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Annie: Hi friends, and 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.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors, [AG1](#). Okay, I know y'all hear me talk about AG1 a lot, but I love it because my days are full and I know yours are too. It is truly the simplest way for me to get all the nutrients I need for each day without taking a bunch of different pills and capsules.

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Intro: Today on the show we get to continue our Let's Read the Gospels series that we're doing every Monday in April over on Let's Read the Gospels podcast. We're eight days into reading the Gospels together and going through the guided journal. And today, my friend Bethany Allen is joining us here to talk all things Luke.

If you don't know Bethany, you will love her. She is the pastor of spiritual formation and leadership development at Bridgetown Church in downtown Portland, Oregon. She has a deep affection for the scriptures and works hard counseling, developing curriculum, and planning alongside Bridgetown's pastoral team. She is one of my favorite preachers to listen to. I love her so much.

Before we jump in, I want to give you an overview of the book of Luke, so you can kind of wrap your head around the context of the book. I am going to read to you from my Quest Study Bible kind of the intro from the book of Luke.

"Why read this book? Does this book offer anything that can't be found in the other Gospels? Yes, it offers plenty. Just as a witness at a trial does more than confirm the story of another witness, Luke enlarges the story of Jesus. You'll gain new

information from Luke and see Jesus from a new angle. Of all the Gospel writers, Luke gives us the greatest variety of teaching, parables, and events from the life of Jesus.

Who wrote this book? Luke, a companion of Paul the Apostle. Luke, who also wrote Acts, was probably a Gentile medical doctor.

To whom was it written and why? Luke wrote to Theophilus, probably a Gentile, who was likely either a new believer or someone seeking to learn about Christ. Theophilus means 'lover of God', leading some to think the book was written in general to people who loved God. Luke hoped Theophilus and other readers would learn that God's love reaches beyond the Jews to the entire world.

When was it written? Possibly AD 59 to 63, although some think it may have been 15 to 20 years later.

What to look for in Luke? Watch for ways that Luke elaborates on the accounts of Matthew and Mark. You'll find new information here, more stories about Jesus's birth, for example, and the parable of the Good Samaritan. You'll also see Luke's personal perspective and the incidents he includes, like stories, for instance, that demonstrate Jesus's interest in the non-Jewish world and in the poor."

I love that at the front of every book in my Bible, my Quest Study Bible, it gives me those questions and answers, really helps me set up for knowing more about the book that I'm reading. And that is what we're doing today as well in this conversation.

So here we go, the book of Luke with my friend, Pastor Bethany Allen.

[00:04:32] <music>

Annie: Bethany Allen, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Bethany: I can't believe I'm here.

Annie: Dude, it is just-

Bethany: Legit.

Annie: ...truly about time. It is about time that we got you on That Sounds Fun.

Bethany: Thank you.

Annie: Thank you so much for doing this today and jumping in to our Let's Read the Gospels series so we can talk about the book of Luke.

Bethany: I'm so honored, so thrilled, and confused about why I'm here in some ways.

Annie: Well, listen, let me tell you who's not confused, is any of our listeners, because they see when we share your sermons in the AFD Week in Review email, they see when I talk about you on socials. I mean, you're just one of my favorite preachers and teachers to listen to. Will you back us up a little bit? Give us a little bit of your bio, just for people who have listened to your sermons, but maybe haven't met you socially.

Bethany: Yeah, I'm not in social, you know what I mean?

Annie: I know.

Bethany: Who can hold a candle to Anne F. Downs?

Annie: Oh, none of you.

Bethany: None of us. I am a pastor of spiritual formation and leadership development at Bridgetown Church, which sounds very fancy. But basically means I'm in all the departments saying, how can we create faithful disciples of Jesus who are sincere in the work that they do? I get to teach here. I'm an elder at the church as well, more recently. And yeah, I never expected to land in the Pacific Northwest in my entire life. In fact, I had no idea it even existed. I'm a deep Floridian, which I think every Floridian is deep, you know what I'm saying?

Annie: Uh huh.

Bethany: They're lost in their own ecosystem, bless us. But yeah, made it out here 16 years ago and never left and got to jump on board the ship that is Bridgetown Church.

Annie: How long have you been on staff at Bridgetown?

Bethany: I've been on staff 12 years and been here since the beginning.

Annie: Oh, wow. I mean, of the staff, how many of y'all are OG like that at this point?

Bethany: One other person.

Annie: One other person.

Bethany: Me and one other person from the job.

Annie: That's so interesting.

Bethany: A lot of iterations. Do you know what I mean?

Annie: Yeah.

Bethany: We just had a few major transitions and it's just been extraordinary because you usually get one really good run. We thought John Mark's a pretty decent run, you know, to serve with. And then this has just been an extraordinary next chapter. So it's been a really fun ride.

Annie: One of the things I love about your teaching is you have really studied scripture. I mean, I love pastors who, when you hear them teach, they have their own stories, but they also really know the Bible. So I was like, Oh, we have got to have Bethany on during this series because I wanted you to kind of chop it up with me about the book of Luke. Will you tell me how you feel about Luke? Like, what's your overarching feeling about this character, this man who wrote Luke and the book of Acts?

Bethany: Yeah. I mean, can you have a favorite gospel? If you did, this is my guy and has been since I was like doing middle school Kay Arthur studies with people. Do you know what I mean?

