

[00:00:00] <music>

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.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors, [AG1](#). Listen, it is important to me that the supplements I take are high quality. And that is why for so many years I've been drinking AG1. Quality really is their commitment and it is backed by their expert-led scientific research, high quality ingredients, and industry-leading manufacturing, and lots of testing.

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Intro: Today on the show, I get to talk with my friend and one of my favorite pastors, Pastor Jon Tyson. I know y'all love Jon as much as I do. He was here for Episode 213, 232, and 315. That means he is creeping up on that Hall of Fun when you're here for five times.

Jon is a speaker, author. He's a pastor of Church of the City in New York City, which is how we got to record this in person together at the Hephzibah House in New York City. He is really the best. One of the things I've really been interested in watching over the last year plus is how he and his co-author, Jeff Bethke, are really investing in men and their spiritual growth, their emotional growth, and their leadership in the church and communities and in their families and in their friendships. It's been really interesting to talk to him about it, to hear what they've been working on, to see what they have been working on.

His brand new book, *Fighting Shadows*, that he and Bethke wrote together is just this really interesting read for men. But women should be reading it too because

there's a lot to learn. But it's a book for men and about your growth and who you are becoming as a man.

I think this is a book that we all need to read. So I hope you will go ahead while you're listening and order a copy from wherever you love to order books. Again, it's called Fighting Shadows.

Here's my conversation from the Hephzibah House in New York City with my friend, Pastor Jon Tyson.

[00:02:55] <music>

Annie: Jon Tyson, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Jon: It is fun to be back.

Annie: I hope so. Thank you very much. In person.

Jon: Yes, this is amazing.

Annie: Have we done another one in person?

Jon: I think we did one in Nashville. I just dropped my daughter off at college. It broke my heart. I showed up sad.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. That's exactly right. Now I'm on your stomping grounds.

Jon: You sure are. This is the Upper West Side.

Annie: Yeah, the Upper West Side.

Jon: 75th and something.

Annie: Yes, yeah, yeah. It's great. You know, when I lived here in the fall, I lived on 76.

Jon: Oh, did you really?

Annie: Oh, yeah, I got the place first. And then my friend, Amanda Jane Cooper, Amanda Jane said, "Oh, I record at this place on 75th." And I was like, "Would the Lord make a way for me to record one block from my house?"

Jon: That's amazing.

Annie: Okay, because it's the 10th year of That Sounds Fun, we're actually starting the show this year, because the show is called That Sounds Fun, what sounds fun to you?

Jon: Oh, what sounds fun to me is the coming spring, walking around Central Park, being done with big winter coats. Being outside sounds fun to me.

Annie: I tricked myself last night and didn't wear a coat to the show I went to and regretted it.

Jon: Too early.

Annie: Too early.

Jon: It's deceptive, isn't it?

Annie: Amateur move on my part. I apologize to you as a professional. How long do I need a coat?

Jon: April's going to mess with you. It's going to break your heart.

Annie: No.

Jon: They'll probably get one more snow. We'll get one more snow this year, I think.

Annie: For real?

Jon: Probably.

Annie: Next Monday, it is 33 degrees.

Jon: That's terrible.

Annie: That's terrible. Because my favorite warm coat is from Rent the Runway and I was going to package it up and send it back this weekend and I was like, "Don't do it, girl."

Jon: One more month.

Annie: Keep it one more month. That's terrible. Okay, I've never done spring here. What do I need to know?

- Jon:** I get ready for allergies. Allergies are a significant factor. If you suffer from allergies, you will experience terrible allergies here. But also the city's coming back to life. Sense of hope. People are going outside, the flowers are in bloom. It just feels like you're awaking from a long, hard, cold winter. I think May and October in New York at its absolute best.
- Annie:** Really? Okay. May and October. I did love October. I will be Octobering again, but this year I'll be Juning and not Maying. Sorry.
- Jon:** I gotcha.
- Annie:** But I'll be here all June.
- Jon:** I mean, it's beautiful.
- Annie:** Yeah. It has been interesting to see the pieces of winter I've seen because I've told all my friends in Nashville and other places, like, the downside of winter is when you leave somewhere, you are focused and you walk fast. Like, okay, the subway is four blocks. Okay, the restaurant is two blocks. The rest of the year, people meander a little bit more. I mean, they still are moving, but there's a little more like, I'll stop in and I'll walk slower. So you lose some of the embodiment.
- Jon:** Yeah, 100%, yes. Yeah, it's true.
- Annie:** It's been really interesting. Okay, I want you to talk about that for a second to our friends who don't live in big cities. One of the things that has changed me living here is how much I experience other people's bodies and energy.
- Jon:** Yes, that's absolutely true.
- Annie:** Talk about the spiritual. What am I experiencing spiritually I don't realize on the subway and the restaurants and on sidewalks when I'm just around? Because I'm never in a car by myself.
- Jon:** Yes. What are you experiencing? Oh, man, whatever people are carrying, whatever people are into. What you can't do is avoid it. So to get here, I was on the number three train, came up from Hell's Kitchen. And I just looked around, there was a woman, a woman having a conversation with herself. It was so diverse in that one subway car, I just thought, people in other places could probably go a year and not be exposed to this much diversity.

So yeah, you're exposed to all sorts of things, but the thing you're mainly exposed to is the beauty of the Imago Dei. You see who people are, you see where they're coming from. There's so many ethnicities, so many stories.

One of the things that made New York unique as opposed to other cities, other city subway systems, you paid for how far you went. So the trains cost more to go to nicer neighborhoods, but New York had the same rate. So you could go to any neighborhood for the same fare. And that's what brings about so much of the city's diversity.

So it's just a beautiful encounter with human need, human beauty, human brokenness. And what you're encountering more than anything is the heart of God for people. When people come visit us, they often say, "I can't go a block without feeling the need." And that is the gift of New York. You cannot hide from the brokenness and the beauty of what people experience here. That's what makes it so rich.

Annie: It changed as it got cold.

Jon: Yes, sure.

