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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today. Happy Easter Monday. He is risen indeed.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors, [AG1](#). It's important to me that any supplements I take are high quality, and that's why for so many years I've been drinking AG1.

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Intro: All right, friends, today on the show, we are kicking off a little Let's Read the Gospels series that we are going to do every Monday in April here on That Sounds Fun. Over on the Let's Read the Gospels podcast, we are diving into the Guided Journal this month, and we're going through the Gospels in the journal and on the podcast, and we are starting with the Book of John.

So we thought what would be really fun is that we would bring some of our favorite theologians and preachers and thinkers and have them really help us chop it up about each of the gospel books. Today we are talking all things the book of John with one of our favorite, most brilliant guests. I know, I can't believe he's giving us time again when we just had him on.

But he is a New Testament expert, one of the translators of the New Living Translation, which is what we are doing the Gospels in this month on Let's Read the Gospels. It is our friend, Dr. Nijay Gupta.

He has been on the show very recently talking about his new book, *Strange Religion*. So if you have not heard that episode, go back and listen. And I'll never forget our conversation on Episode 464 about his previous book, *Tell Her Story*.

But he is also just absolutely a wealth of knowledge and information and perspective on the New Testament, particularly the Gospel of John. So I cannot wait for y'all to just have your mind blown like mine just was. We just recorded this minutes ago.

Before we dive in, I want to do this every episode where we are doing this Let's Read the Gospels series and tell you I've got my Quest Study Bible, the Bible that I read. And at the beginning of every one, they give kind of an overview of the book. So I just kind of want to read this to you. I'm going to read you the questions and answers that they give me about the book of John.

"Why read this book? Our world offers a variety of gods to worship. One major religion features a god of power and revenge. Another worships one that is silent and indifferent to the sufferings of people. Still another offers a god that is mysterious and unknowable, absorbing all the humanity into a great cosmic ocean of oneness.

Some people worship gods of possessions, fame, and entertainment. Only one faith worships a person known primarily for His sacrificial love. This book profiles that God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

So who wrote this book? John the Apostle, one of the twelve original disciples of Christ." And we talk about that with Dr. Nijay.

When and where was it written? Sometime between AD 80 and 95, though some scholars argue that the book can be dated as early as the 50s, but no later than the 70s. John was probably in Ephesus, a city located in modern-day Turkey.

Why was it written? John himself explains his goal, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing, you may have life in his name. That is John 20:31.

To whom was it written? Non-Jewish followers of Jesus, particularly those struggling with predominant Greek philosophies of the day, they taught that salvation comes through special knowledge and that Jesus was divine but not truly human.

What to look for in John. The images of light and life to describe God's activity in the world. John records seven miracles climaxing in Jesus' resurrection, which he sees as proof that Jesus is the Son of God. John also includes several sermons of Christ not found in the other Gospels, which explains the purpose of Jesus' life."

Oh man, I love thinking about all that. As we are reading the Book of John through Let's Read the Gospels, as we are starting there in the Let's Read the Gospels guided journal, and as we have this in-depth conversation today, I cannot wait for you to hear this. So here is my conversation on the Book of John with our friend, Dr. Nijay Gupta.

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Annie: Okay, Dr. Nijay Gupta, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Nijay: It's so great to be with you again.

Annie: I mean, I feel terrible that I asked for your time again so quickly when you just gave us an incredible episode about your most recent book. But thank you for making time so we could talk about the Book of John.

Nijay: Well, the right question is always, would you like to come talk about the Bible? Because that's my passion. So you asked the right question at 5:45 in the morning.

Annie: I know! Thank you! Thank you! You're such a hero! Okay, so first of all, today is Easter Monday, the day after Easter Sunday. Will you give us just a flyover for anybody...? I didn't grow up knowing Easter Monday, and I didn't really grow up knowing Eastertide. So is this season reflected in the Bible as well?

Nijay: Yeah. Basically, all of the New Testament is Eastertide because even Christians meeting on Sunday, when Jews met typically on Saturday, was a way of saying we live in a whole new era, we live in a whole new period of time where we celebrate the beginning of new creation, the beginning of all things. So, yeah, in a sense, everything, you know, all of new creation.

When Paul says, the old things have passed, new things have come, anyone that's in Christ is a new creature, a new creation, I mean, this is what we celebrate. We celebrate hope. We celebrate spring. We celebrate, you know... we do this kind of agriculturally, but the Bible really does this all the time. It's always a good time to celebrate the resurrection.

Annie: I love it. During Holy Week I always read what happened that day. Some days there's two verses, obviously Thursday, Friday. It's a lot. So I like thinking about

this week, too, and these next couple weeks we now in Pentecost, of like, no, this is when Jesus was walking around. We are living in the Eastertide from here on out. He's walking around, the Church is coming, the Holy Spirit is coming.

I said on the stage a couple weeks ago, you still go to the church that you're reading about in Acts 2. You still go to that church. I think that is so fun to think about, yeah, Eastertide was from yesterday forever. Like, that's what we live in from now on.

Nijay: I'm gonna teach you just like 30 seconds of Greek really quick. Have you ever wondered why we say "He is risen" and not "He has risen"?

Annie: No.

Nijay: Well, Greek has this really funny thing. We have basic past tense, you know, "I ate", or we have "I was eating". But Greek has this tense called the perfect tense, and it's the idea of past action that creates a new state of being.

Annie: Wow.

Nijay: So, if I say, are you hungry? You say, "I have eaten". If that was the perfect tense, you'd say, I have eaten, and therefore I'm in a state of being full.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Nijay: So many statements in the New Testament about Jesus' death and resurrection refer to it in the perfect tense, as in, He has risen and therefore reigns as the eternal Lord. So instead of saying He has risen, we say He is risen, because we're not just saying something about the past, we're saying something about the present and the future as well. That's why we say "He is risen".