Annie: With the colored pencils?

Bethany: Yeah, I go deep into that.

Annie: Yes, girl. Yes.

Bethany: Southern Baptist, like I know how to study the Bible precepts from God's word, the whole thing. And for me, even from a young age, Luke's way of telling the story of Jesus connected most profoundly and deeply to me.

I mean, I think one of the major things I love about Luke, and now in hindsight, I'm like, this is why it connected so deeply, was I could find myself in Luke. That was the biggest thing. Luke has this emphasis on women, as well as other socially more outcast individuals. And I just found myself identifying in different movements of the story with Luke differently than I did John or Matthew or Mark or whatever it may be.

So always have had this crush on the gospel of Luke that way. And when I'm feeling most disoriented or lost in my discipleship or needing to encounter Jesus again, which happens pretty regularly in this last season especially, I go back to Luke because I feel like I can find Jesus most tangibly for me in that space.

Annie: That is fascinating. He is also my favorite. I think there's something about his research, there's something about his thoughtfulness. I kind of like that he wasn't there. I like imagining how he got the stories from Mary. I'm like, "Okay, Mary, tell me how this happened, and she says, "Well, I've never told anybody this. I've stored this in my heart, but the shepherd said this." And then he goes, "She stored it in her heart and now told me." I want to watch video of Luke doing the research to get this book.

Bethany: And he's a doctor, right? So we know he's that and yet somehow... At least for me, I'm like, there's something poetic about how he's written this that fascinates me. That he could be more literal, but he's actually more literary in how he expresses the story of Jesus. So that's always fascinated me too about him, yeah, along with just his connection to how he wrote the story, how he entered it.

Annie: Why do you think he... and a lot of this is, you've studied this far more than I have, but I'm also just interested in like, why do you think he did include so many stories about women and so many stories about people different than the Middle Eastern man that is the central part of this whole story? How did he notice that differently?

Bethany: I mean, we'd have to ask Luke. I mean, that's really the base. I don't know exactly. I mean, I don't know. Even I was freshening up for this podcast and rereading about just the powerful impact, you know, Luke's gospel has the social implications of the gospel laid out more than any other book.

Annie: Wow.

Bethany: And it just makes me wonder if... I mean, you could wonder at things. The things I wonder about specifically is if he was a doctor, he was working with all kinds of people coming from all walks of life, like was he able to see differently, was he able to experience the story of Jesus differently because of his profession or because of where he found himself in the ancient Near East or whatever it may be?

But I also... I don't know. The woman piece has always been something that I've been like, why is it that he... even in getting this story of the witness from Mary is so provocative and profound. and how he's patterned in his laying out of women in the scripture. He is laying this pattern for us in a way that no other gospel does for the inclusion of all people. So I don't know. I wish I had a great answer for that. It's speculation.

Annie: You're doing great. I think that was a great answer. Well done.

Bethany: Yeah, just imagine he was connected in a different way.

Annie: I mean, I'm flipping now to chapter 2 because it is where... he is the one that says, verse 10, "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people."

Bethany: That is the statement.

Annie: Like Luke is the one who told us what the shepherds heard from the angels. And I think it's so interesting because Luke 2 is so well known because of Charlie Brown.

Bethany: Yeah, it's true. Thank you, Charlie.

Annie: Everybody knows the story of Luke 2. So even when mainstream people are making art around the gospel story, they're going to Luke.

Bethany: I mean, even there's parables in Luke that you don't hear in any other gospel. There's imagery that he's casting that you don't find across the board. So I think he has this ability to capture the imagination. Even what you're saying, his thesis statement is, this is good news for all people. But he starts it with a story, not a lineage. He's coming in with an invitation for you to find yourself somewhere in the story, which I think is what makes him uniquely profound in his writing.

Annie: So he starts talking about that he's writing this for Theophilus. Do you know more about that? Is he doing research for someone else?

Bethany: We don't know. I don't know exactly what's going on there with Theophilus. But I think there's a lot of key language, and I'm going to turn in my Bible here to it, that I think is just helpful. I think the emphasis of it being an orderly account to Theophilus, which we don't have a lot of context for, is also key. Because he's saying to this person, disciple, friend, whoever this is, "I'm offering this to you ordered so that you can see and receive the fullness of what this is."

And he talks about the certainty of it. He's saying the order is reflecting back to you the truth and power of what's being laid out. So who knows? I mean, we just don't have a lot more. I don't. Tim Mackie probably does. So we can call up Tim and ask him.

Annie: Phone a friend.

Bethany: But as far as I know, we just know that this is... even the eyewitness account part of this opening statement that he makes is again saying, everything is true, so listen and receive what's about to come. I love that it's being submitted to someone.

Annie: Yeah, I do too.

Bethany: Yeah. You just wonder what that says even about Luke that we still don't know.

Annie: Are there certain ones that stand out to you in Luke that you love teaching or you go back to a lot?

Bethany: Oh, yeah. Good Samaritan, numero uno.

Annie: Oh, sure.

Bethany: Again, Jesus provocatively talking to this woman with all kinds of implications for the people of Israel, but also for her in her life. And we have this zoomed-in moment of Jesus in His, I think, most extraordinary form, counterintuitive. And that's the other thing about Luke is everything he does is upside down. Everything in his storytelling is like this upside-down narrative.

