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**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.

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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. Today on the show, I get to talk with my friend and one of my favorite preachers and teachers, Kristi McLelland. Oh, y'all know I love what we get to talk about the gospels. And today is one of those days.

And today's the perfect day too because we start a brand new month of reading the Gospels together tomorrow over on Let's Read the Gospels Podcast. Y'all, this will start our 12th month of reading together. Can you believe that?

And we're reading the NASB, the New American Standard Bible, which we haven't done yet. So come join us over there tomorrow. What a great month. Whether you've done it with us already this year or it is your first month, this is a great month as we look toward Christmas and celebrate Advent and observe Advent together to really sit in the Gospels and to experience them.

So wherever you're listening to this, wherever you love listening to That Sounds Fun, go ahead and search for "Let's read the gospel", subscribe to that, and join us for the month of December.

**Intro:** Today we're talking about all things gospel with Kristi, who is one of my favorite Bible teachers. She's also an incredible resource when it comes to learning about

Israel, and we talk about it. She has led a ton of biblical studies trips there, and in August released her book, *Rediscovering Israel*. It is beautiful.

She just has an incredible ability to apply a Middle Eastern lens while threading together the biblical narrative, helping us to make sense of this whole journey. You're really gonna enjoy this one. So here's my conversation with my friend Kristi McLelland.

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**Annie:** Kristi McLelland, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

**Kristi:** Oh my word. I'm ready to have some fun with you today, friends.

**Annie:** I'm so sorry it's taken this long. You should have been on here a hundred years ago.

**Kristi:** Hey, today's a great day to be the day. So let's go.

**Annie:** It's a great day. I mean, one of my very favorite things is we open Instagram and you are probably in Israel. That's just kind of how it is. You're probably in Israel. Prior to the current war in Israel, what is your rhythm for going over? Are you literally there every month? It feels like you're there that much.

**Kristi:** I mean, I wish I was there every month. From your mouth to God's ears. I hope He's listening to you. But certainly multiple times a year. That's just sort of been my main tributary, like the highway, the Nile that runs through the center of my heart that's taking the Western church to the lands and geography and the Bible in its context. So I go as often as I possibly can be.

**Annie:** How did you get started doing that?

**Kristi:** In 2007 I had the opportunity to go study in Egypt and Israel. And for me, I'm such an experiential visual learner. I need to see it, I need to taste it, I need to climb on it, crawl on it, eat it, all of that. And for me, on a very personal note, getting to know Jesus in His first-century Jewish world. I mean, I was a Christian when I went to Israel in 2007, but I came home a much deeper follower of Jesus. I just felt like I'm home with Him.

**Annie:** I went for the first time in 2016, I think. No, I went '15 and '16. I went in 2015 and I came home and I was like, how are we not all doing this? It absolutely changes everything. Like it just changes everything when you are walking there. What I've said so many times is it took the Bible, for me, from black and white to color.

**Kristi:** Absolutely. I tell everybody that I take, "You will never be able to unsee what you will see. You will be an embodied witness to the geography and the worlds and lands of the Bible." And it's not that we don't believe that those stories happened, but it's sort of like I could read a book by you, I could see your photo on the back of it, but that's different than being with you, hearing your laugh, your voice, your tone, your spirit, catching your spirit in person. I just felt like I went to Israel and caught the spirit of the Bible in person. I can't get off of it. I can't recover from it. I can't move on from it. So, the last 17 years I've just decided to be a bridge for it.

**Annie:** Why haven't you moved there?

**Kristi:** Well, my 87-year-old mother is here in Mississippi and I'm an only child, so it's me and her. So as long as she is gracing this earth... You know, my 87-year-old Southern Baptist, Mississippi mama still serving as church hostess at her church down in rural Mississippi, as long as she's here, I'll be here.

**Annie:** I think that's a really important conversation. Because when I talk to my friends who are younger than me there's a lot of tension around giving up what you want to do for your family. My family would never ask me to do that, or I couldn't do that. I need to chase after what God's made me to do. And I've been in multiple conversations where I have thought, we don't live in a generation anymore that puts secondary what we want if your family needs something primary, very rarely.

**Kristi:** That's right.

**Annie:** Right? Am I reading culture wrong on that?

**Kristi:** No, I think you're exactly right. And it collides with what we see in that biblical world of a communal culture, not individualistic... You know, how you are with your family is one of the most important things about you in an honor-shame culture. So it's a very interesting conversation to have here in a Western culture with Western ideals, you know, individualism being maybe at the top of that consumerism.

**Annie:** Yeah. Because it's funny I feel like I was even taught, particularly in college when I was really involved in a campus ministry, and afterwards of like, what do you feel God calling you to do with your life? And I think that's really important. I mean, that is an important thing to suss out. But I don't remember a lot of conversations about like, where does that fit and what is going on with your family, and what your family might need.

**Kristi:** Yeah. And I'll say for me, Annie... You know, as another friend of yours weighing in on the conversation. I think for me... you know, we're both Bible teachers and all of that. What I think about, for me, I don't feel like I have the moral authority to stand before anyone and teach anything if I've not taken care of my family.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Kristi:** For me, that's just pretty clear. It's been such a plumb line for me, you know, because it determines things for me such as when I can go to Israel and when I can't. But I really think so much of biblical Hebraic faith we might well understand it in terms of concentric circles and proximity to self.

**Annie:** It's just so interesting. I mean, it is one of the challenges of reading the Bible for me is I'm reading it in my Western brain and it was never written... I mean, it was written, it is all true. God knew we'd read it now. It is not unfitting in our culture. But it was written by people sitting in a Middle Eastern culture that is just shaped so different than ours.

**Kristi:** Oh yeah. And it creates this beautiful invitation for us, Annie, as Westerners. And it's a provocation because I just feel like the air that we breathe and everything about the western way... And I'm proud to be an American, not saying anything like that. But I think the Bible is meant to provoke us as much as it's meant to comfort us. And it's meant to challenge us as much as it's meant to encourage or lift us up.

