie:** Same.

**Al:** You know, I'm going, Oh my gosh.

**Annie:** I was like, "Tell me how you do it." I Marco Polo my mentor multiple times a week. My counselor, she is on... I'd bought her a boat at this point. I mean, there's

no world where I am very aware. And the shame voice says "you just aren't as strong as your friends." Which may be true. That's okay.

**Al:** And that's okay too. I'm not saying your friends who are listening to this are in denial. I'm not saying that at all. They may be more comfortable with aloneness, which is different. Or solitude. Or maybe the thing that draws them to loneliness just hasn't shown up in their life yet.

**Annie:** Maybe. That's interesting.

**Al:** Because-

**Annie:** I had a reckoning. I had a reckoning at 33 that got me here.

**Al:** Mine was 32.

**Annie:** Oh, wow. I was only 33 by about four days. So it was virtually 32. It just hit the fan at 33.

**Al:** Well, you know, there is this thing that I think is true is like, I knew there were some things wrong with me, but I didn't exactly know what, but I just couldn't ask for help because it didn't come with my family. I think there was this moment where your body or where my body said, you know, there's too much sorrow in here. There's too much sadness, there's too much things and we just can't handle it anymore. And I just began to disassemble.

**Annie:** Wow. I mean, that's part of the interesting thing about this conversation about loneliness is we kind of get this... wherever we are showing up in someone's life today, in their ears, wherever we're showing up to them, maybe their loneliest day or maybe their least lonely day.

**Al:** They may be going, "What are they talking about? They're depressing."

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right. Or they're going like, "Finally, someone's telling me." So in this moment, whenever we're hearing this, is there for sure a voice we need to add to our lives? Or is there a chance that we are good?

**Al:** You know-

**Annie:** And is "good" even the right word? That's probably fair.

**Al:** No, no. I think it's always important to have a voice in your life just because we can't see ourselves. And somebody else can. I remember daring one time to ask a

couple of friends, we were at dinner, I'm saying, "You know how sometimes if you're together with a group and somebody leaves and one of you rolls your eyes and says something I like, Can you believe that? Whatever. Would you be willing to tell me the thing that you say when I leave?"

**Annie:** Oh, wow.

**Al:** It was a little awkward. But I needed to hear it because I cannot see myself—and they can. So I think we all just need someone that's close, that's honest, that is willing to answer the questions that we ask them. And I think it's important to ask questions.

**Annie:** Blind spots are terrifying for me.

**Al:** They're horrifying. They're horrifying. And yet once they're exposed and you go, Oh my gosh, I don't want to be like that.

**Annie:** Kelly Haywood, who you know and love, last September, my nephew died in August and last September, I was just doing the best I could, Al. I mean, I was here every day-

**Al:** Oh, I can't believe that.

**Annie:** ...but I was suffering. I was grieving so terribly. But I was showing up. I thought better to show up a third of yourself than not show up at all. That is not true. Learned that lesson. But Kelly brought me in the office one day, into her office, and she said this... I could not have crafted a better sentence. She said, "I don't think you are being perceived the way you think you are."

**Al:** Wow.

**Annie:** She said, "I don't think you're showing up quite the way you want to be. So I want to tell you what our experiences of you during this, and you can let me know if that's what you mean for us to be experiencing."

**Al:** Oh my gosh.

**Annie:** Isn't that beautiful?

**Al:** That is Gorgeous.

**Annie:** I know. And I thought, "What a shame-less way to invite me to change my behavior."

**Al:** That is-

**Annie:** It was beautiful.

**Al:** I'm gonna take that home.

**Annie:** It was beautiful.

**Al:** You know, it's just the kindest, gentlest way to say something's wrong. "Here's how I'm experiencing you. Let me know if that's how you want me to experience you." Oh my gosh.

**Annie:** And that's my business partner. So everyone in the org experienced it, but the people who didn't say it to me are the people who work for me. Right?

**Al:** There was a lot of wisdom and they all went, "Hey, you need to go talk to Annie because we are not experiencing her the way she wants to be experienced." And they were right. They were right. I had never grieved like that, so I misunderstood what to do. I thought, I don't want to lay on my couch and be sad, so I'll just go to work. And that was not the move. Al, that was not the move.

**Al:** Not the move.

**Annie:** That was not the move. So even people like... I mean, Kelly brought me out of a version of loneliness even in that because I was lonely in my own behavior. Right?

**Al:** Yes. And I think this might be a time to shift a little bit to solitude.

**Annie:** Yes, please.

**Al:** Just because earlier, we said, you know, loneliness is a wanting, solitude is a having. Solitude is something that you choose. And especially for people who are outgoing, like the two in this room, are perceived as a [inaudible 00:43:44].

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right.