So Good Samaritan's right in there. The prodigal son is probably the most infamous to most of us, where we don't realize that's where that lives. And that's where we, you know, again, find Jesus calling out those who we would presume would be the most faithful and are not, you know? The rich man and Lazarus in Luke, also a little edgy.

Annie: Right, Lazarus is also in Luke. Not Lazarus resurrecting. Maybe he is too, but Lazarus, the one who is... he goes to heaven and the rich guy says, dip your finger in water. Ah, that's also Luke.

Bethany: Or call out for my brothers, and, you know, the provocativeness of like, well, who are your brothers?

Annie: Yeah, yeah.

Bethany: Zing, zing.

Annie: That story always makes me think of A Christmas Carol.

Bethany: Ooh, yeah.

Annie: You know, like his partner comes back with all the chains on him and is like, "I'm mourning you." I'm always like, "Are you telling a Bible story? Is this the Lazarus and the Poor Man story?"

Bethany: Legit helpful imagery for what we're going after.

Annie: Right, right, right. Okay, I have to tell you my hot take on the parable of the lost son.

Bethany: Tell me.

Annie: It was never meant to be titled that, is my hot take. Because the literal first thing Jesus says is, "A man had two sons." This was never a story about one son. This was always a story about two sons. But whoever labeled the Bible decided that it was the parable of the lost son. I'm like, no, it's the parable of two lost sons. Both those boys are lost.

Bethany: And both are equally as important messages, especially to the disciples. Ooh, I love it. Okay, we're going to give some feedback to somebody somewhere.

Annie: Yeah, we need to call Dr. Nijay Gupta and be like, In NLT, can you please change this? I mean, let's go to chapter 15 because chapter 15 is so interesting because it is just back-to-back lost stories. Lost sheep, lost coin, lost sons. What does that chapter say to you about what Luke noticed and who Jesus was? Because those stories... I don't have my Bible. I left my Bible at home. I'm so sorry. I have an office Bible. But I am not sure any of those stories are told elsewhere?

Bethany: Great question, Annie. I don't know, there's something about Luke in the, and I think this connects to the women thing. I'm not sure how it all intersects, but there's a tenderness to the heart of God that seems to be on display through Luke's writings that I think are emphasized through these things.

Again, I think there's a counter-intuitiveness to even the religious among us, us included, who would say like, Oh, it's just one lost sheep. So why would you go after the one when there's 99? Or it's one lost coin. One. One coin. How could it matter? So there's this emphasis on one lost son.

There's an emphasis, I think, on the tenderness and the heart of God and the upside downness of like, this is how radical He is. That it's the one. And the invitation is for you to consider yourself not in pride or ego, but to say like, I'm the one. I'm the one.

So there's a massive invitation to intimacy. I mean, I would end this of like, well, if I'm the one and he's come for me. But also there's a directive at some level to the disciples saying like, your emphasis is not on the masses or the many or the influence or the fame if we can, but to the one. And one life matters, you know, in the narrative of the kingdom. And that's essential. as you navigate this road because it's what he was like.

Annie: Sounds like since we were both using our colored pencils in middle school with Kay Arthur that our growing up was similar. I never really connected with the Lost Sheep story because I always felt like I was a 99.

Bethany: Totally.

Annie: I was always like, so he's gonna... and the longer I've been a person... Like when the woman caught in adultery where the older ones walked away first, the longer I've been a person, the more I'm aware that I am always the one. I'm always the one. I am the 99, meaning I came to Christ at a young age. I am the one that walks away all the time and He is forever being like, "You guys, I'll be right back. Let me go get Annie. Let me..."

Bethany: Because Annie should be here, but her propensity and her thinking is that she's collectively thinking she's agreeing with this 99 mentality, and that's also what's keeping her from being present to the one. I mean, let's not use you as an example. We can use me as one.

Annie: Please do.

Bethany: I mean, this is why I love the scriptures, I mean, so much. It's Jeremiah's language of, like, your words came to me and I ate them. That's how I feel in passages like these, where I'm like, I never saw, I didn't perceive, I couldn't have understood, and now finding myself in new ways in this story.

Annie: And the way that I'm, like, again, dying to know, like, who told Luke that parable? Like, who said, "Okay, Luke, listen. And then Jesus told these three in a row, so you got to write these down." You know, that stuff blows my mind, thinking about... Because we know in the book of Acts Luke is there, so there's a lot more 'we' in Acts. But he wasn't there for any of the life of Christ.

And so all of this is Luke getting it from someone else. So I'm like, who was it that memorized Jesus being like, "Okay, you've got to hear about these sheep? He said..., you know? I just, oh, that just-

Bethany: Which makes me think it has to be Mary because who else is keeping such an insane account of like-

Annie: Great call.

Bethany: ...this is what's going on because... I mean, I'm sure someone was. But I agree. I think it's just really wild to consider who might've been part of the contributing committee.

[00:20:04] <music>

Sponsor: So one thing everybody gets to do is grocery shop. So why not do it from the comfort of your couch though? That is my ideal. That is where [Thrive Market](#) has changed my life. It is the no junk food, healthy grocery store that doesn't make me leave my house.

