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

Hey, don't forget, we are reading the Gospels together on Let's Read the Gospels. Just go subscribe to that podcast wherever you're listening to this. You are not behind. Don't you even worry about it. We are on day five. We're going to read all four Gospels in 30 days. You can very easily catch up. Or just jump in with us today on day five and come on and listen along with us for the month of September.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors. This show is sponsored by [BetterHelp](#). Sometimes we get so busy that we put off trying anything new because there's no possible way we have time for that. But learning a new thing or staying curious can often be such a helpful way to relieve some stress.

I am such a fan of being a lifelong learner, and that includes learning more about myself too. Therapy can help you reconnect with your sense of wonder and your sense of self.

So if you've been thinking about starting therapy, give BetterHelp a try. It's entirely online, super convenient and flexible to your schedule. Plus, getting started is so easy. You just fill out a quick questionnaire — y'all know we love a quiz — and you'll be matched with a licensed therapist. Plus, you can switch therapists anytime at no extra cost, so you make sure to find the right match for you.

Rediscover your curiosity with BetterHelp. Visit betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun today to get 10% off your first month. That's betterhelp.com/thatoundsfun.

Intro: Today on the show I get to talk with a writer and Bible teacher, Ashlee Eiland. Here's why I'm so glad Ashlee is here today. It's election season here in the U.S. Y'all know this. We're trying to navigate the hot topics of the day and how to approach divisive conversations with grace.

Ashlee's latest book, *Say Good: Speaking across Hot Topics, Complex Relationships, and Tense Situations* is just what we need right now. Listen, the holidays are coming too, and I know that can stir up complicated feelings and family dynamics and all the things.

Today, Ashlee is going to be our guide into gracefully walking with people even when we don't agree with them. I think you're really going to love this one. It is a

note-taking. Sound the alarms. This is a note-taking episode. So here's my conversation with my friend, Ashlee Eiland.

[00:02:22] <music>

Annie: Eiland?

Ashlee: Yeah.

Annie: Okay.

Ashlee: Like the landmass.

Annie: Ashlee Eiland, welcome to That Sounds Fun.

Ashlee: Thanks for having me, Annie.

Annie: Johnny, cannot cut that out. The whole world needs to hear me double-check how to say your last name live.

Ashlee: I appreciate it.

Annie: On the podcast. Okay, the first question we always ask. Because it's our 10th year, we've got to know, what sounds fun to you?

Ashlee: Annie, I want to go to Paris.

Annie: Oh, the Olympics. We're recording this amidst Olympics.

Ashlee: Amidst Olympics. And particularly, I'm interested in how Snoop Dogg got this gig.

Annie: And Flavor Flav.

Ashlee: Flavor Flav. Come through.

Annie: There was a thing this morning that I read that said, "Who would have ever dreamed in the year of our Lord 2024 that the two most wholesome experiences at the Olympics would be Snoop Dogg and Flavor Flav?"

Ashlee: 110%.

Annie: Amazing. It's amazing. I mean, Flavor Flav is just in there saying, "Women who are having two to three jobs just to support the sport that they love," he's like, "I got you."

Annie: I know. I literally said to the Lord this morning, I was like, "If you'll give me that kind of money, I would love to do that."

Ashlee: Just left and right.

Annie: I would love to do that. Just to go like, "Oh, you want to do that different? On it."

Ashlee: Let's do it.

Annie: And then he just got in the water with them. Did you see? Dying.

Ashlee: Yes.

Annie: Like, Flavor Flav, how are you this guy? And Snoop Dogg. Snoop Dogg carried the torch.

Ashlee: I don't know how he did it, Annie.

Annie: How would you say it? A Snoopazontz? Would that be the renaissance of Snoop?

Ashlee: 100%. I think you got it. A [Snoopazontz?].

Annie: A D-O-G-G [inaudible 00:03:53]?

Ashlee: Yeah.

Annie: Snoopazontz.

Ashlee: So the fact that he is wearing Simone Biles on his t-shirt and just really providing support and encouragement to these champions' families, that's what I want to do. That sounds fun to me.