Annie: Ooh, listen, I'm jealous. Or everyone's jealous of me because I'm hearing this before Easter. So I'm going to get to say it correctly on Easter. Everybody else is going to have to save it for next year or say it on Easter Monday.

Nijay: He is risen. And to add to that, to go back to Christmas, why we say the Lord is come. Do you ever wonder why we say the "Lord is come"?

Annie: Yeah.

Nijay: He came and he's here now. He is come. Yeah.

Annie: I should learn Greek maybe, Dr. Nijay.

Nijay: You should.

Annie: I should maybe learn Greek.

Nijay: It's the next natural step in your evolution.

Annie: Yes. Yes. Okay, so today we are talking about the book of John. I cannot wait. We joke all the time, as we are reading the NLT for Let's Read the Gospels this month, we're always like, "Well, Dr. Nijay wrote this. He wrote the NLT." That's how we're going to be reading it for the whole month of April, but starting today with the Book of John.

Give us a real quick flyover. Who is John? Who is this guy? It's one of the only Gospels that's written by a disciple.

Nijay: There's so many Johns in the Bible, and so it gets a little confusing. And people, "Is it John the Baptist?" No. When this is referred to as the Gospel of John, it's indicating that tradition, Christian tradition, says that John the son of Zebedee wrote this gospel. John the son of Zebedee is referred to in multiple places.

Now there was kind of an early church controversy over exactly which John, because when the gospel is written, either it didn't have a name attached to it at all because the people that received it knew who wrote it, or it had the title "According to John". And you had to kind of put together which John is this. So they were even talking about this in the early church, "Exactly which John is this?".

Now, the reason why we think it's John, son of Zebedee, is because you have this really strange thing that happens in the gospel where he's referred to as the beloved disciple or the disciple that Jesus loves. It's kind of weird for him to refer to himself. It's like one of my kids referring to them as daddy's favorite child or something like that. That would be kind of weird.

So what we think is happening is John the son of Zebedee is the leader of a community somewhere in the early church and he writes this gospel. And then it is finalized or edited after his death and they rename him the beloved disciple because of their love for him and the intimacy that he had with Christ.

That's one theory. I think it's a pretty wise theory because I don't think John would naturally refer to himself that way.

Annie: Yeah, that changes how I think about him, honestly, because like you said, if I wrote a book and I was like, "The father and the daughter he loved the most went to an Atlanta Braves game..."

Nijay: Or like the perfect Christian or something.

Annie: Yeah. But if the people were honoring him by changing that at the end after his life, oh. Okay, so before we dive into John, he also wrote 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John and Revelation. When we read Luke and Acts, they really are two chapters to the same book. Is that true with the book of John, 1st and 2nd, and 3rd John and Revelation? Should we treat them as a canon, sort of?

Nijay: Yeah, they often are treated that way. I think the most important thing is to recognize there's so many thematic and linguistic similarities: language of light and darkness, language of life and love. All those texts deal with what we call dualities, kind of the extremities of life. You know, what flesh and spirit, light and darkness, truth and falsehood.

So whether it was John sitting down writing it... like we all know what it like... like I've been doing some writing and my editor does a lot of rewriting. She does a lot of rewriting. So then the question is, is it my work or is it her work? My name's on it and her name isn't.

I think some of that's happening with John. He's the figurehead. He's involved somehow. but who knows what other hands are kind of in the cookie jar. And then you have John... sometimes the Revelation is called John the seer. We're just not sure all the interconnections between these texts. Is this exactly the same John? Is it not?

I think as Christians, we should know two things. One is they're inspired texts. God has put His imprint on these texts. Number two, there are so many similarities between the Gospel John, the Johannine epistles, the Revelation, that they are read and treated together. They are most beneficially read and treated together.

Annie: Okay. I love knowing that because with Mark, it's just Mark. Like that's all we get. We get Mark's one book that is mostly Peter's story, a lot of people, theologians say. Then you go like, Okay, so do I read Mark and then first and second of Peter? I'm like figuring this all out. Okay, so the book of John, how does John want us to read John?

Nijay: I'm glad you asked that because when you have the four Gospels, three of them are similar. Do you remember reading highlights as a kid? And it's like you have these four pictures, like, spot the difference. Well, John, it would just be crazy different.

It would just be like... now it's not different in the sense that he's disagreeing with them, but it's just he's writing in a completely different style.

So let me give you a few pieces of that puzzle. When I first heard this it kind of blew my mind. The early church assigned different angelic creatures to the four Gospels. Have you heard this before?

Annie: No, but I'm having a great time. What are you saying?

Nijay: So the early church they were trying to figure out why there are four gospels instead of one gospel. And they tried to come up with theological reasons, so they pointed to the book of Ezekiel that has these angels with four faces. One has the face of a human, one has the face of an ox, one has the face of a lion, and one has the face of an eagle.

And they said, lo and behold, here we have a four-faced angel, and here we have a full four-faced gospel. And so they actually discussed which face should go with which gospel. They weren't full in agreement, but they kind of settled... you know, most of them settled down. So let me just give you a quick run-through.

So often they attribute Mark the Lion, because it starts out with a voice calling in the desert, John the Baptist with this booming voice, he's wearing kind of rough and tough gear. It's the gospel of action. Immediately an action. This would be like the CGI bombs exploding, because there's so much action. There's very little teaching, lots of action.

Luke is often attributed to the ox because of the emphasis on sacrifice, priesthood, liturgy. If you follow some of that train, you have the beginning in the temple with Anna the prophetess, and Simeon. You have just a lot of stuff around singing and liturgy and things like that. You have the song of Mary. You have the song of Elizabeth and all of that.

Matthew is often given the human face because of his genealogy, his famous genealogy, and the emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment of the Davidic Messiah and these long blocks of teaching, like the Sermon on the Mount, things like that.