Annie: Because all these people who live outside or spend a lot of time outside started paying their \$2 to be in the subway all day. So I just started experiencing in the late fall and winter a different view of the subway, a different experience where you just kind of go, "Oh, I'm a little bit afraid sometimes."

Jon: Yeah, sure.

Annie: But I try to say, you are safe. You're fine. He or she is not going to do anything to you. This is just scary because it's unknown.

Jon: I think I looked yesterday. I think for four million people riding the subways every day, there are six felonies.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jon: It's statistically impossible, almost impossible, that something's going to happen to you. So you do feel that. There's definitely a sense of anxiety. If you've been on a train alone at night or very early in the morning, you do. You feel vulnerable at times.

Annie: Yeah, it's really interesting. But you're right. It's beautiful. It is one of my favorite things. Because then also, in my strengths, connectivity is really high. So I think everything means everything. Nothing means nothing.

Jon: I am the same way. Like, the Freddie Beaton has got, you know, life itself, all moments are sacred moments, life itself is grace. I feel that.

Annie: 100%, yeah. I'm like, everyone's on this subway car for a reason at the same time for a reason. So I think, what am I supposed to know? What am I supposed to know? So I'm the most annoying-

Jon: Have you ever seen... it's a little bit dated now, but if you watch it, you'd probably cry. It's a thing called the Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows.

Annie: No.

Jon: And they basically invent words for the human experience that we don't have. And sonder is one of the words they have, which is somebody else being a background part in your own story while having their own meaningful existence. They make these four-minute videos. So good. The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows. Look it up on YouTube.

Annie: I will.

Jon: It's your life.

Annie: That's it. Yeah, that's it. So every time I'm on the subway, I'm like, why are we all in the same car? Why would the Lord see fit for us all to be?

Jon: Are you a Calvinist?

Annie: Here's a good quiz. Calvinists believe that everything happens for a reason. I don't know that I'm a Calvinist, particularly when it comes to salvation and all that. Tulip is challenging for me. I used to call it lilac because I didn't know. I was like, five-letter flower. But I do certainly think nothing is coincidental.

Jon: You're an existential Calvinist.

Annie: Yeah, probably, maybe. That feels true. Is that okay? Can I also be charismatic?

Jon: I mean, if you want.

Annie: Okay. Can I be all those things?

Jon: God's everywhere, moving in power for a reason. That sounds like New Testament Christianity.

Annie: In the fall, when I told you, this is a quiz for you, when I told you in the fall that I was coming back next year, you said, "Of course you are. I knew you would."

Jon: Yes.

Annie: How'd you know?

Jon: The kind of person you are is the kind of person that should be in New York. New York is only a certain subtype of personalities. So your level of vision, your personality type, the way you interact with people, the call of God on your life, at some point you are destined for a tour of duty in New York.

Annie: Okay. I think so too.

Jon: And here we are.

Annie: Here we are.

Jon: Here we are in the upper west side.

Annie: Here we are. Here we are with me living on a new budget. Things are very different because I got to maintain... which the Lord has made... I mean, it's amazing when you shuffle things around how... I mean, I just went to my business manager and I was like, can we?

Jon: Make it work.

Annie: Yeah, it is, it is mind-blowing to me. And then you were like, yeah, I know. I was like, The pastor knew.

Jon: It wasn't special revelation. I wish I could say I was in a deep and necessary press. It was like, a person like you... By the way, New York is filled with people like you. And that's what makes New York so great. That's why I love pastoring here. You meet the most fascinating, interesting, driven, in the best sense of that word, people with ungodly ambition and also godly ambition, who are working on living lives of genuine significance. That's not defined by accomplishment necessarily. It's some deep internal motivation to leverage the calling of God in their life. And people like you do very well here.

Annie: We'll see. Thank you. When Audrey and Elizabeth were on a couple of months ago, we were talking about their poetry book, and I asked both of them, or their liturgies, I asked both of them, why did you move here? And they're both like, "I had a dream, da-da-da-da." And Nashville is built that way, too.

Jon: 100%.

Annie: Which is really interesting. They're both an ice cream shop, but you're getting two different flavors.

Jon: I totally agree. I lived in Nashville. I lived in Franklin, Tennessee. Both my kids were born there. So watching what's become of Nashville is amazing. The amount of people that leave New York City to move to Franklin, Nashville, the surrounding area is incredible now.

Because Nashville in many ways embodies many of those characteristics with probably... Maybe not. Nashville's very expensive. But maybe with a similar sort of level of vision as a city, a sense of sort of destiny and purpose that's there. I was there in the year 2000. Seeing it now is unrecognizable, but I love it. I love it. It's beautiful.

Annie: I'm grateful for both. I don't know how long the Lord... I don't know what He's doing. Everybody's like, so what happens? I'm like, I can tell you 2024, because I can tell you how long I'm paying rent. I know this year. That is all I need to know right now. But I'm so curious. My connectivity and my curiosity is so high. I feel like I'm living a movie and watching a movie at the same time.

Jon: Yeah, honestly, I feel like that every day. I woke up this morning and literally thought... I'm in the prayer room this morning, I'm just standing outside on 57th Street going, how did I get here? I'm from another country. I had a dream as a teenager. God, open a door. I moved here not knowing this would work, not knowing that when I got here that these would be my people.

New York's the first place I've ever lived where I have felt like I don't have to pretend to be someone else. The first time I came here I was like, "This is who I am. Whatever this dysfunction is, I got this too." I think, you know, maybe the reason what we're doing connects here in the city is people say, I think that he's got the same funk in his soul, but he's paid attention to that and there's some redemption in that. And I need that too. So anyway, it's a great, great scene.

Annie: I mean, the interesting thing is Taylor Swift sings about it in her song, New York, too. It's not everything that we would sing, but it is... the spirit is when you go there, just be you. And you will find your crew, and you will find your people, and

you will. And we are just hoping as believers here... I mean, I haven't told you this yet, but I mean, I've got like two people I pray for in this city that are celebrities, and I'm like, "Oh, I'm just waiting to end up in the same coffee shop, because I think they're in my bucket. And I'm like, that would only happen here. I'm like, No, we're built the same. You just don't know Jesus yet. You've even got some anointing on you to lead people to Him. You've got Pied Piper in you. You just need to figure out who it's about. So I'm just waiting.