I mean, the parables will wreck your system if you let them. I mean, you get into the Gospels and some of the stuff that Jesus is saying, is like, what? What in the world?

**Annie:** Yeah. I want us to talk about the Gospels because we have the Let's Read the Gospels podcast. We're getting ready to enter our 12th month. But can we pause for just a second? Can we camp on what's going on in Israel right now? As we're recording, there's a war in Israel. Can Americans go right now? Are you knowing anybody that's taking trips, that's still getting to do their Bible-centric trips that they were planning on doing for the last four years or whatever?

**Kristi:** You know what, I don't know the answer to that. On October 7th, I was in the Newark Airport waiting to board my flight to Tel Aviv.

**Annie:** No way.

**Kristi:** I was with Lifeway. We were taking a little over 300 people on biblical study trip. And I'm sitting there in the Newark Airport enjoying my cheese plate, Annie,

because I've never said no to a cheese plate in my whole life, and just waiting for my flight, and all of a sudden my phone lit up and I looked down and it was the notification from United Airlines.

You know from traveling internationally, you've even been to Israel, to outright cancel a flight to Tel Aviv, that means something has gone down. And the notification said something like, "We're so sorry to inform you that we've canceled your flight to Tel Aviv due to unrest in the region." And my heart just ceased. Like literally. I had this physical reaction because I knew that something of scale had happened.

I went down to TV and it was just starting to... everything that happened. So I ended up flying back to Nashville and thought maybe I could get out that next week. You never really know how long a thing will go. Obviously, that's been... well, it's still going. My take on it, just experientially as somebody who's been in the land for 17 years, is this is in many ways something new.

**Annie:** Is it?

**Kristi:** Mm-Hmm. Yeah. I mean, I'm not a geopolitical expert, so I certainly don't want to get outta my lane. I'm a Bible teacher. But I'm just saying as somebody who's been there, I think what happened on October 7th, it's gonna go down in the annals of history of the modern state of Israel, for sure.

**Annie:** The whole thing is fascinating to... I mean, it's heartbreaking on all sides.

**Kristi:** Yeah.

**Annie:** As people who love the Bible, it is also... I mean, I have goosebumps saying this to you. This is the same Israel, this is the same land in our entire Bible that has had this happen over and... I mean, it is almost impossible to comprehend that this is the same land that we've read about wars and rumors of wars and the people of God being attacked and attacking and... What? How is that...?

**Kristi:** Oh yeah.

**Annie:** So when you put together what you're watching... I'm not asking you to be an end times prophet, but no, you are welcome. You are welcome to end times prophecy us.

**Kristi:** Hepatology podcast today.

**Annie:** Yes, yes, Yes. Suddenly I've become that. When you put together what you know of in the Bible and what you are seeing, what do you think? What do you think?

**Kristi:** You know what Annie, my honest answer is I don't know. I mean, I think every generation that's seen war thought they were the last generation. What I will say is, and this has been rising up in me strongly. I'll walk my little dog, Chester, every morning first thing. That's my consecrated prayer time and it's when my spirit's just wide open to the Lord for Him to speak.

But when the Apostle Peter talks about that somehow we are waiting for the second coming of Jesus, and we are also hastening it, that language is so interesting to me. How do we wait for the second coming of Jesus and yet at the same time somehow hasten it. That's been a lot in my prayers with the living God right now, because I've been like, Lord, I don't know what that means, but I'm dialing in.

I'm saying He break... waiting is not passive, it is active. So I agree with Jesus and the sermon on the Mount, thy kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven. I want to participate with the living God in seeing heaven come down to the ground and see kingdom plant itself and move out into realms of empire.

I've just really been praying that, just that hastening of the second coming of Jesus. Do I think that we're seeing prophetic passages coming to pass right now in all of this? I don't know. But as a follower of Jesus, I just keep telling the Lord, When your eyes search the earth and you see me, I want you to know I am on board and willing. The tikkun olam, the repair of the world, I want to partner with you in that. So what do you have for me?" That's really the only way I know how to kind of answer that.

**Annie:** That's beautiful.

**Kristi:** It's just "I'm here ready, breath in my lungs, strengthen my frame. Let's go. Let's go bring heaven to earth and let's see the kingdom come."

**Annie:** So the Bible is real specific to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. I mean, I have the magnet on my fridge, from the gift shop at the garden tomb. I mean, it is a scriptural thing. Also, there are people in Gaza who are believers who love God. Globally it feels complicated.

**Kristi:** Oh, very.

**Annie:** It feels complicated. So when you're praying, are you only praying for Israel?

**Kristi:** No. No. I'm praying for Israelis. I'm praying for Palestinians in Gaza, in the West Bank, in Israel. I am praying for peace and protection of innocence everywhere and for the conquering of evil.

**Annie:** Right.

**Kristi:** Yeah. I mean, you raise a really good point. I will just take the moment to say this. As you well know, I mean, we were in the land at the same time, not together.

**Annie:** Last October. Yeah.

**Kristi:** And one day you were like, We're in Nazareth today and you know, Nazareth Palestinian. And it's like, yeah, there's so many Palestinian brothers and sisters in Jesus there. And there's Israeli brothers and sisters and Jesus there. Then there's Israelis and Palestinians who are not followers of Jesus. But I think to follow Jesus is to honor the Imago Dei of all and seek that.

So without taking sides, like the praying for the peace of Israel, and when I say that for Gaza, for the West Bank, for everyone. And I do think, Annie... I don't know. I mean, man, the wedding supper of the lamb is gonna be a trip when Jesus just finally starts explaining everything to us. You and I are gonna be there with our dirty notebooks. Well, probably you with a computer, me with a notebook and a [inaudible 00:16:27] because I'm old school, not advanced at all.