John is given, almost always he's given the image of the eagle. And one scholar refers to this as high-flying and far-seeing. I love that about the Gospel of John, because the Gospel of John wants to broaden our perspective, to really figure out who Jesus is spiritually. We see the heights of his divinity in, for example, the "I Am" sayings, "The Father and I are one".

But then we see the truest sense of his incarnation in humanity, the language of incarnation, actually comes from the Gospel of John. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. That's where we get the language of incarnation is from the Gospel of John.

Jesus says, "I am thirsty." Jesus is hungry with the woman at the well. Jesus says, touch my body to Thomas. So we get the highest height. So just like this eagle swooping down and swooping up, high-flying, far-seeing, it was referred in early church as the spiritual gospel.

One writer, Clement, said, the other gospels want to talk about the body of Jesus, the outward workings of Jesus, but John wants to get deep into Jesus' soul.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Nijay: I love that. I love that.

Annie: I do too.

Nijay: It's a spiritual gospel.

Annie: And it's the only non-mammal. The other three walk on the ground.

Nijay: Yeah, high flying.

Annie: So in a lot of ways, the eagle is very different than the... And the other three are more similar than you would realize because they're such different mammals, but they are all on the ground, all walking, all operating at the speed of their feet. And the eagle is not.

Nijay: It's pretty cool. You should look into that.

Annie: That's so cool.

Nijay: Okay, two more things. Two more things. These are really interesting. Many scholars say that John has a trial motif, in the sense that the whole gospel of John is raising the question, who is this person? Now, all the Gospels raise "who is this person?", but this one's even asking what kind of person is he? What kind of being is he? Not just is he the Messiah or is he a prophet, but really what kind of being is he?

For example, you have in chapter one, it says, he came to his own, but his own did not accept him. There's two ways of taking that statement. One is he's a Jew, a Jewish Messiah, He's come to his own people, Israel, and they rejected him.

A second way to take it is his own, meaning he created them. The Creator comes to the creatures and the creatures reject the Creator. This is profound because the whole gospel is raising this question. You have so much language about witnessing. Even our language about witnessing comes from the gospel of John. When we say, do evangelism as witnessing, that's all the gospel of John. So you really ask the question, who is he really?

[00:19:48] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our amazing partners, [Thrive Causemetics](#). You know the one, the turquoise makeup you see all over social media, including on my own Instagram? I am a fan and you will be too.

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Sponsor: I know candles are cute and smell good, but have you ever thought about where they go when we throw them away? You guys, apparently almost 2 billion candles are sold globally each year, and almost all of them are likely to end up in landfills for the next 1 million years. Crazy.

That's why I think [NOTES](#) candles are so cool. They're working to eliminate single-use candle vessels and give home fragrance lovers a more earth-friendly option. NOTES has created a refillable candle system that allows you to use your candle vessel over and over again. It is super easy.

The candles are made with fragranced wax beads, so all you do is place the wick in your reusable NOTES jar, fill it up with the wax beads, and enjoy your fragrance for up to 36 hours. They have some really fun fragrances too: vanilla and pepperwood, pistachio and rosewater, and 11 other really great ones to choose from.

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Sponsor: All right, I know we all love a good hair day. When I use [Prose](#), it truly always is a good hair day. Switching to a custom hair routine has been so helpful. I've noticed the benefits for sure, like my hair looking healthier and shinier. You guys have noticed it too. You tell me. I'm telling you, it is Prose.

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Okay, now back to our conversation with Dr. Nijay.

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Annie: Okay, last one, and this may be the most important. There are some scholars that think that the Gospel of John was actually designed as a play, as a drama.

Annie: What?

Nijay: Yes. This is really cool. And I actually think...

Annie: I have this. [wowie zowie] You just blow our minds over and over again.

Nijay: Even if not formally, even if it wasn't performed formally, it was written in dramatic style. And how do we know that? I think we know that because it uses a lot of drama techniques of the Greco-Roman world.

So let me give you some examples. Well, let's just talk about how dramas are designed. Dramas are created with very little action and lots of dialogue because they're people standing on a stage. The Gospel of John has these really long dialogues. Whereas the Synoptic Gospels has these really short dialogues where Jesus gives a little parable, like a 30-second parable, and then leaves.

It's unrealistic, even though Jesus is welcome to do whatever He wants. It's more normal for him to stand there and teach for an hour like He does in the Farewell Discourse, John 14-16. It's more normal for Jesus to have long conversations with people like He does the woman at the well or Nicodemus, that sort of thing.

But I'm going to clue you into how John wants us to read his text. John loves to use — I'll give you some examples — a certain technique where he's winking at the audience... So we're the audience. He's winking at the audience because the narrator is cluing the audience into things that the characters in the story don't know.

There's a theological reason for this because it's the whole idea of having ears to hear and eyes to see. Think about so many plays or movies we've seen where people on the stage do seemingly dumb things because they're not in the know whereas the audience is in the know.

Okay, so let me give you examples. So John often uses a few techniques that reflect this. Irony, — I'm going to give you examples — double meaning, and humorous

misunderstanding. There are a number of humorous parts of Gospel of John where you're actually meant, I think, to laugh.

Let me give you an example of irony — of irony. So these are occasions where there is a break between what the audience knows and what the character knows.

Annie: What the characters know, right.

Nijay: Yeah. One of the characters at the beginning says, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" This is irony because we already know from John 1 that Jesus has come from heaven.

Annie: Jesus is from heaven.

Nijay: So we know something good can come out of Nazareth because He's God. But in the story, they're thinking this is a nowhere city, it's nothing important from there. So it's irony. We're meant to say, Can we look past the superficial and see something deeper there?

Let me give you an example of double meaning. John loves double meaning, and he doesn't often explain it. Sometimes he does. He doesn't often explain it. So the wedding at Cana. Jesus turns water into wine, which is clearly theologically important. But the host, who doesn't know what's happened and thinks that they just rolled out some fancy wine-

Annie: The nicest wine, yeah.