Jon: I've been on the train, looked next to me, and there was Scarlett Johansson. I've been at a coffee shop, I'm like, Oh, it's Keanu Reeves. The rule in New York is you don't approach people and ask for a photo, but they're very friendly.

Annie: Yeah. I think when, particularly with these two that I pray for, I think it's going to be like, Hey, have you met so-and-so? And then someone introduced it, and then I go, Ha-ha, not in the natural.

Jon: To tell you the truth, is Cardi B one of them?

Annie: No. Wouldn't that be fun, though? No, it's two dudes.

Jon: Okay, gotcha.

Annie: It's two dudes. Okay, so speaking of dudes, you and our bro, Jeff Bethke, Fighting Shadows book that comes out tomorrow, you are doing really interesting work in the world of forming men.

Jon: That is correct.

Annie: So I want to back up to the winter. Also, if I take this in a direction you hate, just tell me.

Jon: Okay. No worries.

Annie: In the winter, I was at IF:Gathering, 13,000 women. And I'm on stage hosting it and I am thinking, Why aren't men doing this? I go to conferences. I could go to a conference every weekend for women. That doesn't exist for men like this. Why? Is it a personality thing? Is it a gender thing? Or is there a bigger story here about what's happening in the faith world with men and women?

Jon: Number one, I love the IF:Gathering. I mean, how amazing is that?

Annie: It's amazing.

Jon: I think there is a deeper story. We used to do these rallies that were called Promise Keepers. I don't know if you remember about it. These were stadiums full of men making their seven promises. If you go back and look at the seven core promises, they're actually quite strong. You would read it and say, yes, if men kept these promises, we would be dealing with a different society.

And I think men have not kept those promises. I passed many kids who grew up in the homes of Promise Keepers and they do not... I mean, I'm sure they're out there and I have a small sample size. But I definitely meet people who are like, That did not play a formative role in how I was raised.

So I think part of it is spiritual war, which means I think Satan is opposed to men becoming like Jesus. Part of it is cultural. We've had so many shifts. There's pushback on the patriarchy. We've had a whole series of reckonings about men acting badly, men who can't be trusted with women, men without character, that a room, honestly, of 14,000 men saying, "Let's be men" kind of has felt inappropriate in our cultural moment.

Annie: Interesting.

Jon: I don't feel like there's been permission. I think men wrestle with a lot of shame. There's been a lot of changes in our world today, even in terms of employment, sociology, understandings of gender. I think a lot of men lack confidence to be who God's made them to be.

Now, I want to just be very, very clear here. I do not have a poor men mentality at all. But there are these other things where men are just sort of like keeping their heads down, trying to get their act together, dealing with a bunch of internal struggles. And many of them don't feel like they have the confidence to sort of lead out like that. So yeah, it's multifaceted, but I don't know of many gatherings like that either.

Annie: It's been interesting to watch as an unmarried woman for the last... I've been unmarried for 43 years, but I've particularly paid attention for the last 20. But it's been really interesting and frustrating, not at men, but on behalf of, of going like, it feels like they don't get as... that men don't get as many opportunities to grow. It feels like there are times in church where women have flown past men in spiritual growth.

Jon: I think that could be true. I mean, our church is predominantly women here in New York. We're about to do another church survey. It's at least 65, 70%. I think that's probably true in many places. New York is also a city that is empowering of women. I mean, this is a place where women can do well if they want to.

I mean, I want to qualify that, but I think you get the heart of what I'm talking about. This is a place that values women making a contribution. I think, again, a lot of the shame we've had, most of the scandals in church, the celebrity scandals, have been men behaving badly. I think the women have sort of risen up, and they've just said, Listen, if you can't do it, we'll take it from here. And there's so much to celebrate about that. But yeah, it feels like women are doing well in church.

Annie: Is it because we're later to leading and so we're a decade behind or two decades behind or is it that... I have two theories about this.

Jon: Okay.

Annie: We haven't screwed up publicly because we haven't had as long of leadership. So just give us time and we will catch up is one of my concerns. My other concern is when men burn out they blow up like a firework show when women burn out, they're the end of a campfire.

Jon: There you do.

Annie: And we just don't see them anymore. You go, "Wait, she hasn't put a book out in like six years." And then you look and she doesn't do anything anymore. She's changed and she's just fizzled away versus having... Do you see one of those as the reason that the problem has been more that men have publicly misbehaved in the church?

Jon: Yeah. I mean, and I also think Gen Z just is not interested in the traditional sort of masculine roles that have been celebrated in other generations. Just in general. You know, like the alpha male who's up there with all the answers holding it all together. There's been so much disillusionment with leadership.

I don't think there's been a denomination that is untouched by public scandal. I was reflecting on one of the leaders who used to lead the National Association of Evangelicals, who was raging against gay marriage while he was paying to see a gay escort. I mean, I think we're just so sick of things like this, that we're like, can we get off the leadership train for a minute and just be disciples? Can we get off the fixing things and holding conferences and just trying to work on becoming like Jesus with integrity?

I think maybe that's a part of it. And I do think there hasn't been a ton of theological space for women to get into leadership. That is definitely, in other parts of the world it's like that. Almost normalized. I think here in the West, it's been a little later to the table. So I don't think women will blow up the same way. I don't think

they approach ministry with the... you know, I don't think you can map the same dynamics exactly onto one another. But yeah, I think a lot of guys have got their heads down, some out of shame, some out of fear. And a lot of them are just like, listen, here's the number one thing I'm trying to be, like Jesus, faithful in my everyday life. And if I ever get my act together, maybe I'll put my head up and try and lead again.

So these are challenging times for everybody trying to follow Jesus in a secular culture. Then men, because of the changes in culture and the challenges that they've faced and sin and shame and all of that sort of stuff, seem to be doing disproportionately badly.