But I don't know how prayer works. I've been thinking about that so much right now because it's like we're just in this tense moment. It's like, man, what is that prayer prayed and faith that just moves the Lord to respond? So many of those morning walks with Chesters, I'm praying, I just start crying because man, I mean this, I have friends in the land. Like this is personal to me. This isn't something I watch on the news. This is deeply personal to me. War has never felt so close to me.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Kristi:** I watch about Russia and Ukraine and I pray there, but this feels like it's in my chest. It's very close. So, man, I've been a follower of Jesus since I was nine years old and here I am back to asking the most elementary of questions because life punches us all in the throat along the way and stuff happens and it calls up these questions and these uncomfortable questions. God, how are you good and evil can work like this? I mean, it's bringing it all back up in us. And you sense it in people.

I mean, you're in New York right now. I would be super curious to know what that's feeling like for you over the last month and what you're experiencing there, and even some of how you're praying and processing in this season of you being there. Talk about like in time and space that the Lord has you there-

**Annie:** Right.

**Kristi:** Right? Now-

**Annie:** So many protests, Kristi. So many protests of every... I mean, last night I was out on a walk and there was a gazillion police vans by my house. And I finally stopped a cop and I said, "Am I allowed to ask you what's going on?" I was like, "Did something happen in Central Park?" And he said, "No, there's a pro-Israel protest. There's like a pro-Israel gathering. So we are here to protect them just like we did when they're pro-Palestinian protests down kind of near the Statue of Liberty." And I just thought that that is happening in this city. It is absolutely everywhere. It's absolutely everywhere.

**Kristi:** Wow, Annie.

**Annie:** So it is wild.

**Kristi:** I'm just glad that God in you is in that city right now.

**Annie:** Thank you.

**[00:18:48] <Music>**

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to share with one of our amazing partners, [Nutrafol](#). Do you ever catch yourself looking at a picture from a few years ago and being like, wait, my hair was definitely thicker back then? Listen, it happens. Yes, our hair gets thinner with age. Yes, we know hormones affect it too and stress can cause more shedding. There are so many root causes for hair thinning. Root causes. You get it?

And that's why Nutrafol addresses those issues through a whole-body approach to hair health. Nutrafol is the number one dermatologist-recommended hair growth supplement. It's clinically shown to improve visible thickness and strength. It's really simple to figure out the best plan.



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Take the first step to visibly thicker, healthier hair. For a limited time, Nutrafol is offering our friends \$10 off your first-month subscription and free shipping when you go to [nutrafol.com](https://nutrafol.com) and enter the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN. Find out why over 4,000 healthcare professionals recommend Nutrafol for healthier hair. [Nutrafol.com](https://nutrafol.com), promo code THATSOUNDSFUN.

**Sponsor:** And one more incredible partner I get to tell you about, Daily Bible Trivia. Okay, as we are talking about the Bible today on the podcast, if you need a game to play in the car when you're traveling over the holidays, Daily Bible Trivia is a really fun one. Plus, you can brush up on your Bible knowledge too.

And if you've been reading the Gospels with us this year, I bet you know some of the answers to these questions. Like, what was the name of Jesus' famous cousin? And He would probably hate that we call them famous. And which city was Jesus born? Which disciple betrayed Jesus for silver? So if you love Bible trivia or just love having a game to play on your phone that helps you kill some time in the carpool line or in the waiting room, try Daily Bible Trivia. It's a free app that makes learning the Bible both fun and interactive.

The questions get more challenging as you advance in each level. So go test your knowledge of scripture and even discover facts you've probably forgotten. The app will also give you a daily Bible verse so you can memorize and share with your friends or save as your phone background.

Download Daily Bible Trivia today to challenge yourself. Just go to the Apple or Google store and search for Daily Bible Trivia. Download Daily Bible Trivia for free today, and get ready to flex your brain and Bible muscles.

And friends, something fun we are doing to celebrate Christmas this year on the podcast is I've asked all my friends over at the That Sounds Fun Network, all of our hosts over at the network to share with us their favorite holiday snack so that you can hear some of the snacks that you've got to be trying this year.

[00:21:33] <Music>

**David:** Hey, I'm David Thomas from the Raising Boys and Girls Podcast, and my favorite holiday snack is the entire breakfast meal. You can't limit me to just one snack over

the holiday. So I want the whole breakfast meal. Sausage balls, monkey bread, everything.

**Sissy:** Hi, it's Sissy Goff from the Raising Boys and Girls Podcast, and my favorite holiday snack is that stuff that's like Chex Mix and pretzels. I think we called it Trash in Arkansas, has a lot of different names. We would always have it. We would go Christmas Eve to my godmother's house. It makes me teary talking about it. Go to my godmother's house and we would have Pepsi, which I don't love except at her house, and trash.

**Annie:** Okay. Now back to our conversation with Kristi.

[00:22:19] <Music>

**Annie:** It is real interesting having a little bit... I mean, I've got a month worth of history in Israel. You've got years' worth of history. I've been there three times for about 10 days. So I have a month of Israel in my life. But when you're there, it feels like the Israel of the Bible. It feels ancient. It feels like the soil matters.

So when you're talking to your friends who are there still, and who live there, the Israelis who live there, does the war part feel ancient too? Does this part feel ancient to them? But you said it feels new and different as well.

**Kristi:** Yeah. I mean, what happened on October 7th is unprecedented over the last 50 years. So these generations of both Palestinians and Israelis are going to remember this. I mean, that date will go down in history.

**Annie:** People have said it's like their 911. Right?

**Kristi:** Absolutely. Yeah. It's into them in a different way. And I think right now there's a lot of fatigue, people are going to a lot of funerals, sirens going off. There's a lot going on in the nervous systems right now for both Palestinians and Israelis.

I mean, time will tell, but I do think we're gonna look back on this... And I think it's that traveling in prayer. I think people feel it. Like, I don't know if you feel it, and I don't know if I feel it just because of being so saturated in time and space spent in the land, but I just keep coming back to it.

I'm reading my Bible differently. I'm praying differently right now. It's almost like my nerves are on the outside of my skin, it's sensing everything just very acutely right now in the ways I'm praying and the things I'm reading and the conversations that I'm having. Like even this conversation with you.