Nijay: ...said, "You save the best for last." Okay, this is a wink from the narrator because it's materially true, it's really good wine, but it's saying something theological that God has ushered in the best era, the era of the Messiah. You've saved the best for last.

Annie: Oh my gosh, so John is also saying the new Adam, the new Moses, the better David.

Nijay: The new Adam, The new creation, all of that.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Nijay: He saved the best for last. Now see, in ancient religion, I talked about this a little bit with our other interview, people prize the antiquity of religion — how old it is. And you always went back to kind of the foundations and you just said the good old

days. And here Jesus is saying the best is yet to come. So this is that double meaning.

Another one, "Destroy the temple and in three days I'll raise it up." Now he actually explains this one. But he doesn't explain it to the people in the moment. The narrator explains it to us.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Nijay: Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, I'll raise in three days," and the narrator tells us He's actually talking about his body as the new temple.

Annie: Yes, that's right.

Nijay: The feeding of the 5,000, passing all this bread, and then Jesus says, gather up the pieces so none is lost. He's talking about bread. He's also talking about seeking everybody with the gospel. No one should be lost. I mean, He's drawing off of maybe even knowledge of the parable of the Good Shepherd.

Annie: And probably in that moment, what I'm picturing in my mind is Jesus making sure He's in John's earshot because He knows John will pick that up. And so He's going, "I know how smart John is. I'm going to make sure John hears me say this because he'll know I meant two things."

Nijay: Yeah.

Annie: Oh, cool.

Nijay: And maybe the disciples are writing down things like, I don't know what this means, maybe later it'll make sense.

Annie: Well, there is a couple of times it says that, right? Where maybe after one of the fish catches, it says, then they realized what they had always been taught was true.

Nijay: Yes, you're right.

Annie: Wow.

Nijay: There are these aha moments, but they are retrospective. They gotta look back and say, wow.

Annie: Yes, yes. That's so cool.

Nijay: Okay, let me give you some humor. Let me give you some humor.

Annie: Oh, yeah, great. I have never seen it.

Nijay: Oh, yeah, you've seen it, but you didn't maybe recognize it as humor. So Nicodemus and Jesus are talking and Jesus says, "You have to be born again." He has to be born again. And the word for "again" can also mean "from above". It's like a double entendre.

So he says, "Hey, Nicodemus, you're a smart guy, but in order to truly know Me and follow Me, you have to be born from above or again." Now, the audience knows it means "born from above" because you already have John chapter one where he talks about him coming from heaven.

But Nicodemus thinks he means being physically born again. He says, "How would I even biologically go back in the womb?" It's meant to be funny. It's meant to be funny because here's a smart Jewish intellect who is catching the wrong meaning of what Jesus is saying.

Annie: Okay, but we already know as the reader.

Nijay: We know. We know. But this is a constant ping by the author to say, in your Christian life, are you paying attention? Everywhere you go, are you looking for signs of the Spirit saying, this is this and not that?

Annie: Oh, wow.

Nijay: This is someone in need and you should help them. It's meant to be a prick from the Spirit to say, Don't go into autopilot. Don't think with a fleshly view. Think with an enlightened view. Think with a spiritual view. So the gospel is training us to see the world in a different way, to see the world John's way.

Let me give you another one. Jesus is teaching about bread and they say to Him, "Oh, bread of God..." and they say to Him, "Sir, give us this bread always." And they're thinking it's actual bread. And He has to say, "No, you numbskulls, I am the bread of life. Like, I would want to actually put in, you numbskulls." Because He does this a lot where He says, "You need to do this," and He's using a metaphor, and they don't get it. They're just being silly.

Another one. Chapter 11, Jesus says, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. I'm going there to awaken him." "Falling asleep" was a euphemism for dying. But falling asleep can also mean being asleep. And the disciples say, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep he will be all right." They're basically saying, "Okay, chill out, Jesus."

Annie: "We don't have to go there for you to wake Him up."

Nijay: "He's going to wake up. He'll be okay." This is also double meaning because "he will be all right" means in the disciples' mind he's only sleeping. But it also is theologically true because Jesus has the power to raise from the dead. So he actually will be all right even though he died.

Annie: And John knows that we know all that when he's telling us that story at that point.

Nijay: Yes, yes. Let me give you another irony moment. The blind man, John 11. So the blind man is healed by Jesus and the Jewish leaders don't like this. They pull the blind man aside and they're interrogating him. They want the blind man to confess that Jesus is a sinner. And they say, "Give glory to God, this man is a sinner." Now, the phrase "give glory to God" means tell the truth. Tell the truth, this man is a sinner.

The ironic part is the blind man tells the truth, says the opposite of what they're saying, and in that gives glory to God. So they say, "Give glory to God," meaning tell the truth. He tells the real truth and thereby gives glory to God. I mean, it's brilliant.

Annie: It's brilliant.

Nijay: And then he says... I love this. This blind man — it's like an Abbott and Costello — he says, "Do you also want to become his disciple?"

Annie: I love that line.

Nijay: Meaning you're obsessed with this guy, like you're going a little too far. And then he says... I love this. This is chapter 9, sorry, verse 25. He's like, "Whether he's a sinner or not, I don't know..." And I love this. He says, "I know one. I know one." And he just used the word one. We translate as one thing. "I know one. Blind then, see now, the end." That's basically what he says.

Annie: Oh, so good.

Nijay: I can't help but think that "one" is reflecting the oneness of God. That Jesus is... He's like, "I don't know who He is, but I know One," meaning he's part of the one God. Now he doesn't know that. But John likes to draw out this double meaning. We call it saying more than you know. Again, it's that wink. Last one.

Annie: And then the guy who tasted the wine didn't know what he was saying. He didn't know. He just said, "Saving the best for last. He didn't know that we now, thanks to you, would see it as a global, across generations thing, not just the better wine.

Nijay: And they become almost un-self-aware prophets. They're prophets and they don't even know it. Because they're speaking truth, they're speaking the words of God.