I never planned to be like a men's ministry guy. It sort of came into my life. I had disciplined my son. I did a thing called the Primal Path, read a book called *The Intentional Father*. And I met so many dads who would say to me, Do you have a thing for men? Nobody did this for me. Nobody disciplined me. I didn't have like a rite of passage. There was no marking moment. I sort of initiated myself and I've struggled through life going from one mistake to the next. Do you have anything for men?

That was basically what made Jefferson and I launch *Forming Men*. And we looked around. There's some beautiful legacy ministries out there that have done a great job. But it felt like we needed something fresh that probably understood next generation, was a little more tuned in the next generation dynamics, that sort of stuff. So we just sort of leaned into it.

And can I be honest with you? I don't know if there's any area in my life that's had more momentum than this.

Annie: Really?

Jon: This and *Pray For Revival* are like two of the great things.

Annie: Is it men coming to you or is it women pushing men to you?

Jon: You know, we do these really amazing retreats, four-day retreats, getting to the hardest stuff men don't want to talk about. And I would say 50% of those men show up and say, "I have no idea who you are. I have no idea what this is My wife sent me." I kid you not on those statistics.

Annie: I bet.

Jon: So you touched on an interesting point, which is women pushing men to be formed into proper men.

Annie: Literally one of my questions is about this. Yes.

Jon: Yeah. Our church, the number one thing I think we'd hear from women in our church who want to get married would be, where are the men? And it definitely feels like women are doing better than men in terms of discipleship, in terms of spiritual formation, and in terms of dealing with their sin. There's a lot of men just shrinking back in fear, shame, and hiding, looking for a way forward.

So we really want to empower men to reach their redemptive potential, to believe Jesus is the best man who's ever lived. And if the world was filled with men like Jesus, the world would look more like the kingdom of heaven. So that's what we're trying to do.

Annie: I also saw a video of a men's small group at your church that you were leading, and I was like, "That's a lot of single guys." I was like, Uh, that's a big group. I don't see that in Nashville. So they're coming.

Jon: If you want to come and lead a press service, you'd be welcome.

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

[00:23:32] <music>

Sponsor: Hi friends! Just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Earth Breeze](#). Y'all, Earth Breeze has been a game-changer for me. Speaking of New York, it is so helpful. If you're looking for an easy way to pack your laundry detergent as you travel this summer, this is it.

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Sponsor: And another amazing partner I get to tell you about, ZocDoc. Okay, let's be real. We all have those moments when we just want to indulge a little, whether it's a foot massage or a fancy coffee or a tea or splurging on that extra leg room while you're traveling because, well, why not?

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Okay, now back to our conversation with Pastor Jon.

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Annie: I think it's really interesting because one of the things I observe, and it is purely an observation, is watching my male married friends and my female married friends and how often it feels like she is having to encourage him to do a thing in faith. Was that true 1,000 years ago? Was that true 50 years ago? Is this Genesis 1 or is this 2020s?

Jon: Oh, I think honestly it would be a combination of sociological and spiritual. I mean, theologically...

Annie: Genesis 3, sorry.

Jon: Yeah, yeah. I knew it.

Annie: You were coming.

Jon: I think it's a combination of both. So part of the confusion, I think a lot of men... we definitely address this in the book. We talk about apathy. We talk about shame. We talk about futility. We live in a time where many traditional men's roles are gone. Many of the things that men used to do in a society, those jobs are just gone, whether through automation, through deconstruction, through progress, whatever it is, and a lot of men sort of feel lost with what to do with their strength and their gift as men. There's a hesitancy on how to activate with it.

I feel like in some sense, many men may feel sort of like, damned if I do, damned if I don't. If I do lead, people are going to say, you're the patriarchy. And if I don't lead, they're going to say, why don't you step up and be a man? And they sort of feel torn about how to respond in between.

So I think that hesitancy is challenging because they don't feel welcome to... they feel hesitant to embrace the criticism of expressing that in life. Again, I don't necessarily think that. I'm not bemoaning societal changes, longing for some idealist past where we get back to traditional gender roles. But we do need to acknowledge that I think a lot of men feel stuck in these places.

So what I'm trying to do is sort of break out of that funk and get men to have a vision of becoming like Jesus in the kingdom of God. My conviction, Jesus is the greatest man who's ever lived. And Jesus just knew how to do the right thing at the right time.

So if you can get a man to break off the orphan spirit, which says no one's coming for me, no one cares about me, I've got to rely on myself, get the spirit of adoption to be the truest sense of who he is, root his identity in a relationship with his father, so he's tuned into a source beyond any cultural changes or any personal concerns, and then call him to live a life of sacrificial mission for others, he's going to be able to break out of the cultural milieu with a kingdom vision that transcends our cultural moment.

That's where we put all of our energy. It's like, how do you produce holy ambition and not just tell a man to have ambition when he doesn't have any? How instead of telling a man, you know, like, don't sin, we try and give him a vision of like, here's what it's like to bear the fruit of the Spirit. Seek first the kingdom of God, build your life.

So our emphasis is more proactive. We basically believe God formed men. He says He created the man, He breathed in his nostrils. He spoke creation, but He formed

the man. This is God with dirt on His hands. Intimate. Breathes in. Man becomes a living being. Then men are distorted by fall, the sin, our culture. And we believe Jesus is in the process of reforming men into His image.

So ours is really spiritual formation towards the image of Jesus rather than recovering cultural values or anything like that. Maybe other people want to do that, that's just not what I'm after. The more you can find men who are proactive like Jesus, can weep like Jesus, serve like Jesus, throw tables over when it's appropriate like Jesus, and die for others like Jesus, that's when we feel like we're living the ministry God's called us to.

Annie: Do you get pushback for being patriarchal when you're talking about this?

Jon: I mean, I'm an egalitarian theologically. I have women elders and my teaching pastor is a woman, so I don't.

Annie: And they're good, too.

Jon: Yeah, it's true. I mean, my theological take is what I would describe as complementarity without hierarchy. I believe that men and women possess distinct characteristics that function almost like God made them to work together. So that is my basic take. I think the church does best when it's led by fathers and mothers. And I don't want women in the room trying to act like men and prove they can handle it and lead. And I don't want men acting genderless, like the only thing that matters is the fruit of the Spirit.