**Al:** ...to choose being alone for the purpose of growing, for the purposes of listening to the still small voice, for the purpose of reading, of reflecting, even for the purpose of sitting with your loneliness and understanding that there's more that can go on here, and maybe in this solitude, I'll find God, maybe in this solitude I'll find a word and a reading or a poem that will center me. So a having. It's I have something in solitude rather than want something. I just think it's really critical.

[00:44:25] <Music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to share about another amazing partner, [Indeed](#). So whether you're a small and mighty team like us or a large corporation, Indeed is the hiring tool you need to find the talent you want. No matter the size of your company, when you're ready to hire, I'm guessing you're already low on bandwidth. That is the truth around here.

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

And now back to finish up our Build Your Board conversation without Al.

[00:46:08] <Music>

**Annie:** How do we define that for ourselves? So when I'm thinking about... I don't know if you know this, but I'm going to New York for October and November. Do you know?

**Al:** No.

**Annie:** I'm gonna live up there for two months?

**Al:** Is there an extra room for a couple who want to come and visit?

**Annie:** Yeah. Oh my gosh, right? You wish I got an apartment that size. Nope. It's a one-bedroom.

**Al:** We're on the couch in the living room. What are you going for?

**Annie:** I just have always wanted to. I felt the opportunity in January and came back... I was up there for New Year's and came back to my team and just said, "Could I go at some point this year?" So back in January, we lopped off October and November.

**Al:** Wow.

**Annie:** It's such a gift. Talk to me about when I'm here in New York and am I lonely or mind solitude? How do we know the difference of this is loneliness and this is chosen solitude. Is it a mindset?

**Al:** I think it's a mindset. But I also think—this word is going to come again—a shame is not involved in solitude.

**Annie:** Shame is not involved in solitude.

**Al:** I know. We're back to that again, in that the loneliness makes up stuff, makes up those stories and tells you things that if you're aware, if you can open your eyes to it that you know are not true, but you're not sure what to do about it. And that's the time to reach out to a friend. I would suggest Kelly because that's an amazing thing. I might reach out to Kelly.

**Annie:** Right? I know.

**Al:** But solitude produces something good. You know, often with bands who are out on the road, I'll say to them, create a little liturgy before the show or after the show. And by that I mean, light a candle, read something together. That centers you. And I do that for myself. I have a little time in the morning, I go up to a little place in our house. It's a little library kind of place, and I'll light a few candles, and read some, pray some, and be alone.

We had a friend that you're familiar with, Suzanne Stabile-

**Annie:** Oh, we love her. We've had her on the show talking about Enneagram.

**Al:** About Enneagram.

**Annie:** She's amazing.

**Al:** Well, when we were with her one time, I don't remember what it was, but my wife and I, Nita, in the mornings we'd get up and we'd have some coffee and we'd sit down together and kind of do our private things across from each other now and then. And she said, "I'm an Enneagram two." And she said, out of the blue... and I talked, she said, "You know, Enneagram twos cannot have devotionals with other people."

**Annie:** Oh, Whoops.

**Al:** And I went, "What?" And she goes, "Yeah. Because they're kind of going, Are you okay?"

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Al:** Or can I get you something? Or if they want to talk, I'll talk and won't say, No, I'm trying to think here. We then had a little chat about it and I found the need for solitude in the morning and then we get together and listen to the song or something, or have that time in the evenings together.

But it's a routine to go be by myself purposefully. Not just to have a quiet time or whatever, but to be by myself to reflect a little. Sometimes I'll read a little bit or a lot of different things, but it's important. I like both of us. I like to go off by myself for a weekend.

**Annie:** Oh wow.

**Al:** A chosen solitude. And Nita's great about, go, go. She gets energy from different places. She'll go off with a friend or something. But we're okay by ourselves. If I go off on a trip, she's fine. She pulls out the arch supplies and messes up. And same if she's gone. We're okay. We were by ourselves a long time. So we can have solitude.

**Annie:** Is solitude a practice worth pursuing? Is that something that... does that show a level of health and maturity? Is that a step toward deeper relationship with God?

**Al:** I think so. I think so. And with yourself. You know, we're just in such a busy world. I've found myself... you know, Instagram algorithms have totally figured me out. They know that I love funny animal things. And they're great, by the way. I have one.

But I can just get lost there. Yeah. And that's ridiculous, you know? But it just makes me busy. It makes me busy. It makes my mind always active. So yes, I think it's good to pursue. And I wanna pursue it more. And it doesn't mean days, hours. It means sometime when it's just you and just you and God just to be still and hear the still small voice both of God and of yourself. That is really important.

Okay, Al, is there anything we didn't say about loneliness? And we're gonna finish with that, but is there anything we didn't say about loneliness that you wanna make sure we say?