Annie: Oh, that's so good.

Nijay: You want me to keep going?

Annie: Yes, yes, yes.

Nijay: There's some super fun ones here. I love this, John chapter 7. There's a festival going on, a big party in Jerusalem, and Jesus hype people, they're like, "You gotta go." Like, "If you want a big stage, that's the biggest stage of all." They're giving him PR advice here. And I love this. John 6, he's like, "I'm not gonna go to this festival, my time has not yet fully come." And then after that, he reigned in Galilee. And then, after his brothers had gone to the festival, he also went.

Annie: He sneaks in! He's like, "I will not be going" and speaking, "I'm going to go. You know what? I'm going to go."

Nijay: Yeah. It's almost like He's like packing his stuff into his hotel room and saying, "I'm not going." And then as soon as they leave, He's like packing all His suitcase. He's on His own time. He's on His own agenda. Like John is going out of his way to point out Jesus can't be pushed around.

This happens also when they want to make Him king and he eludes them. And he says, "No, I am King, but I'm not going to be king your way.

Annie: Wow. In Chapter 7... I think this is so interesting. Chapter 7 is also... well, it's the beginning of Chapter 8, where it's the woman caught in adultery, but it says in my Bible that this isn't in all the original manuscripts.

Nijay: Yes. Yes.

Annie: So is it in your NLT? Did you include it in your Bible you wrote for us?

Nijay: I think we'd put it in brackets. I'd have to look. But here's what's going on. Here's what's going on. I'll give you a reflection on this. What's going on is some early, early, really ancient manuscripts don't have this text, and some do.

And when it gets to the level where it's really unclear... if it was clear that it's not a part of the Gospel of John originally and was added later, which happens sometimes, like the long ending of the Gospel of Mark, the longest ending of the Gospel of Mark, then we just leave it out. There are lots of stuff where we just leave out because even though it's in some manuscripts, it's probably not true to the original version.

This one it is kind of a flip of a coin. I would say of the scholars, the John scholars that I know, 80% are mostly confident it is not original to the Gospel of John. There are two reasons. One reason is if it's not in some of our earliest and best manuscripts, that's a bad sign.

The second reason is the wording of the text doesn't fit the style of the Gospel of John. It might even fit the Gospel of Luke better, is what I've heard.

Annie: Spicy steak! It's supposed to be in Luke!

Nijay: Now, here's the thing. Now, I know this is going to lead to a crisis of faith for some people. I just want to reassure you. No, I'm being serious. I want to reassure people. There are these things that scholars call agraphon or agrapha, meaning real traditions or historically real and accurate traditions about Jesus that aren't in the Gospels.

So let me give an example. The book of Acts has a saying of Jesus, "It is better to give than to receive." This is a real and true saying of Jesus that is not in the four Gospels. So I tend to treat the story of the woman caught in adultery as historical, But we're not sure whether it was part of John or one of the other Gospels or an unrecorded, agraphon meaning not recorded, an unrecorded real part of Jesus' life.

Annie: We'll go there at the end of the podcast, but that is the last verse in the book is, there's so much more you don't know.

Nijay: Yeah. That tells us that John really wanted to narrow down what he wanted to talk about. You know, it's all about selection, you know, like your podcast that can't be three hours no matter how much you want them to be because you only have so much time and energy.

John really wants to focus in on demonstrating that Jesus is the bridge between God and mortals through the divine person of the Messiah, the divine form of the Messiah, that is also mystically and mysteriously also human.

Annie: One of my favorite verses that I have always thought was humorous, and you just correct me, you're the professor, I'm the student. After the Samaritan woman story,

in John 4:27 says, "Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman, but no one asked, what do you want or why are you talking with her?" I just love that John's like, they all knew it was weird, but no one asked because they're so used to Jesus being weird.

I just think that is so funny that they all went like, "Of course He would." It's like when you walk back to your dad and he's explaining everything at the grocery store that he's purchasing and you don't ask why he's explaining it because of course he is.

Nijay: And for it to be recorded, John must have been, you know, it must be remembered that they were chatting about this and whispers like, "Who is that person?" And, you know, they're standing a little too close. I'm sure you know this, but in the Bible, well scenes are meant to be romantic. Now, I don't think it was romantic.

Annie: Oh, I didn't know that.

Nijay: Okay. Well, you have so many scenes in the book of Genesis where when a man and woman hang out by a well, someone's getting married.

Annie: Is that what I'm doing wrong? I just am not hanging out in enough wells?

Nijay: You gotta go to the right place.

Annie: This is on me! This is on me! Okay, okay.

Nijay: I think John is setting us up to see a really intimate conversation taking place. Very similar to Moses when he runs away and ends up at a well or the scenes with the patriarchs like Rebecca and so forth. That was a particular place.

The example I like to give — my wife actually came up with this — is in Bollywood movies, Indian movies, the traditional Bollywood movies don't have sex scenes, thankfully. Instead, they'll be hanging out in the rain at like a water fountain. So rain is like a euphemism for romance.

So every older Bollywood movie has a rain dance scene where you're dancing in the rain. And that's supposed to replicate that romantic... I think the well scene is very similar. And so Jesus has this really intimate, personal conversation. It's not romantic, but you're meant to think: This is where a new union is formed.

Annie: Wow.

Nijay: And the union actually has to do with the Spirit and the Gospel and this concept of the church. And so, yeah, I do think it's funny that these disciples are so confused all the time and misdirected in their understanding.

Annie: When I'm thinking about... you mentioned John 14 through 16. It's okay if you don't know this answer, because this is a weird one. But how did John get exactly what Jesus said written down, his prayers?

Nijay: Oh, yeah. Like in John 17?

Annie: Oh, sorry.?

Nijay: Oh, that is a good question. How would Jesus, or how would they... I mean, there are two or three things that are important to know. One is because of high illiteracy in the ancient world... Now illiteracy wasn't a binary, like can you read or not read. It would be across the spectrum. But most people had lower levels of literacy, the non-elites. So they were trained from when they were young to have better memories because they're not able to write things down.