I believe men and women coming together, playing both hands, is a stronger hand than on their own. And I honestly believe that with many of the failures we've had with Christian men, if their wives were in the room or there was women in the room, they would just say, You can't talk to people like that. This is completely inappropriate.

I think one of the roles of gender is to release and restrain the gifts of the other gender. So if you have 10 men in a room, they'll all act a certain way. One woman comes in the room, it changes everything.

Annie: I know. I dealt with this with my Vandy boys that I was raising up when they were finishing college. When I showed up, I was like, I know I change things. Not only am I old, but I'm also a girl.

Jon: So I believe you need distinct spaces. That's why the IF:Gathering's thriving. That's why I think there's so much traction on what some men's ministries are doing. You need spaces to process your stuff in total freedom and safety. But then you also

need to interact in a way that you're bringing the best of what you have. So do I get called patriarchal? Not by anybody who knows me.

Annie: I've never heard anybody say that. You said it, and I was like, I wonder if Jon ever deals with that. It feels like if somebody wanted to say that, all they have to do is do one click and see Susie Silk, and one click and see how the church runs and what you say, and it would not be true. History makes it hard — recent history, not the world's history. Maybe longer — makes it hard to feel sorry for men because bad leadership has been so predominant in so many spaces, right?

But I also feel myself so tender toward my peers who have that... I've never heard it described like that, that like, if we walk in our strength, we are accused of this. If we don't walk in our strength, we're accused of this. It feels like it is challenging to walk in your calling.

Jon: Yeah, I think people feel paralyzed. But again, that's why we try and put most of our emphasis on being like Jesus. And by the way, there is a lot of godly men just holding it down, living beautiful lives.

Annie: Yeah, we just don't know them because they're doing it right.

Jon: That's right. We get punished by the sins of the public few. And the public few don't represent the vast majority, I think, of how people interact. There's so much research on human behavior at this point in history. You basically realize a tiny percentage of people are responsible for the majority of the damage, but those tiny percentage of people are the ones that tend to want, generate, and acquire power and attention. So it doesn't sort of represent everybody, but the reputation sort of sticks.

Annie: Yeah, it's fascinating. Some friends and I were sitting around at lunch after church on Sunday, and we were talking about how we haven't seen anybody older than us retire well publicly. And what came up at the table is, well, we are just getting to where public Christians who have had a public space and public life are retiring. Because before the 60, 70-year-olds, they weren't public people.

Jon: You know, it's very, very interesting. Someone was talking to me about Tim Keller's influence here in New York, and I was like, He grew up without social media. He grew up formed by faithfulness and pastoring. He was a little bit of a rock star in the PCA. He probably had a good tape ministry, but there was no Twitter. There's no people arguing, saying like, we're sick of your third-way approach. Like that just didn't exist. So he was just living his life faithfully without scandal.

We'll never have a generation of people like that again. Those days are over of being formed faithfully and private. There is a lot of pressure. And I think some of it can be a gift. You do not want to let people down in a godly way. I feel a tremendous Godly burden.

Listen, I'm just trying to serve Jesus, I'm trying to be faithful to God's calling in my life, but I definitely feel... I've had younger pastors pull me aside and say, "Jon, please don't screw this up, man."

Annie: I know.

Jon: "Please don't go progressive. Please stay faithful to the gospel. Please do not fail. Please just finish well. Because if you can do this in the middle of Manhattan, there's hope for me, I can do it where I am." And I don't feel ungodly pressure, but I do feel a sober responsibility.

When I get together with my pastor friends, we literally are saying, How do we just get to the end and honor Jesus? I'm not afraid of being challenged. I'm not afraid of people attacking me. This comes with being a Christian. But I do not want to dishonor Jesus because my influence is greater than my character, and I collapse under the weight.

Annie: Oh, listen.

Jon: These are heavy days. Yeah.

Annie: I think that's what we will see as we see the T.D. Jakes when he decides to retire. What we saw in Keller, these men and women like Beth Moore, Kay Arthur did this really well. There are some who are getting to where in the next decade they will finish well publicly. We're just right behind them.

I feel the same way, Jon. I mean, I have a counselor. I have a mentor. I have a spiritual director. I have about eight of y'all who can call me and say just about anything because I'm like, Maybe one of my top three things I have to do with my life is finish well. I mean, I quit drinking this year. I mean, I'm just like, I can't have... I didn't have a drinking problem. I just started being like, I can't have anything.

Jon: The stakes get higher.

Annie: The stakes feel higher. It may be New York's fault, but the stakes feel higher for me than they ever have.

Jon: Again, the goal of a pastor, and I'm just speaking for myself, is to cultivate love for Jesus in people. That's what Eugene Peterson said. And then to make the bride beautiful. I am preparing people to meet Jesus, getting ready for the marriage supper of the Lamb. I do not want to make the bride deconstruct their faith, hate Jesus, add to the scale and all the rest of it.

This is not pointed at what anybody else has done. To me, walk with Jesus. I'm preaching to myself. Be humble. Rely on the Holy Spirit's help. Have integrity. Confess your sins. Talk to people when you need to. So I think if we normalize conversations like that, we're going to go a long way.

I think one of the gifts, maybe, of social media is it can lower the platform where people can call you out. They can respond to you. I always receive feedback. I've got pretty thick skin. I've been here 19 years. Sometimes it still hurts a little bit. But for the most part, I'm like, hey, I could have a blind spot there. I want to receive that.

Annie: I do not have thick skin. Working on it. The Lord's letting me practice. It's not going.

Jon: Well, it's hard, man.

Annie: It's tough, man. I just want everybody to like me. I want to be Miss Congeniality. It does not always work that way. I think John Mark and I talked about this, Christine Caine and I talked about this. Your 60s or your decade where you are the most impactful, 70s are next, 50s are next. So you and I are walking toward our top three.

Jon: The glorious 40s.

Annie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I have been saying to people, for men and for women, I've got about six years to be ready. I'm doing important work now, but we're about to run for the next 30 hopefully. That's my goal. I'm trying to be 100.

Jon: Okay, I got you.