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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?

So where can you go to learn from the most remarkable people besides, you know, right here? [Masterclass](#)! Masterclass is such an easy way to help you learn more about something you're interested in. You can seriously find classes on everything

from comedy with Steve Martin to the art of performing with Usher. I mean, from the Super Bowl halftime show to your teacher, that is cool.

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Sponsor: All right, I know we all love a good hair day. And 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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And now back to our conversation with Bethany.

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Annie: Luke is also the one who records that Peter and Jesus made eye contact after Peter denied Jesus three times before his crucifixion.

Bethany: Ooh, so steamy.

Annie: Yeah, right. So it's details like that. How does that detail impact you? That detail has been very impactful to me in my life. How does that detail impact you that Luke recorded Peter and Jesus making eye contact?

Bethany: Can I speak really personally and not so much biblically or hermeneutically or whatever?

Annie: Of course, yeah.

Bethany: This is also probably why I'm so drawn to Luke is I have such a wild imagination and the way that I commune most regularly and profoundly with God is in my imagination. There's a whole prayer space there, you know? I feel like that moment in particular captures many, many moments I've had before even perceiving that moment with God.

Annie: Wow.

Bethany: The intimacy of like being actually seen by Jesus, especially in my worst moments. So like in my spaces of communion with God, I felt that moment many times. And when I read something like that in Luke, I'm like, that's a real place of communion. This is how Jesus communed with His disciple that He loved, you know, and knew.

I think, too, like, what does it mean that there was that connection? And what was being told? What language had they had already established through a thousand awkward moments, you know, sermon after sermon, where it was like, Yeah, here's Bill again, you know, or whatever. Learned a language together. What was spoken in that moment without being spoken?

You know, so for me, it connects into a part of my discipleship to Jesus and also helps me consider in deeper ways what God... what that relationship actually entailed, you know?

Annie: Yeah. I mean, I've thought about that detail a lot. When you said that Jesus sees you, it's the first time I've thought, I wonder if Jesus looked at him and smiled.

Bethany: Totally.

- Annie:** What Peter does is he walks away and he weeps. So whatever Jesus' face said to Peter made him weep. So I've always assumed, because shame is a companion of mine, I have always assumed that Jesus' face was like, Peter. And you and I having this conversation, I'm going, no, what if Jesus' face said, "I love you and I see you"?
- Bethany:** "And I saw this. I know you beyond this moment." You know, like that moment where you're like, hang in there. Obviously, we don't know, but I do... I mean, what would make you break more than anything? What has made me break more than anything with God is the mercy I found in His sight of me when I have been the most broken and failing? I don't know. I think there's a lot to be captured in that.
- Annie:** I hope everybody is having this experience with us. This is why we read scripture over and over and why we talk about it. Because my filter for that one line has always been a filter of shame until right now. It is a filter. And now I'm like, No, actually, what actually made Peter weep bitterly probably was love, probably was Jesus being still Jesus to him. Because when did Jesus ever look at somebody and shame them? He did not.
- Bethany:** He would not. He cannot.
- Annie:** He did not. But that is exactly what I've been picturing there on 43 years, Bethany. So well done to me.
- Bethany:** Welcome to it now. You're about to go some places.
- Annie:** That's it. It honestly makes the story even sadder. It is so sad. I mean, when The Chosen depicts this, it's going to break our hearts.
- Bethany:** I know.
- Annie:** I'm not even looking forward to that.
- Bethany:** There's a lot I'm not prepared for in The Chosen series.
- Annie:** I know.
- Bethany:** Yeah, yeah. It's helped. It just is hard as well.
- Annie:** Yeah, no kidding. How often do you teach out of Luke? Like when you're setting up to... is it one you go back to? Is it one you save? Is it one you have like... Like my all-time favorite thing to teach about is the two lost sons. So that one always stands out to me. What is your teaching rhythm around the book of Luke?

Bethany: You know, I don't technically have one. I will say this.

Annie: I don't mean scientifically, I just like the story.

Bethany: I think for me, when I am teaching anything from the Gospels or trying to get context about something around, I mean, anything, which the stuff I'm teaching around is often and more regularly about formation stuff or the pathways of discipleship, those kind of things, Luke is where I go with a holy imagination to consider again what some of these things actually mean, to consider the humanity in the story.

I think, you know, the other thing I do come back to a lot, I get to talk about a lot, is being a woman in ministry or whatever that shapes out. And for me, Luke is one of the places where, because I first felt dignified without even knowing I did, is a place that I come back to over and over again in considering how I'm speaking about that, what we actually see in the scriptures, how profound it was, the partnership of men and women together as we see discipleship played out.

So I will say I come back to those moments quite a bit. But, you know, if someone wants to give me an opportunity just to preach through Luke, let's go.

Annie: Me too. Dear Bridgetown.

Bethany: Dear Bridgetown, an open letter from Annie Downs.

Annie: From Annie F. Downs. I mean, literally in Luke 8, it's where they list the women who followed Jesus, and then it ends with they were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and the other disciples. And I think I might be wrong, and our friends will correct us. I think that's the only time in the Gospels that that part of the story is told, that the women paid the way for Jesus and the disciples.

Bethany: And their names are listed. That's also the profound, like literal...

Annie: Thank you for stating their name, Luke.