Annie: They aren't able to write them down and read them, right.

Nijay: Right. So let me give an example for today. My kids are terrible at spelling. They're terrible at spelling, because of autocorrect.

Annie: That's right. They don't have to be good at it. That's right.

Nijay: Yeah, because of autocorrect you don't have to be good at spelling. Because of Grammarly, you don't have to be good at punctuation, apparently.

Annie: That's exactly right.

Nijay: So I think there's an analogy there in the ancient world that there was an assumption. Also, Jews traditionally memorized large blocks of the Old Testament. And so you were trained from really young to just memorize, you know, very well.

Now, did they memorize word perfect? That was one of the second issues. Probably not. Scholars have different opinions on this. Did biography writers have the freedom to use artistic license in how they expressed these stories about Jesus, that sort of thing?

It was really common practice in the Greco-Roman world, in biographies, to use artistic license. So think about like, you know, Denis Villeneuve doing Dune, right? The new Dune. What amount of freedom does he have to deviate from the book in

terms of dialogue? Or think about Peter Jackson and Lord of the Rings. What amount of freedom? It's a cultural question.

Annie: Yeah, because I've actually never read the Lord of the Rings books, but I assume that what I see in the movie is what was written in the books. I'm just assuming because I haven't ever read the books.

Nijay: And some things are super close, some things aren't. Like The Chosen, I love The Chosen, it's super loose in terms of word for word. There are a lot of movies that are word for word. So many scholars think that the Gospel of John allows more of that flexibility because of the genre so that you didn't need to have every word word perfect. I don't want to open up a can of worms that really bothers people. It could very well be that Jesus appeared in His resurrection form, like He does according to the book of Acts, according to 1 Corinthians, and retaught them some of this stuff.

Annie: Said, John, write it down. You were there, you don't remember.

Nijay: Now's your chance.

Annie: Write it down.

Nijay: Now's your chance. This is why I'm here.

Annie: Oh, I hope he did. I hope he did. That's such a fun idea.

Nijay: Another is piecemeal. You know, there's 12 of them or more. According to Gospel of Luke, there are 70 or 72. And so between the 70 of them, if some of them are around, they're, you know, eavesdropping, they're picking up some of this.

We know that the early church was really concerned with adhering to the teachings of Jesus. So this would be really key. I think one of the key things we're missing is the things that are lost to history. The records, the things that are lost to history.

What we know is there weren't just four Gospels written in the first two or three centuries. There were maybe dozens and dozens of them.

Annie: No way.

Nijay: Only four rise to the surface as canonical, being apostolic, ancient, and orthodox. But there's lots of stuff out there. We found some of it, that may have bits and pieces that fill in some gaps: Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Judas. There's all this

other stuff. Scholars are trying to sift what can we really use and retain and think is historical, that sort of thing.

But from the production of Gospels in the first four centuries, this was a much more common practice than we think it was when you look at four Gospels.

Annie: What a gift that the church cared that much back then. They couldn't have known that 2,000 years later we would be making life choices off of what they had preserved and what the Lord had made the canon of Scripture. What a wild thing! I can't imagine how they thought to do that.

[00:46:39] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Shopify](#). I know you guys have a lot of fun business ideas and are always asking to hear more about the behind-the-scenes of running businesses. I love it.

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Sponsor: I've gotten to talk to a lot of amazing people on this podcast. And if you're like me, once I learn a little something new from one of our friends, then I want to go deeper. I mean, that is so true in these podcasts, right?

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And now back to finish up our conversation with Dr. Nijay.

[00:50:45] <music>

Annie: John isn't written in chronological order, right?

Nijay: Not if we're comparing it to the Synoptic Gospels. Again, if we're using the genre of ancient biography, there was freedom to move things around to help tell the theological story or the spiritual story of Jesus.

Let me give you a few examples. One obvious example is the cleansing of the temple, where Jesus drives out the money changers. It tends to happen at the end of the synoptic Gospels as kind of a climactic protest against the temple institution or criticism. In the Gospel, John, it happens at the beginning.

Annie: Yes, super early.

Nijay: It happens right at the beginning. Some people say, "Oh, there must be two times." Could be. Why doesn't John say that? I don't know. But I would think if it happened once, then the second time they would have been like, No, Jesus, we nailed the tables down. You can't get us this time. Uh-oh, here he comes. Hide your money.

Annie: "He's got a whip. He is not good. We know what he does." Yeah.

Nijay: That's an example. Some of the stories that they share are kind of like that, where they can be slightly moved around. If you compare, this is called the synoptic problem, where things don't exactly match up. But I think it's a matter of telling the story in the most compelling way that tells you the kind of heart of the person, the heart of the story.

And John does that, just as the way each gospel... just look at the way they begin. Mark just jumps straight into the action. Matthew starts with His genealogy, Luke doesn't. And John starts with this beautiful prologue that talks about the divine word coming down, all of that sort of thing, light and darkness. Starts with more of a philosophical theological introduction.

So instead of sitting there saying who's right and who's wrong, I think that's the wrong question to ask. The question is why does John craft it this way. There was a shift in the middle of the 20th century away from obsessing over who's right and who's wrong in the academy amongst the Gospels to appreciating each Gospel writer as a unique storyteller.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Nijay: As an inspired, authoritative, unique, and gifted storyteller. So I tell my students, give Matthew a brain, give John a brain. They're not just copying and pasting. They are artists. They are word artists and they're doing things really beautifully.

I remember asking the question to my students, you know, when we get to heaven and the four evangelists are sitting at a pub table talking, are they going to punch each other in the face saying, "You got it wrong?" or are they going to high-five each other and say, "I like the way you did that?"

I think they're going to high-five each other. I think they're going to say, That was really cool, I can see why you're the eagle, or that was really cool, I can see why you're the lion.