Annie: I got a long way to go. So tell me, for men, what could men put in place right now in their 40s, 30s, 20s that is going to help them finish well, that's going to get them to wear their body, soul, and spirit healthy in their 50s, 60s, 70s, as much as they can control?

Jon: I mean, there's definitely a decade-by-decade thing. I think most of the sort of psychological research I've looked at probably is... So, number one, listen, get the

fundamentals right, man. Get a biblical theology and practice of money. Learn to be a generous person. Start saving for retirement. Give in secret.

Annie: Be gospel patrons.

Jon: Yeah. Don't buy dumb stuff. All those things. You're laying a foundation for who you'll be in the future. Have a long view, look through the lens of formation, not just action. Who am I becoming over time? Most people do things. I don't know if I've done many things right in my life, but one thing I think I have gotten right is I'm always playing the long game, you know, which is like, I'm not just worried about the next three years, I'm asking what impact will these decisions have when I'm 60? My son's about to get married this summer, what sort of grandfather will I be? How do I build multi-generational blessing?

I did talk to one of my mentors, he said... he did a whole study of old age, 60s, 70s, and he says your worst trait gets exasperated in old age rather than reduced. So if you're a little snotty in your 40s, you're going to be mean in your 60s. He said to me, in your 40s, man, you've got to find those traits that could make you a cartoon of yourself, a caricature of yourself. And you've got to lean into those now.

All that to say, I think the biggest thing that I've spent my time working on is sort of midlife stuff right now. Do you have a theology of midlife?

Annie: I've read the fire book.

Jon: Okay, here's my point.

Annie: No, I don't.

Jon: Nobody talks about what midlife is doing in ministry. A lot of people who are blowing up their lives are having midlife crises without a theology to process it.

Annie: How do we make one? Teach me. Go!

Jon: So they're basically... and a lot of this is sort of Jung and James Hollis' stuff. But he basically says there's two adulthoods. The first adulthood happens in your early 20s, and he says that's defined by heroic thinking. And you basically say, I can't believe you previous generations, how could you screw the planet up like this? How could you possess guns like this? It's like looking at all the flaws and saying, if I had power, I wouldn't be like this. And it's sort of activist. A lot of it's actually naive. It doesn't take into account the complexities of life or human nature.

But it's the zeal that reforms, and it's the energy for accomplishment. So we go through our lives, if my parents had a bad marriage, I'm going to have a good marriage. I'm not going to, you know...

Annie: Reactive.

Jon: And inspirational. And then somewhere in your mid to late 30s, you're like, gosh, it's really hard to get life right.

Annie: It's hard being a person. I say that a lot.

Jon: It's hard being a person. So yeah, man, relationships are harder than I thought. Leadership is more complicated than I thought. So many more things are out of my control than I was aware of. That is what initiates you into that midlife passage. That should feel like a teenage crisis. Your late 30s to mid-40s, sometimes it's earlier or later, should feel like a second adolescence. Because what it's forming you into is your second adulthood. The second adulthood is based on two things, meaning and wonder. You stop trying to accomplish because you have a realistic sense of who you are. You accept your gifts, personality, limitations, and you say, I can't sustain the life I'm pretending to live. I accept who I am, and now I'm going to live authentically.

Then secondly, you've had the crap beaten out of you. And so you're like, I need to get wonder back. I need to just get some joy up in this place. So you shift from accomplishment and recognition to meaning and wonder. And I got to tell you, the first half of my life, the first adulthood brought me to New York, and it was challenging. The second adulthood is keeping me here, and I'm loving it. Because I'm just confident in who God's made me to be, but I've never been more dependent on the Holy Spirit. And I'm not trying to do anything.

When you look at the life of Jesus, which would really free all of us, He had a three-year ministry.

Annie: Three years.

Jon: He says in John 17, "I finished the work He gave me to do, which was really about getting a bunch of teenage fishermen and saying, "You guys good? And the answer is "not really because anyway, I trust you. Here's my spirit. I'm out." And he says, that's it. That's enough to be the Messiah of the world. So, very freeing. I just asked the Lord, what's the work you've got for me? How do I do this with a sense of wonder and gratitude? And if it bears remarkable fruit, great. And if not, the gift of gratitude is enough.

So anyway, that's the second half of life. And I think if you don't learn that middle passage properly, and you try and redo the first adulthood, which is about accomplishment, drive, and all that sort of stuff, you will have a very hard second half of life. You'll burn out. You won't sustain it. You'll be a cartoon. This is the cliché. It's a 50-year-old man getting a Corvette and a new wife. He just wants to recapture his youth. You can't. It's gone.

So accept who you are now. Live authentically. Let life tell you what it requires of you, which is Viktor Frankl's big gift. Don't ask, what do I want from life? Slow down and ask, what is life asking of me? Live faithfully with that assignment, and that's where the meaning lies.

[00:43:52] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation one more time to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Shopify](#). When I started podcasting 10 years ago, the idea of running an online store seemed like a distant dream that I could not even imagine. But thanks to Shopify, we get to bring you all kinds of fun merch at [shopanniefdowns.com](#) and great resources to go along with what we talk about on the show. And Shopify makes it so easy.

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And now back to finish up our conversation with Pastor Jon.

[00:45:17] <music>

Annie: We just did a survey of the people listening to this, and we overwhelmingly work full-time, part-time. I'm talking like... I think it's something like 80-something percent of the friends listening right now are working out of the home. People who

are at home are working too. But I'm telling you, the wild amount, so much more than we thought, are in the workplace, men and women.

And so when you're saying this, this midlife thing leading toward our second adulthood, does that mean we have to stay in the career we're in? Is it settle into the career you're in and be best at it? Or can there still be career shifts where we're going, for men and for women? Can there still be career shifts?

Jon: That's often when people make career shifts. This is the person who's like, hey, my parents told me I had to be a doctor. I went to Harvard Medical School. I hate my life. And I just don't want to do this anymore. One of the things James Hollis says is that you have a meeting with your true self that is long overdue. And your true self refuses to wait any longer. And that's when you're confronted with who you actually are. And that's the quest for meaning, not accomplishment.