Bethany: Like, say their name. You did. And he's making some kind of statement because of who he's naming in that text, too. So he's saying, like, these are women of high standing. These are women of great authority and wealth and influence. And here they are spending their life on Jesus. You know, there's all kinds of, yeah, thoughts around that, but pretty profound.

Annie: And it's where Mary Magdalene is told that she had seven demons and where you and I can rage against the machine, that none of them say she was a prostitute.

None of them say it was sexual, but somehow in the history of the Bible teaching... there's actually... you can Google it, for our friends listening, you can Google it. But there is a record of where it started shifting to where Mary Magdalene was a sexual sinner versus seven demons that could all be about anxiety and fear.

Bethany: Come on. This story or this context has always made me wonder, like, here she is around the campfire watching people be set free from demons day after day after day after day. Like, what in the world kind of authority was she walking in? What kind of burning and desire? When we categorize her in these other places, too, it diminishes this profound part of her rescue and what bent her life towards even being the witness. Here she is, ultimately the witness to the story at the end.

Annie: That's right, and how important she is. That's why I'm flipping as to where she shows up. Verse 10 it was Mary Magdalene, and then he lists the women again by name. Like!

Bethany: Luke is up in it. Luke is saying something to everyone about this. What I think is cool about this too, which maybe this is like a Bible nerd fact. I have no idea, or thought I've been having the last week is so interesting that he was Paul's travel companion. Like we know that about him. Paul is always this provocative character and even the narrative around women.

So I just wonder what kind of conversations were being had, experiences were being had collectively in this larger conversation too, with Luke's emphasis, you know, Paul's story, Paul's... you know, I wouldn't even say it's a story. I would say it's just how he's been interpreted different things. I have curiosity around that in the text, in that relationship.

Annie: This is why the new Heaven and the New Earth are going to be so fun. Because we'll be like, what time is Luke's lecture? What time should we... are we all going to go?

Bethany: 100%. Or are we just going to have it downloaded? Like part of me is like, I'd just love to have it and then be just having a nice glass of wine with Luke, just being like, Remember when you, you know, whatever.

Annie: I know. But the thing I know about you that is true about me is you actually light up when you learn too.

Bethany: Yes.

Annie: I know. So if we quit learning, I'm going to be-

Bethany: It's true.

Annie: We obviously get an automatic download. When you pass through the gates, there are things that you know that we do not know.

Bethany: Baseline questions.

Annie: I say to the Lord more than I should, I'm sure it's frustrating where I'm like, will you add that to my list of questions? Because there are some things and like... sitting with Luke and Peter are pretty high on my to-dos.

Bethany: I'm gonna pop in. I'm just going to be on the side just listening like this.

Annie: Come with. You're so invited. You are so invited. Okay, let's go to Luke 18. Okay. I think for two of us who are not married yet, no kids yet-

Bethany: Ooh.

Annie: Right. The persistent widow.

Bethany: Come on.

Annie: I mean, literally it starts with "one day Jesus told His disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up." Like, here is how you do it. So, everyone listening is praying for something. Some are praying for children. Some are praying for spouses. Some are praying for healing. Some are praying for a new job. Some have prayed and the thing did not happen and they've stopped praying.

I literally woke up this morning and I don't remember my dream, I remember a person in my dream. Like, I don't remember any of my dream, and I woke up and I thought, Is that story done or not done? It was a guy. And I was like, Is that story done or not done? Because I'm still praying. What are you still doing? You know, like that kind of thing. So when it comes to this story, talk to me about your experience with the persistent widow, because the judge in the story doesn't sound like God. He's not a good guy.

Bethany: No. Oh, it's like you're reading from my journal entry, so it's a little embarrassing.

[crosstalk 00:35:02]

Bethany: Well, oh.

Annie: It's been a tough week.

Bethany: This text to me has been... I don't know. I'm not one of those people yet who has like, I have a life verse or a life chapter or whatever. But even in what I've been learning about prayer in the last three years, which has been revelatory for me, this passage has been both one of the most challenging for me and the most catalyzing for me.

Annie: Really?

Bethany: Yeah. I feel like, you know, we all get the ask, seek, and knock thing. We all get the "I should pray without ceasing", that whole narrative. I will say I rarely meet people who, or the people I do meet who have lived persistent in prayer are distinctly different than people who have not persisted in prayer. And I think persistence is a defining marker for disciples and often not common.

I think it's one thing to say I'm regular. And then like you said, I'm like off the deep end at a certain point. And that's not a judgment statement. That's my life. So I'm swimming in that river.

Annie: That's all of us.

Bethany: But I do think in the last season in particular, even yesterday, I'm not joking, I'm putting on makeup, I'm pissed at God for a lot of different things, I'm just processing, and I just felt like He said to me in a whisper... I was listening to some interview, and I just felt like the Lord said to me, would you walk this path you've been walking, even in your singleness in particular, the humiliation? Because there's just layers of it that have come in my life, even recently with another birthday, with another...

And I heard Him whisper, would you walk this path knowing like you do now that it's for my glory? Like, it's just a simple question that we've all answered a thousand times, and yet I feel like it was so personal where He was like, If I was calling you to persist in prayer for my glory, would it be worth it to you? Because I was like, I'm so tired of contending. I don't know what else to pray. I don't know what else to say to you. I'm asking, and you are better than this judge in the story. You are better than this one who isn't even reluctant to give good gifts, I was meditating on the fact that you say you don't withhold anything good from your kids, and you love to give good gifts to your children. And I don't feel that.