But one thing I will say, Annie, and I believe you're cut out of the same cloth, so you could weigh on this a little bit. I think as followers of Jesus, part of what we're being invited to do is to not avert our eye. I think we're a people who choose to not look away at the hardest things of life. But because of the finished work of Jesus and because of who He is and the kingdom coming, we're able to plant our feet, look directly into the hardest things of life, and to seek to locate ourselves there.

That the spirit of God and the Word of God and the people of God, that deep salvation and restoration and renewal and redemption. Whatever Jesus meant in Revelation 21 when He said, "Behold I am making everything new," like Jesus is doing that right now. You and I and every other human being and all of creation woke up again this morning into a world where Jesus is making everything new.

So part of why I feel like my nerves are on the outside of my skin is I don't want to avert my eye, I don't want to just not watch the news and not look and not know and go meet my friends at Starbucks or at the movies, or to go for a walk in a pleasant park with fall weather. I want to plant my feet and square up and look in and just be a willing vessel to pray for, to contend for, to be there.

I think about that a lot as somebody who gets to go to the land. You know, you get back to the Gospels a little bit. There's all about who can see and who can't see. Apparently, leaders can't see and the common people can see. And Jesus is talking about who's blind and who can see, and I'm like, Man, there's something about our eyes.

And I think we're not meant to look away. We're meant to look into things and through anchored in this hopefulness of who Jesus is and what He's like and what He did in His first coming. And to take hold of that promise that He's coming again.

You know, as the New Testament church, we live between the visitations, you know. And we have the historical witness of Jesus and the gospels, and we have the futuristic prophecies of His return. And sometimes that just makes me want to run through a brick wall and want to run around the block. Because it's like Jesus behind me, Jesus in me, Jesus beside me, and Jesus in front of me, like, let's go.

**Annie:** Yeah. Yeah. That's it. I mean, as I was reading your *Rediscovering Israel* book, it feels like that, Kristi. It feels like this, like, okay, here's a way to look at Israel modern day, color pictures, the whole scripture, but sense Jesus on every side of it.

**Kristi:** Yes.

**Annie:** When you were writing this... I mean, this is the trip you take people on. You just turned it into a book that we can have.

**Kristi:** Yes. Absolutely.

**Annie:** Why does it matter? I mean, some of our friends listening are like, I don't like traveling international. And that's fine. They do not have to. You do not have to have a passport to be a good person. It is not required. But they're like, "I don't want to travel." I mean, I can't guess when we'll get to go back to Israel easily again. And we have plans too, Kristi, I'm sure you do too, of like, well, what do we do now?

So talk about why you wrote *Rediscovering Israel* and what you've seen. It's already been in people's hands for a couple weeks. What's it been like for people to get to hold this?

**Kristi:** Man, thank you. I think for me, the Lord... when I say the word "bridge", I really mean it. Years ago... I felt like it was such a stewardship and a deposit that got poured into me. That I was one of those, of all of the centuries and the millennium, that got to go to Israel and study the Bible. And I just felt like the Lord was saying, you're a bridge.

People call me a [inaudible 00:28:35] or a professor, an author, whatever. But really the thing that fits me the most is I'm just seeking to be a bridge. And for 17 years that bridge has looked like me taking Westerners, both believers and non-believers on-

**Annie:** Oh wow.

**Kristi:** ...on a Biblical study in Israel. And it was during Covid when I couldn't go to Israel for two and a half years and that put me straight into therapy for 18 months.

**Annie:** Wow.

**Kristi:** Loss. Because it's a sense of place and home for me. So I felt a little dis-located, I felt a little bit exiled. I mean, I could get off into that another time. But I really felt like the Lord started planting into my spirit, "Kristi, you're still a bridge, but I want you to start bringing Israel here for people."

**Annie:** Wow.

**Kristi:** Who may never get to go either because like you said, they don't like travel, but they love the Lord, just had a baby and it's gonna be, you know, 10 years something or they don't have the finances to go or there's something that doesn't allow them to go. I had to really wrestle that, Annie. I don't know if the Lord's ever called you to things and you're like, I'm gonna need you to go consider that Lord and come back maybe [inaudible 00:29:45].

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

**Kristi:** But I love international travel. I sleep like a baby on an airplane. I'm one of those weird people that even kind of likes airplane food, that little thing of cheese pastures over to my... I mean, I'll take it. I'm a nerd like that. And I had to really surrender to that part of, I think. Now I look back at all God knew was coming. Two and a half years of covid that I've been able to go back to the land for two years and then now we're a month into this current war.

So I feel like sitting here with you today, the Lord was kind to me to let me just work my way into yielding and surrendering to that. So once I said, "Okay, Lord, I'm with you. I'm on the path. What does it look like for me to start bringing Israel here?" One of the first ideas that just came is this 12-week Israel course that I've been teaching at the college forever and here around town.

I know you're in New York right now, but you live here, you know Nashville, Franklin area. And it just made sense like this... Because what the book is and what the course has always been is the story of the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation through a Middle Eastern lens. Kind of like the text and context. And I'm always saying the Bible is one story. It's best read and understood from beginning to end.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God gave us a story like a good Father wanting to sit down with His children and tell us the best and truest story that's ever been told. So that's what the book is. And in every story in the Bible, it's showing us who the living God is, what He's like, what it's gonna mean for us to walk with Him, to share, and to participate in that harmony, that wholeness, that flourishing, that delight.

That we're not just inheritors of it, we sow it into this world as followers of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit of God and formed by the Word of God, living among the people of God, like following Jesus. So that's where the book came from. It's just been this long surrender of me. And I was just in Israel in early September with Lifeway. We filmed all of the teachings to the new Bible-

**Annie:** I watched it on Instagram. You filmed in the most beautiful places.

**Kristi:** Again, Annie, look at the timing. We were there like the first 10 days of September, not knowing that three weeks later, October 7th was going to happen. I had such joy on that filming trip because I had never filmed in Israel before. And you know what it's like. Like we teach, but when you just do a thing for the first time that you've never done before, I dunno if you get nervous. But I'm an Enneagram 6 so I'm like all nervous.

