

EPIPHANY 2024

Hi friends. Welcome to our first 2024 episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs and, as always, I am so happy to be here with you.

FIRST OFF, THAT NEW SONG THOUGH!!! Do you recognize the artist? I can't even begin to thank Ben Rector and Dave Haywood from Lady A for creating such a fun song for such a special new year on the show. When it was finished, Ben's text to Dave and I was, "See y'all at the Grammys," so I think the guys like the song as well.

Here's a bit of a cheat. Yesterday, I recorded with our first few guests of the year and my jaw is already on the ground about all God has for us in 2024. The other week, when I asked on socials why you guys hang out with me (weird question, but it was so clarifying!), the majority of people mentioned wanting to grow spiritually. I'm telling y'all, I don't know all that God is up to this year, but I know He is up to something good. For us.

Epiphany feels like just the start.

This year is already special. That's one of the reasons starting the year with three episodes of Let's Read The Gospels felt totally right. And I am SO HAPPY that y'all are so happy with the one chapter a day rhythm! If you're not reading and listening along there, consider this your invitation to join in. I hope you'll join us as we continue to read the Gospels together.

Okay. So. Epiphany. GOSH I love this day.

And Epiphany on a Saturday? I'm really excited about that. Feels TOO SPECIAL. Y'all know every single thing has deep meaning to me, nothing is casual or accidental, so I feel these extra goosebumpy moments of wondering what God is up to.

I fell in love with Epiphany and how God uses it in my life in 2017, when it was on a Friday. (You can read more about that in my book Remember

God.) The next year, 2018, it was on a Saturday. I was at Onsite, an intensive counseling experience that lasts for a week. It was no accident.

And today, back on a Saturday, what a gift. You may already know this about me, but practicing Sabbath is a rhythm that really matters in my life, and I usually do that on Saturdays. AND Epiphany is an important day to me too. It's the last day of Christmastide, the technical 12th day of Christmas. It's the day where we celebrate the wise men finding Jesus and offering their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. So when the two coincide?! DOUBLE happy for your girl AFD!

Okay so, on this Epiphany, here's what I'm actually doing today.

I'm finally sitting down, at my own house in my swirly chair, and processing 2023. You know me, one of the reasons Sabbath is so important for me is that it gives me a chance to actually reflect and feel, two activities that my personality doesn't naturally do. I'm doing my version of answering the questions that Emily P. Freeman presented on her podcast The Next Right Thing on Episode 307: What Worked in 2023. (Absolutely worth listening to if you haven't yet, I'll have Lillian link to it in the show notes below.)

For me, a few things worked in 2023. A few didn't. Personally and professionally, it's been all the things. I want to tell you more of that today.

So on this, the 12th day of Christmas, the day of Epiphany, I'm going to tell you 12 things that matter to us, you and me, this year.

Since I started doing this episode as our first of the year, it's always been a State of the TSF Union sort of show. And so I want to do that today. Update you, in less than 12 ways, about what's going on here. But I want to save a few of those 12 to also make this a State of the AFD speech as well.

Let's start here.

I am really excited about 2024 here on That Sounds Fun. I can't even believe this, but 2024 is the 10th year of this podcast. That is truly such a long time. I am deeply grateful to each of you who listen, share, rate, review, buy things from our amazing partners, and respond to the episodes. And boy it's a different day than when I started this show, at my dining room table, and edited the episodes myself. (I did a terrible job- thank God for the editors and producers and engineers who have joined the team over the last decade.)

Sooooo...ok... let's start our list of 12... (sing) the twelve topics of 2024....
Terrible

NUMBER 1. If you are new around here, and you've wondered how we got to 10 years and how this whole thing got started, I talk a lot about the birth of this show in my NYTimes bestseller, That Sounds Fun, the book. Literally, it's only a NYTimes bestseller because of y'all, so thank you forever for that. If you haven't read that book, we've put it on sale at shopanniefdowns.com for \$7 with the code TSF. It's my favorite number, so it only took me like 10 seconds to talk my merch team into making TSF a \$7 book.

NUMBER 2. A confession. The episodes have not been numbered correctly... for like, years. So we are fixing that starting next week. It's a complicated story of how I didn't used to number series, just interview shows, and then people were like CONGRATS ON 400! And we were actually at 635, blah blah blah it was dumb. So, fixed. You'll notice that we have changed how we title the shows, the number is at the end now. And it only took the team 10 years to talk me into it.

NUMBER 3. We are putting FULL EPISODES of That Sounds Fun up on youtube. So if you wanna **watch** the fun as well as listen, it'll be there for you! The link to watch and subscribe to my youtube is in the show notes- there's lots of videos there actually... including me trying to make Dollywood's cinnamon bread in my own home. Yikes. But starting with this show, every podcast will be there in video form.

Three down. Nine to go.

Next, a very important question indeed....

How are we going to celebrate the 10th year of the podcast?