That was my honest wrestle yesterday. And yet I just felt like you said, would you persist in prayer if it just meant my glory of what it was doing in you, of who it was making you to be, would that be enough? And if it was just about the communion

with Me, would it be enough? So anyway, it's kind of a weird aside, but I will say this story-

Annie: No, that's right on. That is right on.

Bethany: This story for me is like... I just love the practicality of it. Because even yesterday I was thinking, You know, it's not hard for God to do what I've persisted in prayer about and He's not not being good today in my persistence. He's not withholding something today, at least as the scriptures tell me. So there's goodness and glory here right now in my persistence.

And when He does respond in the way, at least I perceive Him to respond, He's responding, but in the ways that I hope He responds, I will be different because of it. I will be different. I think when we look at the widow or this story, I think we don't give her enough credit a lot, because we often move to the answer of this story.

Annie: Yeah, interesting.

Bethany: Oh, but did she get what she wanted? As opposed to, what did it mean that she, a woman in this story, and the ancient Near East was persisting with a judge over and over and over again? What did it mean that she was doing that? And who was she becoming as she did that? And then he says, fine, like, it's just driving me nuts. I also like the fact that God's like, sometimes you can just drive me nuts and I'll do it.

Annie: Listen, you don't have to tell me twice.

Bethany: I'm banking on it. The last six weeks I've been like, Lord, with Hezekiah, you were like, all right, we'll just pivot or whatever. And I'm like, So God, you are so relationally driven that there's an impact here that really matters. And that's what I also see in this story is just like there's a point at which He can be like a parent and just go like, Yeah, you can get candy at the front. It's no problem. You know, whatever.

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

[00:39:32] <music>

Sponsor: So 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.

Be a responsible consumer while not giving up high quality home fragrance by making the switch to NOTES. You can build your custom starter kit right now at notescandle.com/thatsoundsfun.

Right now NOTES is giving our friends 15% off and free shipping when you buy a NOTES starter kit using the code THATSOUNDSFUN. Again, the code is THATSOUNDSFUN when you're placing your order. That's THATSOUNDSFUN at notescandle.com/thatsoundsfun.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Bethany.

[00:41:05] <music>

Annie: I am moved in a similar way of where I jokingly say a lot, I want to get to heaven and the Lord be like, I'm really glad she's here because I'm tired of hearing it. Like I'm just tired of hearing it, and so it's time. It's time that she's here because I've had enough.

Bethany: It'll be something new though. I quickly remind Him like, I got a few other things we could talk about once we're there.

Annie: Oh, certainly. Certainly. I'm so with you on this story. I love that it's a female widow, like you said. I love that the story Luke records that someone remembered to tell him was Jesus talking about the lowest class of person that was not a slave yet, but that would be... I mean, I think it is in John, you can correct me, but where the woman's son has died. She's a widow and her son has died and Jesus raises him from the dead. The undertones of that story is He also rescued her from a life of poverty.

Bethany: Yes.

Annie: And so this woman has an enemy, and the enemy is keeping her from what she wants. And she's a widow, so who knows how close she is to being without any income, without... just losing everything? And she just keeps showing up. And the fortitude of that, is that a word we would use there? Fortitude.

Bethany: Fight. I mean, yeah. That's some great. She's a widow too. Let's just say that there was heartbreak in her story, and yet she still is there.

Annie: That's good.

Bethany: To your point, that to me is so helpful because often heartbreak can either be this catalyst for pressing in or pulling out.

Annie: Okay, do you're bringing to my mind, Luke... I'm falling deeper in friend love with Luke over and over and over again. And you.

Bethany: Thanks.

Annie: So he notices this, He records this story. He is also the one who tells us about Anna in chapter 2.

Bethany: Yeah, let's talk about Anna.

Annie: ...who's also been praying for 80 years or whatever. Let's see what it says.

Bethany: Over 80 years. They think at least 84 years. Anna's this... oh, she's a freaking force who spends her days in the temple persistently looking and waiting, anticipating this coming Messiah.

Annie: Yes, in the middle of her heartbreak, in the middle of not having the life she wanted. I mean, she was married for seven years. The text indicates nothing about her having her own children. So that's also seven years of infertility that ends with her husband dying, and now she is just committed to fasting and praying looking for Jesus. And you're like, who are you, Anna? What kind of woman? It's amazing.

Bethany: She's nuts. I mean, behind her are Elizabeth and Mary. I mean, Elizabeth's barren for all these years, and Mary and her have these divine encounters that catalyze a life which we don't speak out very often, but can you imagine both of them lost their sons through a merciless, horrific death. Both these women traveled a path of having to let go of their children from a very early age to consecrate them to the Lord.

The stories of these women are unbelievably profound when it comes to this narrative of discipleship, of what it actually means to yield all of our lives to Jesus and all of our heartbreak and all of our disappointment and a million years of barrenness, even though the miraculous comes, greater still is the story that unfolds.