**Annie:** You live nervous.

**Kristi:** I live nervous. My nervous system's constantly on fire and braving in. And being able to film there, I had such joy and the sense of purpose and surrender that that was another way of bringing Israel here visually. They had drones up in the air, and I kept saying, "Shoot the land. The land will be your stage." You know. You've been there. The land will be your teacher, the metaphors of the Bible.

And to get home and three weeks later, it's like, oh my gosh. So it's kind of funny even talking about this with you today because I've not really talked about it in a minute with any of my friends or community here. But I think I'm seeing the fruit of that surrender. And I just can't say that enough.

I guess people think we publish a book and it's like, yay. And to think that it's nothing I ever even had an idea to do, that was like a rendered work. Because I would much rather just take the entire world to Israel. You see what I'm saying?

**Annie:** Yes. Yes.

**Kristi:** That will bring, you know, 6 billion people to Israel. Like can we-

**Annie:** That will somehow happen in the new earth. Right? I mean, if somehow we all see the new Jerusalem.

**Kristi:** That's right.

**Annie:** He's gonna figure it out somehow. You and Him are gonna figure out how to get us all there.

**Kristi:** We're working on it, Annie. We're working on it. But that's the hard... but I think it's good to just say, man, like even some of the things we put in the earth that may seem like an accomplishment or you know, it's just something like shiny... Man, we

put this stuff in the earth with some deep pain. There's some labor pains, there's some bloodshed, some tears, some crying, some surrender, some yielding.

**Annie:** I get to read 50 or so books a year for people that are coming on the podcast. And my rhythm is I read the book, I do the interview, I take my notes, I do the interview, and then we have a counter at the office where we set all the books. So everybody else in the office can read them too. Because I'm like, listen, I think you'll love this, whatever.

No one is allowed to have *Rediscovering Israel*. Hand to heaven, it is the second book this year that I have not given away. Every other one, I've read it and passed it off to my team. And I hate to tell them, but no one is getting my *Rediscovering Israel*. I am keeping this one, Kristi. I mean, I flew it to New York with me. So it is a beautiful invitation. It does do what you hope someone who won't get to go to Israel or chooses not to go to Israel, it does give them the closest next thing. This is the closest next thing I've ever seen.

**Kristi:** I mean, thank you for that. It means so much. It means a lot coming from you. But you know, man, I just think it's important for us to perpetually proclaim that our stories are not gonna end badly.

**Annie:** Yes. Yes.

**Kristi:** Like our story does not end in ash and ruin. That's not what we read in Revelation 21 and 22. We're talking new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem coming down. She's so brilliantly secure and wonderful. Her gates are never even shut.

**Annie:** Absolutely.

**Kristi:** Not even at night. What? Like ancient people where gates are everything. It's your honor, it's your protection. Nehemiah's grieving at the walls of Jerusalem being breached. I mean, I've been reading Revelation 21 and 22 so much. But when we talk about the Christian witness in this modern world, you know, with culture wars and I mean... Now I'm getting into all the things.

**Annie:** Yeah, gal.

**Kristi:** Everything past Israel. I just keep thinking for us to show up wherever God puts us with this hopeful buoyance because of who Jesus is, what He's done and what He is yet to do we have hope. And to just stand in this world and tell people, listen, it's all real, and the living God has never failed a person yet, and you are not gonna be the first.

**Annie:** That's Right.

**Kristi:** For us to like be able to tell people that. And that's the spirit in the book too. You know, I did a whole section on the tikkun olam, the repair of the world. I believe in the same way Jesus was inviting Peter and John and James. And them into that, I think He's inviting Annie and Kristi and everybody listening with us today.

That excites me because if we can know a little bit, even though we don't know what it'll look like. Like I don't know when you picture the wedding supper or the lamb, just with my whole soul, I think it's gonna be a Middle Eastern meal. You know, I'm there eating falafels or shawarma and salad. I'm like, man, we're practicing for heaven. Like, you know, this is what it's gonna be. So we joke, will there be macaroni and cheese at the wedding supper or the lamb? Is there gonna be Chicken Fettuccine Alfredo, sushi, or my pizza? I don't know. But I just envision it being that way.

**Annie:** But we promise falafel. We could actually be pretty sure of falafel.

**Kristi:** Falafel with French fries. Oh my gosh.

**Annie:** With French fries.

**Kristi:** It steps it up a notch. But stories are gonna end at a great banquet where there's more than enough for everybody in a city whose gates are never even shut, not even at night. And we are gonna be there in the presence of God the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit and each other and whatever we're eating, we're gonna all just know that none of us are there because we were good enough to get there.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Kristi:** We're just gonna know. We're just gonna know that the covenant faithfulness of God saw us through to that banquet. And I just think this is so much of what we're here in the world to proclaim, to confess, to profess that we are anchored in scarcity, we are anchored in sufficiency. I can afford to give my life away because a living God is giving it back to me in manifold fashion. I don't need to take anything from you. I don't need to be better than you at anything.

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

**Kristi:** I can actually just be for the kingdom coming, for heaven to touch earth. And to just be like an embodied witness of that in this world.



[00:39:10] <Music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about another amazing partner, [Liquid I.V.](#) Okay, you guys already know how much we love Liquid I.V. around here. And "here" is Nashville and New York. We keep our Liquid I.V. packs in the office so we can stay hydrated during the workday. Plus they just taste so good. I literally have one in my water bottle right now.

But if you're traveling over the holidays or running around doing all kinds of Christmas shopping, make sure you're bringing Liquid I.V. with you so you stay hydrated too. They have so many fun flavors to choose from. Liquid I.V. has three times the electrolytes of the leading sports drink, plus eight vitamins and nutrients for everyday wellness.