Annie: Oh, my gosh. After Jesus, and anyone personal, when you walk up to that pub table, who is the first person you want to speak to? Which of the Gospel writers is the first one you want to shake hands with and talk to?

Nijay: Good question. Oh my gosh. You know, John's always the weird one. Like when you think about the person that just... have you ever seen those memes where they have, in the car, the woman... I think it was a woman with the feathers and everything, the pink, you know?

Annie: Yeah.

Nijay: That's the weird one. Or if you have like four people standing next to each other, one's the weird. Like John is the weird one.

Annie: I mean, the book of Revelation will tell you the guy is weird.

Nijay: The book of Revelation builds on that. I mean, I think John would be the most interesting because he's actually... I should mention at the beginning. He's referred to as the maverick gospel.

Annie: Oh, the maverick gospel.

Nijay: The maverick gospel, because he's just doing his own thing. He's doing his own thing.

Annie: Like an eagle.

Nijay: I don't think he's doing it in competition. I think he's saying, "I have a different way of looking at this story, and I think you'll like it. I have a different way, and I think you'll like it." But Mark... people generally say Mark is the first person to pave the path of a theological biography of Jesus. It didn't happen until Mark thought of the idea.

- Annie:** Oh, wow.
- Nijay:** So this is widely assumed that Mark kicked the whole thing off. No one would have done it, let's say, if we're being hypothetical, if Mark didn't first say, "I'm going to write this and see how it goes."
- Annie:** And then all the guys who were with him
- Nijay:** And then people like, OK, I like that. Matthew's like, I need to add some material. You know, like Sermon on the Mount, Mark's like, Okay, I need to add some of these stories about women. And then John's just like, I'm going to blow this whole thing up.
- Annie:** John's like, Oh, we writing? Oh, we writing? Okay. I'm gonna be doing this different. Y'all don't know, I'm the beloved one. I'm laying up on His chest."
- Nijay:** "We're gonna take wings."
- Annie:** "I am all the way different."
- Nijay:** "We're gonna take wings."
- Annie:** This is gonna be a total guess on either of our parts. Why didn't any of the disciples describe what Jesus looked like?
- Nijay:** There's been a lot of conversation about this. And it was pretty normal to describe what someone looked like. I think that they are all thinking about Isaiah 53. And they're thinking about how the suffering servant, if Jesus is a suffering servant, He had no appearance, no reputation. He was one people turn their faces away. He was despised and rejected.
- I think this idea that... and this is throughout the Bible. It's also in Paul, where it says people look at the external but God looks at the inside. This goes back to that irony, double meaning. We see a huge ramp-up in irony in the passion narrative where they put the crown of thorns on and they put the robe on Him, they give him the scepter, they make Him look like a king to mock Him and say, "You will never be King. You're nothing, Jesus." And to look at Him, He's wearing the trappings of a king, but he's bleeding, and He's probably sickly, and he's been flogged, all of that. And we have to see past the exterior to the interior.
- So let's go back to Saul and David. When Saul was chosen as king, it says I think he was handsome and ruddy. I think the old English. He was handsome and ruddy. I don't know what that means.

Annie: Oh, you've got to Google it. Have you ever Googled it?

Nijay: I'll have to Google it.

Annie: It's awesome. He's like a light-skinned black man with red hair. He's beautiful.

Nijay: Oh, really? Okay. I mean, Saul-

Annie: We Googled him at lunch one day, Dr. Nijay. That's the things we talk about at lunch. How hot was David? How hot was David?

Nijay: That sounds fun. Oh, boy. Well, Saul was meant to be the picture of the worldly icon, the worldly idol. the ideal human form in the flesh's eyes.

Annie: Wow.

Nijay: And the whole point of why would Saul be chosen first if he was going to be a bad king? God wanted to show how bad it'll go if we choose according to the flesh. And then David comes along. He's the youngest. He's the least in his family. He's out there with mud on his face because he's, you know, fighting bears and... you know, he's the shepherd, which, you know, the idea of a shepherd is shabby appearance, that sort of thing.

So we're meant to contrast Saul and David based... despite what popular pictures look like of David. I think the biblical concept is, He's a man after God's heart, and so his heart is beautiful, and it shouldn't matter what he looks like. Whereas Saul, I kind of think of as Gaston.

Annie: Yeah, I do too, oh my gosh, I've always thought of Saul as Gaston.

Nijay: So you got the Gaston, you know, the hurly, the strong, beautiful. And I think Jesus, despite the beautiful Jonathan Roumie, despite the beautiful Jim Caviezel's of the day, I think He would be less than normal good-looking.

Annie: Mm, interesting.

Nijay: He's going to be an unlikely hero in terms of the way He looks.

Annie: Jonathan Roumie, I honor him and bless him, he's not ugly.

Nijay: He's a good-looking guy.

- Annie:** So he's not setting us up to see Jesus as the least attractive of the disciples.
- Nijay:** I'm okay with that. I'm okay with that for theatrical reasons. But the real Jesus, I think if I'm taking the biblical tradition of not obsessing over the way God looks, because that's what the pagans do, the pagans make beautiful statues, then the lack of reference to the way Jesus looks is a way of saying, picture His heart, not His face.
- Annie:** Wow.
- Nijay:** That would be my reason why I think they don't do it.
- Annie:** That's beautiful. Yeah, that makes so much sense.
- Nijay:** Because it is odd. It is odd that they don't. The only time they talk about his appearance is when they talk about His mockery and what they clothe Him with.
- Annie:** What they put on him. So we'll finish up with this. When we're reading John, how do we come to it? Tell us how to prepare our hearts, tell us how to prepare our... to journal? Is there some glasses we should put on while we're reading John?
- Nijay:** Yes. You know, I've already mentioned that you want to read it as a drama. When you're watching a good drama, you know how to get in the mood of it by kind of following the cues of whether it wants you to laugh or cry or be scared. I guess, be prepared to feel the range of feelings that the narrator tries to clue you into. I think that's really crucial.