Now, if you're not a Christian, this can go south. This is when people leave their spouse. I never loved you. I want to be free, you know.

Annie: Blow all their money, gamble it.

Jon: That's exactly right. But as a Christian, this is when you say, Wow, how freeing to do the Father's will and not human's will, to break the fear of people's opinions of me, and to lean into a divine call, to have an upward call and not just a vision of horizontal success. These, I think, are very, very free things.

So people often do midlife evaluations. And I think we should be very merciful to people who make midlife changes, because it actually takes a lot of courage when you are buried under obligation, bills, and responsibility to say, "The heart's not done yet. There's more. God has more for me, and I'm willing to risk everything to go and do it." You're often misunderstood, you're often judged, you're often called naive. People mock the midlife crisis. And I tell you, no one who's had one mocks it. You will be empathetic, you'll be merciful, and hopefully you'll come out a person more like Jesus.

Annie: When I'm thinking about that happening in men's lives, we're going to make a shift, we're going to do whatever, what is the role of the woman standing next to him? If she doesn't feel that yet, if she's working too, she doesn't feel like she wants to quit her job, but he wants to quit his job and go to do his thing.

Jon: Well, part of it at this point, if they're married, assuming they're married, you're going to have covenantal responsibilities where you don't have an unlimited horizon. The older you get, the more options disappear, and that's why meaning becomes important.

Annie: It's interesting, ain't it?

Jon: So you don't have the same energy. You can't jump back and get another degree real quick. You're coming to terms with the limitations that you actually have.

So you can't abandon your responsibilities, but you can move in healthy ways. I think the most important thing is to talk about it. You know, it's to say, hey, these things are stirring in my heart. And then you're going to have to negotiate it because that's going to happen in her heart too. So this is a partnership where you're responding and respecting each other's cause.

Like my wife has been amazing. Oh my gosh, she is a... This remarkable woman. She said yes to every crazy idea I've ever had. But now she's in school, and she's going back, and I'm having to flex my schedule around her. And this is just like, I want to support her. I want her to thrive. I want her to do everything that's in her heart. But that's a conversation we're having. Hey, is it graduate school next? What's after that? Oh, you're going to have to do a thousand hours of counseling in order to get certification. Hey, I'm working 70 hours a week with all the stuff I'm doing, empty nester, not when the kids are at home. How do I make this work?

So that's just a negotiation and doing that in partnership. But the beauty of living in a time like ours is there are so many opportunities to serve God in creative, vocational ways. You should explore it.

Annie: One of the joys about all of y'all being empty nesters is suddenly all my friends are back. It's like, Hey, I've been here this whole time for 18 years. Y'all were busy, but now y'all are ready to hang again. It is a kind of wild. I mean, I have a kind of freedom.

Annie: It's been interesting to watch.

Jon: We got married young. We had kids right away. I think I was an empty nester at 44.

Annie: You were, because it shocked me when you told me that when I was 42, and I was like, Weird.

Jon: I mean, but there's many things I miss. I mean, there's the sadness-

Annie: Sure, sure, sure.

Jon: Anyway, it's good stuff.

Annie: It's really fun. There's a lot. I mean, just about the majority of my friends who had kids when I thought I was going to have kids and got married when I thought I was going to get married are getting to the end of having kids at home. And so they're like, do you want to go to a movie? I'm like, "You're available for a movie again? This is like our 20s. This is great." It's a part of this you don't know is coming as the single person.

Okay, we've started a new community called Single Purpose League and we are really talking to singles about like, what is your purpose while you're single, and what is your single purpose? So we are digging in on that this year. I don't know how long this goes, but for this year, we're for sure doing it. We've got about 2,000 people who've joined.

Jon: Wow.

Annie: And they are all believers wanting to know why they are here in this particular season. So talk for a second to single women and some single men, but mostly women who are going... like me. I mean, talk to me like, I'm looking for the guy who is living in his purpose and who's in his second. I mean, I'm 43. I'm not looking for a 28-year-old who's starting his life. You know, that's why that five o'clock service doesn't serve me because they're children.

Talk to us about what we're looking for. What is my role in the formation of the men around me? Do I have a role or no?

Jon: I mean, so number one, I just want to say, there's probably some very, very real frustrations about being single. And I have the majority of our church is single. And there's a lot of folks who are like, can be disillusioned. Lord, I've tried to honor you. I've tried to serve you. This is a desire of my heart. Your word's not working. I'm seeking your kingdom.

So I think it can be a lot of frustration that just requires care. And I think the church often only celebrates married people's stuff. Congratulations on your anniversary. Wow. Children's dedications. I think a lot of single folks can sit in church and be like, I've actually got a little career over here. Things are going well.

So I think the church has an obligation to basically care and include single folks and view them as people rather than just like those waiting to not be single. Even if people feel like you've got to honor sort of the humanity. I think that, number one, you've got to use this time as a time of formation.

I think we all know this now, and I certainly can testify this as a pastor. I think one of the only things that's worse than being lonely in your singleness is being lonely

in a marriage because you married the wrong person out of frustration or desperation.

Annie: I'm uninterested in that.

Jon: I mean, man, I just want to weep. I think of so many people in our church who have got into relationships that have damaged them, hurt them, hurt their hearts, hurt one another. It can sound callous, but I'm like, but trust me, you do not want... don't do that. Like just wrestle with where you are. Use that as a time of preparation and formation.

You know, I'm a big believer... Obviously, John Mark's a good friend of mine. But who you become by what you do is the most important part of your life. Our ultimate destiny is not human marriage. Our ultimate destiny is marriage to Christ. I've been saying in my sermons lately, it's not that there's no marriage in heaven, there's just one marriage. It's us and Christ. That's the great celebration.

So ultimately, all singleness, marriage, whatever, it is preparation and formation into the image of Jesus for that. And getting our eyes on that, am I becoming more like Jesus? How can this season form me disproportionately? How do I examine my true desires? How do I live with sexual tension and sexual energy and have that as a life-giving Eros rather than a destructive Eros? How do I leverage my time to love and serve other people if I do have more of it?