**Al:** You know, I think we did pretty well.

**Annie:** Yeah. You're amazing at this.

**Al:** But I do have a poem, a funny poem.

**Annie:** Okay, good.

**Al:** Because we need a little levity here.

**Annie:** Sure, sure, sure.

**Al:** My favorite poet is a guy named Billy Collins. You can go to YouTube and to Billy Collins, and he's reading his poetry. He is a guy that makes poetry accessible. Everybody's afraid of poetry because of their horrible high school English class.

**Annie:** Yeah, sure.

**Al:** But we had him for evening of stories, our gathering we have every year. Hilarious. But he wrote a poem on loneliness, and it's a Haiku, you know, five syllables, seven syllables, five syllables. And here it is.

*Mid-winter evening,  
alone at the sushi bar?  
just me and this eel.*

**Annie:** Eel.

**Al:** I think it's just lovely.

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

**Al:** And when I read that, you know, it does... you think of loneliness. I mean, it's a lonely poem but it's funny. You know, mid-winter evening: that's a setup. 'Alone in this sushi bar,' that's even worse. And then he kind of says, just me and this eel. And you die laughing. And you go, it is a lonely poem but he makes good fun of it. I just needed to say that.

**Annie:** It feels very profoundly true.

**Al:** I know of.

**Annie:** I was like, I'm just having a realization. It's just me and this eel.

**Al:** I know.

**Annie:** Oh, I love it. But Al, you also brought another poem to end us with.

**Al:** I did.

**Annie:** Which I really appreciate. Thank you.

**Al:** I did. One of my favorite poets, in addition to Billy Collins, is Mary Oliver. She wrote a poem on sorrow. And if people want to look it up, it's called *Love Sorrow* by Mary Oliver. I've read it for a long time to give people who are in the midst of sorrow because we don't know what to do with sorrow. We run from it. We don't know how to embrace it. It's something that's just not dealt with a lot. We shut it down, we move on. But it remains.

And I think that's very connected to loneliness. So almost in this poem, you can exchange the word sorrow and loneliness. I think it speaks to us and we can talk a little bit of it, after, if we have time.

**Annie:** Yeah.

**Al:** She makes sorrow into a little girl.

*Love sorrow. She is yours now, and you must  
take care of what has been  
given. Brush her hair, help her  
into her little coat, hold her hand,  
especially when crossing a street. For, think,*

*what if you should lose her? Then you would be*

*sorrow yourself; her drawn face, her sleeplessness  
would be yours. Take care, touch  
her forehead that she feel herself not so*

*utterly alone. And smile, that she does not  
altogether forget the world before the lesson.  
Have patience in abundance. And do not  
ever lie or ever leave her even for a moment*

*by herself, which is to say, possibly, again,  
abandoned. She is strange, mute, difficult,  
sometimes unmanageable but, remember, she is a child.  
And amazing things can happen. And you may see,*

*as the two of you go  
walking together in the morning light, how  
little by little she relaxes; she looks about her;  
she begins to grow.*

**Annie:** Wow. Wow. Why did that one come to your mind for us?

**Al:** I think because we don't know what to do with loneliness. We don't know what to do with sorrow. And I think she gives us an instruction. When she makes it into a little girl, it changes what I'm thinking. And she makes it into something you need to take care of, love, embrace, and embrace in a way that perhaps invites God into it with you.

I think the hopeful part is she goes again, "As you may see, as the two of you go walking together in the morning light, how little by little she relaxes; she looks about her; she begins to grow." To me, that's just a hopeful line that in embracing sorrow, which is a part of our life, and embracing loneliness, both true and made up. If we embrace it, we can grow.

**Annie:** Oh, thank you. Thank you for doing this today.

**Al:** Thanks for having me. I've learned a lot myself from you.

**Annie:** Oh, gosh. No. No. This is our mind-blown emoji button. Wowie zowie. It has been all my self-control not to do this 10 times today. So you have blown our mind with good theology around loneliness.

**Al:** Thank you.

**Annie:** So what a way to start the series. Thank you so much.

**Al:** Thanks for having me.

**[00:56:00] <Music>**

**Outro:** Oh y'all, isn't he so great? That conversation was so helpful to me. This is how we want to start off this series. Gracious! I'm so thankful for him. Hey, make sure you follow Al on Instagram. Tell him thank you for being here.

To kick off this series and for a full list of all the resources and Instagram handles from our Build Your Board series, just go to [anniefdowns.com/buildyourboard](http://anniefdowns.com/buildyourboard). There is a lot more content over on our That Sounds Fun podcast Instagram. So make sure you're following there @thatsoundsfunpodcast.

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

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 getting all my laundry done before I go to an apartment that does not have a washer and dryer, you guys. It's a new life. It is a new life for two months.

Y'all have a great week. We'll see y'all back here on Thursday as we continue our Build Your Board series with tackling one of the most asked questions I get: how do we make friends as adults? It is hard. Some of my best friends here in Nashville that I met once I moved to Nashville are joining me for this one. And we're gonna talk about it. I can't wait. I'll see y'all then.