Another thing is, John's the most philosophical of the four Gospels. John spends the most time wanting you to reflect philosophically on the meaning of life.

So let me give an example. The Synoptic Gospels talk a lot about the kingdom of God in a really large-scale, world-building kind of way. John is really interested in eternal life. Now, it's not that Jesus never talks about eternal life in the synoptics, but in John, He really turns up the volume on that. He says, I really want to focus on this, on eternal life.

Now, don't think eternal life... I used to think of Indiana Jones' Last Crusade, where eternal life means getting really, really old. No. The way I explain it is, When he use the language of eternal life, he means the life of the new creation, the life of the new age.

The image I get is, I lived in England for three years back in the early 2000s, and that's when America discovered high-definition TV. So I came back to the United

States, I was in a Walmart or a Target, and I remember walking into high-definition TV, and it almost blew me away.

Annie: Oh wow.

Nijay: Like I'm used to just seeing regular TV and high-definition is like it's just popping at you. Or imagine seeing, you know, using 3D for the first time with a... you know, 3D glasses with a movie. That's what he means. When he says life to the full, when he says eternal life, he's talking about life in high-definition, the way we were always meant to...

Or if you ever went to the eye doctor, you don't have good eyesight, you get glasses, you're like, oh my gosh, That's what all these things look like. That's what John's talking about. So really keeping these key questions, what is eternal life? Who is Jesus? And here's a key one.

John is, more than the other Gospels, very interested in the theme of love. He teaches about it throughout the gospel, especially chapters 14 through 16. The foot washing is about loving his disciples to the end. He talks about love as sacrifice. Really follow that thread throughout the gospel, how does Jesus embody love? Because 1 John talks about God is love, Jesus is the face of love on earth. I'd follow that thread throughout the gospel. Read slowly, read it as philosophy, read it as drama, and look for love.

Annie: And that last sentence, that last verse, Jesus said many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. That could make me sob every time I read it.

Nijay: It's powerful.

Annie: It's so beautiful. Just love that it's such a good reminder that there was so much they saw that we did not see. There is more for us to ask them in the future and more for us to learn and we are nowhere near the fullness of learning everything there is to know about Jesus.

Nijay: I'm translating through Galatians, and there's one moment in Galatians 1, I think, where Paul early on in his faith goes to visit Peter and stays with him for 15 days. And it literally says he takes a history.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Nijay: Yeah. We get the word "history" from the verb that's used in that. So he sits down for 15 days and gets a history of Jesus. Could you imagine Paul and Peter sitting down and talking about the history of Jesus? How amazing would that be?

Annie: Let's take that class when we get to heaven. The new earth, you get to sign up for Peter-

Nijay: History 101.

Annie: Yeah, Peter teaches History 101. It is a 15-day course, and you have to stay the whole time. Dr. Nijay, thank you so much for doing this today. Would you mind closing us out just as we are getting into the Gospels for the last time on Let's Read the Gospels, as we are reading these four books again, would you just pray for us as we go into this discipline this month, particularly starting with the book of John?

Nijay: Yeah, let's pray. Gracious God, we thank You that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, pitched a tent among us so that we could have hope, so that we could know truth, so that we could be fully human, because the image of God has been reset in us through Jesus Christ.

Help us to be patient, help us to be wise, as the narrator John wants us to be in the know, to have eyes to see and ears to hear. Help us be open, to have our hearts and ears and eyes open to soak in every little bit. You want us to read slowly with patience, with grief when we need to grieve, with joy when we need to rejoice, with confusion when we need to struggle with something that may be difficult.

I pray that we would be riding on the wings of the eagle as we read this gospel and apply it to our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

[01:05:55] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, isn't he the best? I mean, it is blowing my mind. It's blowing my mind. I live for these conversations. And that's just the first. We're actually doing five. John, Luke, Mark. Mark, Matthew, and then we'll finish with the Book of Acts. Y'all are going to love these conversations.

And if you aren't following Dr. Nijay Gupta, please follow him, tell him thanks so much for being on the show. The two books I would love for you to get, if you haven't yet, that I think you'll love reading, *Strange Religion* and *Tell Her Story*. Both are incredible. Though anything Dr. Nijay Gupta writes you should read.

Don't miss that today, tomorrow, and Wednesday we have extra episodes here for you on That Sounds Fun. We're bringing you in as we read the first nine chapters of

the Book of John, so you can get a taste of what we're doing together over on the Let's Read the Gospels podcast.

So as you finish this episode, take 15 more minutes to listen to day one in the Book of John, where we're reading my favorite three chapters of the Gospels, John chapters one through three.

Come join us over on Let's Read the Gospels podcast this whole month. We're using the Let's Read the Gospels Guided Journal as we go, and if you've ordered your copy by April 3rd, which is Wednesday, you can join the Guided Journal Book Club over on Facebook. The link to that and the journal are all in the show notes below. Join us. This is our last month of reading the Gospels together like this. I don't want you to miss it. It is going to be really special.

If you have any questions from this episode, which me too, you can drop them in the Q&A box on Spotify app, if that's where you listen, that is where I listen to podcasts, or you can send them straight to us on Instagram @ThatSoundsFunPodcast. Leave them in the comments below this post or send them in DM, slide on in, and we'll do our best to get those answered.

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 may need me, that is 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, and I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is heading to a coffee shop for a little bit this afternoon to do some writing. I'm looking forward to that.

Y'all have a great week. And today, tomorrow, and Wednesday, remember you get to read the first nine chapters of the Gospels of John with us. And then I cannot wait to continue our gospel series as we get to the book of Luke next Monday. It's gonna be every Monday this month with one of my favorite pastors, Bethany Allen.

But before then, this Thursday, we're sitting down with one of your favorites and one of mine, Jess Connolly. We'll see you on Thursday.