It hydrates two times faster than water alone. And it's all in one single stick that you just add to your water bottle. And now their hydration multiplier, which I love, comes in three really fun, sugar-free flavors. White peach, green grape, and lemon-lime. The lemon-lime is a favorite around our office, but I feel that green grape. I love it so much.

It's also non-GMO and free from gluten, dairy, and soy. So grab your Liquid I.V. hydration multiplier, sugar-free and bulk nationwide at Costco. Or you can get 20% off when you go to [liquidiv.com](#) and use the code THATSOUNDSFUN at checkout.

That's 20% off anything you order when you shop better hydration today using the promo code THATSOUNDSFUN at [liquidiv.com](#).

**Sponsor:** And one more incredible partner I get to tell you about, Daily Bible Trivia. Okay, as we are talking about the Bible today on the podcast, if you need a game to play in the car when you're traveling over the holidays, Daily Bible Trivia is a really fun one. Plus you can brush up on your Bible knowledge too.

And if you've been reading the Gospels with us this year, I bet you know some of the answers to these questions. Like, what was the name of Jesus' famous cousin? And He would probably hate that we call Him famous. In which city was Jesus born? Which disciple betrayed Jesus for silver?

So if you love Bible trivia or just love having a game to play on your phone, that helps you kill some time in the carpool line or in the waiting room, try Daily Bible Trivia. It's a free app that makes learning the Bible both fun and interactive. The

questions get more challenging as you advance in each level. So go test your knowledge of scripture and even discover facts you've probably forgotten.

The app will also give you a daily Bible verse so you can memorize and share with your friends or save as your phone background.

Download daily Bible trivia today to challenge yourself. Just go to the Apple or Google store and search for Daily Bible Trivia. Download Daily Bible Trivia for free today and get ready to flex your brain and Bible muscles.

[00:41:40] <Music>

**Jami:** Hey, I'm Jamie.

**Fallon:** And I'm Fallon, and we're from The Snack Show with Jami Fallon.

**Jami:** My favorite holiday snack is the cookie platters. I love fudge so much, but I never eat it during the year. And also those little peanut butter Hershey Kiss cookies, so good. So good.

**Fallon:** And my favorite holiday snack is my Nonna's lasagna. She would make it for us every Christmas Eve. And now no Christmas is complete without her lasagna.

**Both:** Happy holidays.

[00:42:09] <Music>

**Annie:** Will you talk for a second about the Eastern Gate? Because I think people who haven't been to Israel don't know about it being blocked up. Will you just talk about that and why that is? I think that's one of my favorite things. Whenever we see it, I'm like, LOL, you don't think bricks are gonna solve this for you,

**Kristi:** Well, and there's so many stories as to why it's closed off, first of all.

**Annie:** Ah.

**Kristi:** But I just love it. And you know this, Annie, but when you're in Israel, you can literally stand on the Mount of Olives. Which by the way, the prophets say when Jesus returns, He will return to the Mount of Olives, the mountain will split. Every time I'm on the Mount of Olives, I'm like, Jesus, if you want to come back right now-

**Annie:** "Do it right now. I would love to see it."

**Kristi:** I could be one of the first witnesses of you returning. I would freak out. It'd be like the best thing ever. But you're standing on the Mount of Olives, which literally 2,000 years ago was a Mount of Olives. It was a large industrial olive complex, along sort of mountain range. And you're looking over the Kidron Valley to the Temple Mount, to the temple that Jesus would've known, that the disciples would've known, all the Marys would've known that time. And you can see the Eastern gate.

So when we talk about Jesus' triumphal entry into the town, He gets on a donkey, you know, on the Mount of Olives, and that sort of like procession into Jerusalem.

**Annie:** It's so steep, by the way. I have no idea how he did that on a donkey. It's so steep.

**Kristi:** Listen, I mean, I have fallen there so many times because you're just walking and I'm usually talking to people and I've run into signs a few times because I just get in a different space when I'm there. But yeah, the gate it is sort of closed, kind of blocked. And there are different versions. And you know, man, that's what I've learned.

And I'll say this. There was a teacher in Israel and he talks about the idea that if you visit Israel for a week, you can write a book. If you visit Israel for a month, you can write a chapter. Then if you visit Israel for a year, you know you can't write anything at all. It's not simple.

**Annie:** Mm-hmm.

**Kristi:** And in a world of story, there's just a lot of stories that sort of circulate around, you know... I mean, was it Ishmael or was it Isaac? You know?

**Annie:** Right, right, right.

**Kristi:** ...stories and things going on. I know you asked about the Eastern Gate, but it just took me straight to the Mount of Olives because that's where we stand when you just get that really clear picture of it. And again, just to think of the second return happening there, man.

**Annie:** It's gonna be the best. It's gonna be... More than me standing there, I genuinely hope you're standing there. I feel like you have earned it far more than I have. I would love for you to be there.

**Kristi:** I'm asking God for that, Annie. Look, I'll high-five you with the... I'll give you my glass of wine at the wedding supper.

**Annie:** Yeah, that's right. The Lord's like, I'm waiting on Annie and Kristi to go together. When they're together. No. I would love...ah.

**Kristi:** Talk about having some fun.

**Annie:** Oh.

**Kristi:** Yes.

**Annie:** Man. So let's talk about the Gospels for a minute, because we are going into our last month. We've done this for 12 months on the Let's Read the Gospels Podcast. I have a couple of direct Gospels questions I'd love for you to answer as we are jumping into our 12th month. For starters, for anybody who's either done the Let's Read the Gospels with us, or they're gonna do it for the first time because it's Advent and that's their advent plan and they want to like get to Christmas, listen to it, can you give us like, what's the mental stance? Like, what should we be thinking as we are reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?

**Kristi:** You know what, the first thing that comes to mind, Annie, and I just read it the other day, it's in 2 Peter. When Peter talks about we did not follow cleverly invented stories but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. And I'm like, man, woo. Like even just saying that right now, it's like running through my body.