NUMBER 4. We've got lots of fun plans to roll out over the year. You'll notice that things look a little different in your podcast platform when you click on That Sounds Fun or on our website as you navigate around. And as you heard in our last episode of 2023, our pal Eddie Kaufholz will be here once a month as we do a recap of each of the last 10 years. For example, at the end of January, we are recapping 2014- in our lives, in the world, in pop culture, in the pod. That will be so crazy fun to have him back.

This next one, like the FIVE GOLDEN RINGS, might be the biggest epiphany of the whole show so pay attention, people.

NUMBER 5. August 11th.

Put that date on your calendar, like, right now.

You're gonna want to be in Nashville that weekend, particularly that Sunday night.

August 11, 2024.

Please please save the date. Make your plans. Book your airbnb. Text your gals. Call your husband. Grab your mom or your daughter.

It's gonna be the biggest party I've ever thrown. More details are coming soon (like very soon), but today is your SAVE THE DATE.

Sunday, August 11, 2024. Nashville. You and me and friends and confetti.

Two other podcast things, which is helpful, because I'm not actually sure I have 12 things to say.

NUMBER 6. Gospels things: Lots of fun Gospels things happening. First is that Annie's miniBFF podcast returns on Monday with all Gospels stories! We deeply love making things for your kids, so this is a joy to create. We also have a miniBFF guidebook available that gives the kids a memory verse for every episode, a place to draw a picture for each episode, and a check off page as they hear each episode. It's adorable.

And the other is this: one of the things y'all have asked around Let's Read the Gospels is could we all do something together- like go through a month as a group in a deeper way. YES. APRIL 2024. GET READY. Remember January to March is one chapter a day, then April is another BRAND NEW THING. You're gonna love it.

NUMBER 7. My favorite number and I get to talk about the best part of this podcast: YOU. Our team LOVES making these shows for you- Craig, Johnny, Ashley, Lillian, Cait, Taylor Ann, Katy, myself, the TSF Network team, we genuinely love doing this. And a big reason we love it is because you are great to work for. So thank you. Thank you x a million. We wouldn't be at year 10 without you. And gosh, your kindness to the guests! It's literally what you are KNOWN for in the conversations people have about TSF behind my back (and then someone tells me about it later). How supportive and kind our friends are.

And I know you don't always agree with everything a guest says in the studio, or what they have said in the past, or there are times when you don't agree with something a guest does or says after they have been on the show. I get that. I've felt some of that too. But what is consistent is, even in your disagreement, I have rarely seen our listener friends being the ones who lead the mob of unkindness. And that means a LOT to me. Because that same slow to speak slow to anger vibe that you extend to our guests, you extend to me. And I'm thankful. Because I know you don't always agree with me either.

Thank you for learning and growing alongside me and allowing me to make mistakes and missteps and misspeaks and in general, allowing me to be an evolving human who is growing and changing.

This year, my biggest ask, if I can do that, is that you would share each episode with someone. Just text it to them, or post on your social media. Get a podcast club together and y'all listen and chat. Invite new friends into our community. I think God has something special for us, but there are more friends you know that I don't know yet that might really love the conversations we are sharing. So please, pass them on. Just pay attention to who pops into your mind as you listen, and toss that episode over to them.

OKAY. Five more to go, five more epiphanies, five more ideas, so let's take this state of TSF to the state of AFD for just a few minutes... and how I am growing and changing.

NUMBER 8. If you follow me on instagram, you saw a hint of this over New Years. But I will be spending part of 2024 in New York City. I know that surprises approximately none of y'all except, well, me. It has honestly been a really fascinating experience- I genuinely suggest you try it. Do something out of your comfort zone and process big parts of it in front of people, your friends, your family, your social media. And pay attention to what THEY notice. Because y'all were telling me, a few weeks into my time in New York, that something was different. That something was worth paying attention to. I heard you, but I didn't, ya know? It was also scary to hear y'all saying that I looked like I was living my best life because what do you do when that is true in a city where you don't live? I didn't listen because I couldn't figure out what to do with what y'all were saying, but mostly I didn't listen because it made me feel afraid. So it's been a few weeks of wrestling and praying and listening- to God and people in my life- and that includes YOU. And the story continues with me spending some time up there each month over the next year.

NUMBER 9. I want to keep listening to you. A big epiphany I've had personally over the last few weeks has been that as my career has grown and changed over the last 13 years, as this podcast has done the same over the last 10, my ability to hear and see you has changed too. But I really want to work on that. A lot because of New York, honestly, and how y'all have been so IN IT with me. And a lot because so often y'all say to me we feel like friends, you and I, and I feel that way too. And friends hear each other. So I want to hear you.