It's Anna standing there as a pillar with this whole other narrative behind them that I think gives us a little nod to some of the Old Testament women that we also follow. But, you know, again, Tim Mackie's jurisdiction.

Annie: Yeah, that's exactly right. You're having me thinking about... Again, I've never thought about Elizabeth suffering through John the Baptist's death if she was still alive. I mean-

Bethany: She's old, so we don't know.

Annie: Yeah, we don't know. Right. We know Mary saw Jesus die because she's standing there. But yeah, I mean, Elizabeth, we have no idea. I mean, from the beginning, John was not a normal kid.

Bethany: No.

Annie: And so it's not like they were like, what are you gonna do for your job? And he was like, I'm gonna go live in the desert for my job.

Bethany: And they got a little manuscript about where this was headed.

Annie: That's exactly right.

Bethany: And yet still, this precious thing you prayed for and wanted your entire life. And then it's like, I got this unique story.

Annie: And he's a kid in his 20s, right? Because if Jesus dies at 33, John the Baptist dies sometime in Jesus's ministry and was six months older than Jesus. So he dies early 30s. I mean, that is... That is a child to me in some ways though. In my 20s I thought I was a grown-up. And you are. If you're listening to us, you are.

Bethany: 100%.

Annie: You are an independent woman or man. Also, it is different looking at your 20s when you're in your 40s. But I'm like, oh my gosh I have not thought about that John the Baptist was also 29, 30, when he was living out in the desert eating locusts, grasshoppers, whatever.

Bethany: And wearing the fur. I mean, totally.

Annie: It's wild.

Bethany: It is wild. That's the gift of the Gospels is it's human.

Annie: Yeah, right.

Bethany: If we let ourselves go there, it's like, whoa, this is really, really human. And it's, I think, often less disconnected from us than we like to think if we actually sit in some of these things, you know?

Annie: Yeah. So everyone listening, as you know, is listening to Let's Read the Gospels, and we are going in this order as well. We started with John, now we're on, this week we're on the book of Luke. So one of the reasons we wanted to talk to you today is so as we're listening to Luke on Let's Read the Gospels and in our journal, we're all on the same book.

When I was reading this to record it, I was blown away at chapter 5, when Jesus heals the man with leprosy, and before He heals him, He touches him. And I have read the Gospels out loud 14 times for this podcast, and I have never noticed that before Jesus heals the man with leprosy He touches him. And it came to my mind because you're saying the same thing, like, Luke calls out when Jesus notices the person who's unseen.

Bethany: And does things like touches him, which we can go biblical context and go like, Oh, how counter-cultural, this was the least of these and all that. And can we also just say that that's a human act of love that is extraordinary that we all need to receive that this man probably never did? Like the humanness of Jesus was just high-

Annie: And dangerous for Jesus, technically.

Bethany: Totally.

Annie: Because that's how you got leprosy is by touching an open wound.

Bethany: Totally.

Annie: And so you're like, Oh my gosh, Jesus, you put yourself at risk to love this man and to see him.

Bethany: And that alone will preach right there.

Annie: That's it, right? Everything Luke writes is a sermon. Luke just writes sermons over. Okay, what have we not talked about in the book of Luke that you want to make sure everybody's thinking about or getting curious around?

Bethany: I got one. Luke chapter 4, Jesus in the wilderness. People may know this, but I just wanted to say this because it's one of my favorite chapters in the book of Luke because in it, we've got Jesus going to the wilderness, He gets baptized by John, "This is my beloved son," goes away.

There's a couple things I just want to say about this. One, it's so helpful when you're reading this story to think about the whole of scripture and what this thing that Jesus does that seems slightly weird, inconsequential, weird encounter with Satan. It's like, is he talking to him? Is he not talking to him? All this stuff. That this is one of the parallels we find in the scriptures to Israel in the wilderness. This is like one of those...

And people may know this, but I just want to name it, that that Jesus goes to the wilderness, He's tested and tempted like the people of Israel, He's drawn out there, has encounters out there with the enemy, but where Israel could not overcome Jesus overcame.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Bethany: And He comes out of the wilderness. And it's not meant to be like, see how terrible you guys are? It's meant to be like, look at the one who has come who can bring us out. of the wilderness, which I love.

Annie: Me too.

Bethany: I think, you know, I think one of the other things, and again, people may know this stuff, but for me, it's something I think about regularly is oftentimes when that story is told, we're kind of like, Ooh. We think about our own discipleship and think, I got to go to the wilderness, and then it's going to be horrible, and I'm going to crawl out of the wilderness when it's over after I overcome barely.

And I do think there's so much to be said. Obviously, there's a thousand books that have been written, and brilliant things that have been said about this, about the wilderness and the discipleship journey and how it is part of our story. But what I do love is that one of the key lines in Luke says that Jesus came out of the wilderness filled with the power of the Spirit.

And I think oftentimes we see the wilderness as a place of fighting and survival as opposed to a place of strengthening, which is what it's meant to be, to send us out, propel us out towards greater faithfulness and life in the spirit. So anyway, I just want to say those two things because for me-

Annie: That's really good.

Bethany: ...those are two things that actively encouraged me in my discipleship to Jesus, especially when I read that story... you know, and I had it presented to me on a philanthropic graph board 16 ways to Sunday. But I remember listening to a scholar probably 20 years ago and thinking, how come I've never seen the parallel of this story to Israel or the garden and the kingdom that comes? So there's all kinds of beautiful parallel there, but also that this is a place of strength as opposed to-

Annie: The idea that the wilderness is a place of strength is, somebody is writing that down right now, including me. That is a real word.