And I would just encourage anyone Advent reading or Gospel's reading, you're reading eyewitness accounts. You can almost think of them as journals. Like journal telling this real story. And even Mark and Luke are listening to Peter, listening to the apostles, and writing these things down. But I think the Gospels they serve as a real historical cultural window and journal to the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Then we get into the book of Acts and the birth of the church and the coming of the spirit of God coming down like flames. But if we're going to follow Jesus, we have to know who He is and what He's like and what's it going to mean to follow Him. And that's the story of the Gospels, this embodied witness.

The same way we've been talking about as two people who've been to Israel, we're just embodied witnesses of the land. We'll never unsee what we will see. And I think the Gospel writers were anchored in that. We will never be able to unsee,

unhear, unfeel, unknow what we've known. I mean, you think about... just a quick snapshot and I'll make it quick.

**Annie:** Yeah, do.

**Kristi:** I love the Sea of Galilee. I mean, I would rank the whole thing if somehow I could just take it all into my body. But I think about the story of Peter the night that he walked on water with Jesus. You've read that story a million times, so have I. But I think the piece of it that being in Israel really brought home for me is. Annie, think about this. Peter lived that moment with Jesus on that sea, but he is the only disciple that ever knew what it felt like to walk on water. Actually have that embody miraculous experience of the power of Jesus in that way. And you'll never convince me that years after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, Peter's not sitting around fires telling that story.

**Annie:** Totally.

**Kristi:** ...of what it felt like to step out of that boat and walk on water. He felt the power of the kingdom coming and what that would've been like. And he was very unique in that. I want to be clear, the Bible doesn't say exactly what Peter was thinking in 2 Peter 1 when he talked about that. We did not follow cleverly invented stories, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

I'm sure there's a lot of things he was thinking, but I think part of what he was thinking about is that physical embodied sensation that he alone knew. Because the other 11 didn't get out of the boat. And man, that will reach all day. There's some stuff about God you are not gonna know until you get out of the boat. You won't have embodied experience.

So that's what I just love about the Gospels is I feel like they're this window into who Jesus is and this invitation for me to come close and to hear His voice and to be reminded and renewed and refreshed and provoked and convicted and challenged by these stories as somebody who has said to the world, I'm actually a follower of that guy. That guy, Jesus, that rabbi of Israel, I'm a follower of His.

You know this. In Jewish culture, when you follow a rabbi, you don't just want to know what he knows. You want to be just like him. You want to be an icon of him in the earth, like a clearly embodied witness and ambassador. So I think as we're reading the Gospels, they're training us in how to be more and more like Him in this world.

**Annie:** When you think of the eyewitness part of it, one of the questions we've asked all the theologians is, do you think Mark was the naked guy at the end of Mark? Because if so he had, he actually saw Jesus arrested. So he was in the garden. So do you think that was Mark?

**Kristi:** I tend to think it was. It makes sense to me.

**Annie:** Do you think he was also the rich young ruler?

**Annie:** I don't know. I don't know. I've certainly read some of that. I'm not sure. I think him being naked at the end, that that just seems to be true to me. It seems to fit with the brain of the text and the flow of the narrative. But man, again, we'll ask that question at the wedding supper.

**Annie:** Oh, listen, I have a list. I have a list. I don't even have to ask Jesus. He's gonna be busy. I want to ask Mark. Mark, was that you? My guy, was that you?

**Kristi:** Oh.

**Annie:** I love it. Let's do some rapid-fire. Which tomb is your favorite tomb? Do you think one of them is actually where Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected?

**Kristi:** For me, I think the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is historically.

**Annie:** Okay. So when you go, do you take people to both? Do you go to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the garden tomb?

**Kristi:** We used to go to the garden tomb. And the reason I like taking teams there is it gives you a visual. That stone-rolled kokum tomb, that is very free. Again, I'm a visual learner. So we've certainly taken teams there before, but in the last several years, it's been the Church of the Holy Sepulchre because we're able to show them stone-rolled tombs and other places to give them that visual.

But when you look at the story of Helena, Constantine's mother coming to the land in the 300s and marking these places that a pagan emperor named Hadrian had built trying to stamp out the testimony of the Christians. I just love it that God used a pagan Roman emperor to mark some places.

**Annie:** That's right.

**Kristi:** Then Helena a hundred years later, and I mean, x marks the spot. But you know, she builds the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre

in Jerusalem. If you're asking me historically, I would say 99.999 is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

**Annie:** Yeah. Now, the garden tomb is really fun and beautiful and you get a cup to bring home after you take communion. It's very hard scientifically for any brain to be like, This one was from 300 AD and this is from 1947. You're like, I don't know, you guys.

**Kristi:** That's right. That's right.

**Annie:** It's a little harder. It feels better. The garden tomb would feel better, but-

**Kristi:** It does. Well, again, it's [inaudible] and something I'll always tell teams when we're there, like when we are in the Church of Nativity at Bethlehem, and it's like, what was the literal square foot where Jesus was born? And I always tell teams, you've never been closer than you are right now.

**Annie:** That's Right.

**Kristi:** And that's part of being in the land. We've never been closer than we are in that moment. His birth, His incarnation in Bethlehem, you know, Nazareth where He would've grown up, Capernaum on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the southern teaching steps, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Mount of Olives, the pools of Bethesda, the Pool of Siloam. I mean-

**Annie:** Do you love that they just let us start going to the pool of Siloam. Right? I mean, I love it.

**Kristi:** And be updated how deep and far back it's going. Oh my gosh. I cannot wait. I cannot wait to see what all they uncover. And the Herodian street that went all the way from the Temple Mount-

**Annie:** Crazy.

**Kristi:** ...complex down pool of... the fact that we can walk that now.

**Annie:** Yes.

**Kristi:** I mean, walking an ancient road that Jesus and His disciples, all the Marys and the women would've walked at the festivals and the feast and... it's wild, man. I mean, I'm always telling my students at the college the Bible is the best and truest story that's ever been told.

So be well-read. Read many things from many different genres and many different perspectives that'll help you be a more well-rounded human, but touch the Bible the most and the most often because of all the stories that have ever been told, it's the best and the truest. And for embodied witnesses who've been to the land, we just know it to be true with our five senses, not just our brain, not just our minds.