One of the ways I want to hear you? We have a survey I'd love for you to fill out. It's linked in the show notes below, and also on my social media today. If you're on our email list, we'll email you about it too. The survey will be open for the next week or so? But it's SUPER important to me to have this avenue to hear from you- who you are, what you want from me and my team, what you DON'T want, etc. Would you please please take a few minutes and answer? Yes, even you, you who think you aren't the normal listener, you who are convinced you don't matter and I'll never listen, I promise I will. I am going to read every single answer- that's my promise to you.

NUMBER 10. So, New York. I have a place to stay there, I have friends there and a church I like, I am not dating anyone there, though it deeply means a lot to me that y'all have asked and wondered and hoped. I also hope this is the year where I get to hard launch some wonderful man into my public life, but alas, that is not one of my twelve for you today. (But pray him in, people!) I will spend some time up there every month, probably do my summer sabbath up there as well. I'll be doing my normal job, just like I did in the fall, recording podcasts at the Hepzibah House, one of the most special places in the city, and also? I'll be writing. Finally, after five years, I think I'm ready to write a chapter book/memoir/non-fiction/storytelling book again. (I have loved writing devotionals and kids books the last few years- but a longer one has started to bubble up in me... and I need to get it outta my body!) I will keep seeing Broadway shows, eating at great restaurants, and going on long walks. I'll post all that on @ afdinnyc, my instagram account about all New York things.

Overall, I have a lot of hope and joy and thankfulness about this. I also have some fear and WHAT IN THE WORLD and is this even doable and YIKES about this too. So come along with me this year. And please keep talking to me.

NUMBER 11. When I started having this public job and writing about my life, I told myself two topics that were absolutely off the table: my body and being single. I didn't want to talk about either of those things and for years and years I didn't. But the longer we've been friends, the more I am hearing you, the more I'm paying attention to what is stirring in me and what feels the most tender but important, I need to talk about them both. I tend to think my body is the least interesting thing about me, but I also recognize my age- 43- is when a lot of women start seeing lots of changes and making lots of new decisions and preparing for a whole new season of life. So I'm doing that too.

And for some of us, statistically we think half of us are single (but we'll really see after y'all share in the survey), so for possibly half of us, we are navigating life in the decade we are in without a partner, and a big group of us, we are navigating changing bodies- whether you are 24 or 64- without having birthed children. But all of us, no matter stage, decade, home life, we are all living in our bodies and trying to figure out how to do that well.

That's my story, at least. I'm here, in mid-life, my body is changing, and this isn't at all how I thought my life would look in this season, but I want to honor God and be as healthy as possible so I can do this life for as long as possible. So I want to talk about that.

Which goes hand in hand with being single and dating and hoping, holding on and letting go. I want to talk about that more this year too. (Again, when y'all fill out the survey, you'll really help me know if these topics relate to you as well, but they are biggies in my life, obviously.)

It is WEEEEEEIRD to talk about my dating life because it isn't just my story,

and I want to be protective of myself and the man in my life, in the seasons where there is one, but I'm going to try this year. And in some safe closed spaces (that we'll share soon), I'll be able to do that more openly and personally, verses here where a guy's mom can get sent this podcast and her friend from college be like, "WAIT DID YOUR SON JUST DUMP ANNIE F. DOWNS?" Woof that makes my stomach hurt.

So long-winded way to say epiphany thought 11 is that what has been off the table is no longer off the table, but I promise to try to hold those conversations with wisdom and hope and grace and care.

And finally...

NUMBER 12. Jesus Christ is the center of my life and the best thing that has ever happened to me. He saved me once, but He rescues me all the time. I am a very flawed human being, and I don't say that with false humility, I say that as a person who hasn't missed a single one of my sins, who remembers my worst days of 8th grade and my worst days of 2023. And so, it's from that flawed place, that Jesus is constantly redeeming and making new, that I create and record and write and live. I want, and I hope, to live daily for Him and to Him and with Him. I want, and I hope, that everything we create that enters your life, in big or small ways, points you to Him. No matter where you are in your own spiritual journey, you are 100% welcome here, but I hope our friendship opens us up to more of Him- you and me both. That was surely on display in my life this fall- your words and response to my NYC adventure opened ME up to the voice of God in ways that wouldn't have happened without you. I hope to return the favor this year.

Okay PHEW. I think this podcast is officially the only thing longer than the 12 days of Christmas song. But I had lots to tell you!! And I'm listening to you, too. Again, please take that survey today if you've got a minute- it would mean the world to me.

And I know I said, but here it is again: thank you. I'm deeply grateful to get to spend my life doing this work and to be in it with YOU.

So I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out, or stay home, and do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Happy Epiphany- may we find Jesus this year, just like the wise men found Jesus on this day. And may we all lay gifts before Him today - our hopes and dreams, our talents and plans, our very lives. I'll see you back here on Monday with a mindblowing pastoring us into 2024 episode with one of the best, Banning.

We'll see y'all then... also, you put August 11th on your calendar, right? Okay good. We'll see y'all THEN, too.