There are many people here in New York, single people. The assumption is, well, you're single, you don't have time. You've got time. Many people have no time who are single. So, I think that's a part of it. Leveraging your work while you can, getting a theology of vocation, and then being the church, married or single, loving one another as disciples, celebrating each other's wins, weeping when our hearts are broken, walking together through the challenges of life.

Being in community together, I think that's the most important part. So yes, women play a role in men's formation and men play a role in women's formation. It's calling each other to accountability, use our gifts, find our cause, serve the poor, love one another, enjoy life. So I think, yeah, there's a huge purpose in that season, but it is a challenging season.

Annie: I think it's interesting because a summary I'm hearing from you, correct me if I'm wrong, is for Annie, one of the best ways I can help the men and women around me form, but if I'm thinking about the men, one of the best ways I can help them form into who they're meant to be is to pursue forming whom I'm meant to be. And we all just kind of rising tide stuff, where if I'm living like that in front of them. Because I notice the men in my life who I see their prayer life increasing, because I

see them at the prayer room in Nashville, or I see them at the prayer room here more, I'm like, Oh, they're pursuing God. I should. Or if I hear... you know, and so. Pulling each other up?

Jon: Yeah, absolutely. I want to say something. I mean, this could be weaponized if it was taken out of context.

Annie: We will not clip this.

Jon: I want to say this. I think when a man hears from women in a church, we need you to level up. We need you. Come on. Let's go. We need you. We need you at your best," something happens in a man's heart. That kind of call.

You know, in the stuff we're talking about in this book, a lot of it, we talk basically about archetypes. We basically say in every man's heart, there's something you've got to kill that's sinful. And there's something hiding that's cowardly that's got to be summoned to greatness. And isn't that Jesus' invitation? A summoning to greatness. Kill the flesh, rise in the spirit, live as a full-hearted man.

Women play a very important role, so do men, of calling men to their full redemptive potential. And so even letting a man know, I expect more from you. I need you to level up. Listen, if my wife says to me... like my wife is a Jedi master of motivating me. She has two phrases I cannot resist. Number one is, I believe you can solve this problem. I married a man who can solve problems. You can solve this problem. And I'm like, yes, I can solve this problem.

The other one is, this is her playful one, my favorite tweet, I'm not on Twitter anymore, I don't even know how to use it as X, but my favorite tweet I ever sent was, it's 12:41 and I am in Times Square at a Duane Reade buying my wife a snack. #shebelievesinme. And my wife says to me, I believe in you. She believes in me. This woman believes in me, so I'm going to go do this crazy thing.

Men require motivation to act when they feel summoned to something. Part of the problem is a lot of men don't feel like there's any great cause to give themselves to in the world. All their energy is getting discharged in fantasy worlds. So that gift of godly aggression, this is the Proverbs 31 man, which no one talks about. This is a key passage for men in the Bible. Do not give your strength to women, your vigor to those who ruin kings.

So what do you do with it? A man's energy is to speak up for the poor and the oppressed, to use your voice and your power for the sake of others. And this is a critique of Solomon, who has married foreign wives against the will of God and has built monuments, squandering his resources and idolatry instead of serving the poor

with his strength. So yeah, I think men need to be summoned out of the trivial into the consequential, and women play a really important role in that.

Annie: Consider this a megaphone. Let's go. We need dudes. I mean, that's great. Okay, is there anything we didn't say you want to say?

Jon: No, but just thank you for what you do. I mean, your level of consideration. What I really am grateful about you, whatever you're walking through, doesn't matter, stage of life, theological question, issue, opportunity, you create a community of people where you say, let's take a journey to grow in Jesus together. And it's created space for not just fun, but spiritual formation. So thanks for having me on. Thank you for what you do.

Annie: Thank you. That's really kind. I believe you. So I will keep doing that. I'm excited for people to get Fighting Shadows tomorrow. I think the more leadership I step into, the more leadership I'm given as a woman, the more I want to be part of helping the men in my life get the same and do the same.

So I'm very aware that there are times that as women increase in leadership, all we want to do is bring up women. And I do feel that a little bit in the church where I'm like, Okay, I'm getting to do this. Let's make sure there are other women getting to do this. At the same time, I'm like, hey, I want to be a mother that helps lead men and women. So I'm reading Fighting Shadows because I want to learn to make sure that I'm leading the men in my life as well as I can. So this is a good one for all of us. So thank you. I'm grateful.

[00:59:30] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, isn't he the best man? That was... getting to chat with him all about church and life in New York and this new book, Fighting Shadows. I'm so thankful for it. I'm thankful for him and Jeff Bethke, the work they are doing for the men in my life and for the men in your life.

So go get your copy of Fighting Shadows. It actually comes out tomorrow. Grab a copy. Grab a couple of copies. You know, I've got this one little shelf at my house that when there is a book that I love giving away, I will order a couple, especially on launch days like this, so that they're a little bit cheaper when they launch out. And I can just have them there if ever I want to hand one off to a friend. So today would be a great day to buy one, two, three copies of Fighting Shadows.

And make sure you're following Jon on social media, tell him thank you so much for being on the show. And if you love this episode, I would love for you to share it

with a guy in your life. Just hit share wherever you're listening. You can text it, you can share on your socials, whatever is easiest for you.

But I also wonder if you love this episode, if you'd love Episode 861 with Darren Whitehead or episode 183 with Jon's co-author and our friend Jefferson Bethke. Those are all linked in the show notes.

If you have any questions from this episode, just drop them in the Q&A box on your Spotify app, if you're a Spotify listener like me, or send them to us on Instagram @thatsoundsfunpodcast, we'll try to answer them there. Don't forget to be following us over there @thatsoundsfunpodcast because you're going to see a lot of extra video clips that are not posted anywhere else.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. anywhere you may need me, that is where you can find me.

I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me... I need a new bedspread for my guest room. And what sounds fun to me is figuring out what I want it to look like. It's like what I'm dreaming of doing after work today is figuring out what bedspread I want and finishing listening to an audiobook. Very excited about it.

Y'all have a great week. We'll see you back here on Thursday with our good friend Latasha Morrison. We'll see y'all then.