And I think that's the way the gospels read to me. They are bearing witness in their bodies and their historic memory and the things they saw, the things that they lived through. I mean, and who doesn't want an eyewitness of Jesus, man?

**Annie:** That's right.

**Kristi:** My gosh.

**Annie:** I know.

**Kristi:** You know, give me all of that. That can be had.

**Annie:** That's right. Okay, what did we not say today that you want to make sure we cover? Is there anything we left...? I mean, people need to get *Rediscovering Israel*. They need to do the *Jesus and Women's* study because it's just... one of my friends just finished it and she's like, "Have you heard of...?" I was like, "Yeah. Do you know Kristi McClelland is at Church of the City in Franklin? You know she lives in our town. You know she's a very famous Bible teacher?" So don't you love when people keep discovering the work you've put two decades of your life into? Great.

**Kristi:** It's a vibe. It is.

**Annie:** So is there anything we didn't say that you want to make sure we cover about the gospels or about Israel right now?

**Kristi:** Man, you know, the timing of this with everything going on in Israel and Advent is coming and so is Hanukkah. I would just encourage people to do some reading because the historical story of Hanukkah it got revisited in the Holocaust with Hitler.

**Annie:** Oh wow.

**Kristi:** And you know, just trying to exterminate the Jewish people and... you know, we're just living in something right now. So when I think of December, you know, happy Advent and [inaudible [00:56:57], you know, happy Hanukkah. So these stories,



you know, many people have lived before us, Annie faithful to who Jesus is and to the gospel witness. And we are the current generations of the church up to bat. And I'm just praying for a strengthening in the church right now. And every one of us just plant our feet square up our shoulders and to not look away but to look in with hope because of who Jesus is and what He's like.

**Annie:** Kristi, I've said to the Lord a lot, I do not know why you picked me to be a grownup in this season of the church. I don't know why this is the one you picked for me to be the one of the leaders of, but I'm sorry for you Lord, but I'll do the best I can.

**Kristi:** At seven years old in my small Mississippi church, like sneaky in on communion night and eating all the extra crackers and drinking all the extra things and juice. And I [inaudible 00:57:50] because I just wanted more of Jesus, but it just felt like a snack to me at that age. I would give anything to go back to that right now, but here we are.

**Annie:** Here we are.

**Kristi:** And it's our turn.

**Annie:** It's our turn. All right, friend, the last question you always ask. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

**Kristi:** Listen, I'm going to play golf right after this.

**Annie:** I was hoping it was gonna be golf. I think I'm picking it up next year.

**Kristi:** Listen, hey, call me anytime.

**Annie:** Okay.

**Kristi:** Golf is my Sabbath rest, being in nature.

**Annie:** Really?

**Kristi:** You'll love it. Give it a chance. You're gonna be awful at first. I don't know what else, but just stay in it, stay hopeful. And you can take your friends and it can be super cool. Or you can play all by yourself and it be very tranquil. So I love to do both.

**Annie:** Okay. What Cody Carnes told me to do is to take five lessons before I ever go out. So Kari sent me her person I'm supposed to take lessons from. So my plan was to take lessons in the winter so that by the time everybody's playing in the spring, I can tag along.

**Kristi:** That's a solid plan. I co-sign that.

**Annie:** Okay, great. I would love to go with you once I've got my lessons under my belt.

**Kristi:** Truly. I am always a yes for golf.

**Annie:** Perfect.

**Kristi:** I'm a yes for Jesus, I'm a yes for coffee, you know, and a yes for golf. So yes.

**Annie:** Oh, Kristi, I love you. Thank you for making time to do this.

**Kristi:** Oh, thank you.

**Annie:** So grateful.

**[00:59:11] <Music>**

**Outro:** Oh y'all, isn't she brilliant, man? She is such a beautiful follow on Instagram. If you aren't already following Kristi, go do that. And grab a copy of *Rediscovering Israel* right now. I'm telling y'all of the three times I've been there, I've never seen a book that reflects the experience of Israel and helps you do deeper research into it. Oh man, I just love it. Love it, love it. I think y'all are gonna love it too.

So grab a copy of *Rediscovering Israel*. What a great thing to gift your mom, to gift your dad, your siblings, your sister's husband, your coworker that you're not sure what to get them. *Rediscovering Israel* is a great option.

Lemme remind you too that over on the Let's Read the Gospels Podcast we start our last month of the year reading the Gospels together tomorrow, also in the December Let's Read the Gospels guidebook, which you can get at [anniefdowns.com/gospels](http://anniefdowns.com/gospels). We are not only giving you lots of fun activities to do, some journaling questions, some deeper thoughts.

Also, when you buy it this month, you get it for the whole year. So you get everything we've done all year. But we're also gonna be sharing what's in store for

2024. And it includes a free reading guide for 2024 in the December Gospels guidebook. So don't miss out on that. Again, that's [anniefdowns.com/gospels](https://anniefdowns.com/gospels).

Come close out the year by starting your day in the gospels with us. We kick things off tomorrow with the NASB. Again, that's Let's Read the Gospels. Join us.

And if you have any other questions from this episode, drop them in the Q&A box on your Spotify app if you're a Spotify listener, or send them to us on Instagram @thatsoundsfunpodcast. We're answering them over there in the stories.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, for one more day in New York City. All the places you may need me, that's where 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 and I'll do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is heading back to Nashville and getting to hang out with the whole team tomorrow night at our Christmas party. I cannot wait to see everybody.

Y'all have a great weekend. We'll see you back here on Monday with a really special episode. My first Monday back in Nashville, we are recapping my two months in New York with Ginna Claire Mason, Mary Kate Morrissey, and a big fan request, Meredith Story. My three best gals here in New York City are going to sit down with me and chat through the last two months. And that is coming to you on Monday. Bring your tissues, I'm afraid. We'll see y'all Monday morning. Y'all have a great weekend.