Bethany: I know. And me.

Annie: That is a real word.

Bethany: I just think it's something to be said because I am compelled by it often, especially when I feel like I'm at that season myself and going, what is this meant to do, is it just a test? Because we can all get angry and frustrated at that reality, but it's for the purification and strengthening of what you're about to do, about where you're about to go, because it goes immediately into this ministry and it's just pooh, pooh, pooh.

Annie: Wow. Do you have any thoughts as we're... And you don't have to. But after we read the Gospels in April, we're reading the book of Acts in May. So as Luke is the author of both, do you have any thoughts for us as we go into Acts in May?

Bethany: I mean, no big thoughts except to say you should read it with the same kind of grid or limbs. You should be looking for and listening to... This is, again, Bible nerdy stuff, but his narrative, the literary techniques that he uses. What are the miracles he emphasizes, and where does that connect to what we've seen from him before?

Annie: That's so smart.

Bethany: Is there a motif through this gospel or through Acts that we connect to the gospel of Luke? And is there any nuance? I think for me, I'm always like, what is the nuance here? And remember that this is a crescendo. This is like, he's going, we've done all this, where we are, now it's... We hear it coming. Now he's answering the question of like, how then now shall we really live?

And you've got this weaving in of Paul and all the complexity of the other disciples. Like, it's nuts. Like, stuff's nuts. But I would just say, man, if you can stay with him, I imagine the Lord will bring to light maybe some things you haven't seen before. And I love doing that in seasons as I follow the story is-

Annie: Yeah, it's beautiful.

Bethany: ...hanging on to the skirt tails of him.

Annie: That's so good. I love the idea of... again, you're teaching me things I haven't thought about. I have not read the Book of Acts. I mean, my brain knows it's the same author. I've never read Acts going, if he made these people groups stand out in the Gospel of Luke, should I look for how he writes about women in Acts? Should I look for how he writes about the least of these in Acts? And I have never done that before. So here we go. I'm going to do it in May. This is great.

Bethany: I might join you.

Annie: That's awesome.

Bethany: Social implications, social groups. Look at who he's speaking to when he's highlighting. Luke's nuts. I hope he's everybody's favorite now after today.

Annie: I know. Me too.

Bethany: What a dreamboat.

Annie: He's still my favorite. What a dreamboat. We love the guy. Luke, save us some space. Save some time for me and Bethany.

Bethany: We need to be on the schedule.

Annie: That's right. If you think I'm not doing live podcasts for the rest of forever. Do you know the access I get once we are in the new heavens and the new earth? We will for sure interview Jesus, but He's got a lot else to do. We will have Paul too. But we'll lead with the disciples, Luke, the disciples, those people. Bethany, as we go into the book of Luke this week, will you just pray for us to close the podcast?

Bethany: Oh, yeah.

Annie: Would you just pray for us as we're reading through the gospels?

Bethany: I would love to. Jesus, we ask that You would, by the power of Your Spirit, open our eyes to see You, to see You rightly, to hear in new ways, to receive in new ways the depth and beauty of who You are and how you see us and how You love us and how You come after us.

Jesus, we ask that You would be disruptive to the ways that we have boxed You in or how our circumstances have created narratives or whatever it may be. We ask that You would disrupt us as we read this book and as we see again and hear again about the life that You lived and gave and the life that You've called us to. So Holy Spirit, do what only You can do.

I pray that you would change lives as we read and reread the stories again of Your life. We love You, Jesus. We love Your word. Just as Annie prayed earlier, thank You, God, that we get to have this extraordinary gift to receive more and more of who You are. We love You. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Annie: Amen. Thank you, friend.

Bethany: Yeah.

[00:55:48] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, isn't she the best? I know. She's so smart, so thoughtful, so compassionate. I love getting to have her on the podcast. Y'all come over and join us on the Let's Read the Gospels podcast this whole month. You are not too late to start. Just jump in with us today.

We're using the Let's Read the Gospels Guided Journal as we go, and you can join the Guided Journal book club over on Facebook. The link to that and the journal are in the show notes below.

Make sure you follow Bethany on Instagram, tell her thanks so much for joining us. And anytime you want to, just go scrolling through that Bridgetown podcast and listen to Bethany's sermons. They are extraordinary.

If you have any questions from this episode, you can drop them in the Q&A box in your Spotify app if you're a Spotify listener like me, or send them to us straight on Instagram @ThatSoundsFunPodcast. We'll try to answer them there.

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.

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 having a slow Monday. You know, the Mondays after I preach, I don't come into work until after lunch. I get the morning to myself. I'll sleep in a little bit this morning. So, you'll see me later. You will see me later.

Y'all have a great week. We'll continue our gospel series next Monday as we talk about the Book of Mark with Dr. Esau McCaulley. But first, we'll see you back here on Thursday with my friend, actress, and Broadway star, Laura Osnes, as we talk about her new movie, Just In Time. If you haven't watched it yet, go watch it now because we may talk about some spoilers on Thursday. Okay? Okay. See y'all back here then.