Annie: I'm going to make it too serious real quick.

Ashlee: Okay.

Annie: Your book is called *Say Good: Speaking across Hot Topics, Complex Relationships, and Tense Situations*. In it you talk about how high we go on a tightrope of

conversations. And so I want you to know I am willing to have public. I'm willing to be on the level where we have a public conversation.

So my question is, you have a different experience seeing Simone Biles and Snoop Dogg than I do, because for those of us just listening, I am White.

Ashlee: Yes.

Annie: And you?

Ashlee: I'm a Black woman in America, Annie.

Annie: Yes. So tell me how it's different... I mean, I don't know if you can know how it's different. Tell me your experience of seeing a Black grandfather like Snoop and a Black young married woman like Simone Biles having such love of the nation. What does that feel like?

Ashlee: So you have to understand, I'm tracking Snoop and Simone from before they were megastars.

Annie: Sure.

Ashlee: I have a husband who's a musician, grew up in South Side Chicago.

Annie: Oh, great.

Ashlee: And so music runs deep in our family. So I understand what Snoop was putting out like early, early days before my parents would have affirmed-

Annie: Were told you couldn't?

Ashlee: Yes. Those explicit lyrics. I understand what he's carried in the way of culture. And so to see him on this global of a stage.

Annie: Yes. And mainstream of a stage.

Ashlee: And mainstream. And I think he called it. He called the shot. He said, "I want to be there at the Olympics, the next summer Olympics." This was a few years ago. So to see him put that out there and to show up not just in this really insignificant way. He's coming alongside people's families and he's saying, "I'm providing support to you while you watch your child go for gold." That's significant to me as someone who's seen the Black experience as one that has these ebbs and flows of pain and heartache, but also triumph and success.

And for me as a Black woman watching both Snoop and Simone show up, Simone, after coming off of this mental breakdown that she was very open about. And I was grateful for it because more leaders and more athletes need to talk about not just the physical fatigue, but the mental toll that your sport or your speciality can take on you.

For her to come back and to say, "I'm still here. I'm showing up for the love of it because I can at 27 years old, which is quote-unquote "old" for a gymnast. She's like, "I'm doing it my way. I'm doing this on my terms." And for me, that is an example of for someone like me in her late 30s, what it means to persevere, cultural perseverance because younger generations are watching. So how will I show up regardless of the arc that my life takes, both the defeats and the successes? How do I want to continue the story?

Annie: You tell the story in your book about someone coming and asking you a question and they said how articulate you were and how it actually spun you into a real pile of grief over the next few days. I found that story to be really moving, particularly when we're thinking about Snoop Dogg and Simone Biles, because is it more or less offensive that there are some public Black men and women that are more palatable to the whole country? Does that feel true or am I being...?

Ashlee: If I could show our listeners, I would be laid out on the floor because that is so true. There are certain voices in the Black community that others are packaging as saying, Oh, you make us comfortable enough. Because we're not talking about Snoop's lyrics or his musicality.

Annie: No.

Ashlee: We're talking about his presence, his glitz, his glamor. He's bringing an air of humor to the games that I think makes everyone feel this levity that perhaps counterbalances the tense nature of what it means to watch sport.

So for me, I'm going, listen, if you want to call me articulate, thank you. I am. But let's not say that because I make you more comfortable. Don't allow that to water down the message my life brings because of what God has asked me to walk through and into in my life.

So for me, I'm going, you know what? People will say what they want to say. I hope they do say good. But if they choose not to, how do I understand my identity in Christ to say, even if you do throw this microaggression at me, I'm going to use that to the glory of God and for the good of the body of Christ, for the sake of the kingdom. I have that choice. There's an agency in that way.

So yeah, he might be more palatable for some, but I'm seeing him using that as an opportunity to be himself no matter what.

Annie: Yes. I think it'll be interesting to watch after the Olympics. Our friends listening are seeing this real time. You and I are seeing it Olympic time. I think it'll be really interesting to see, does he make political statements, does he talk about racial injustice in our country? Because has he actually become a favored voice and a respected voice or is he someone we enjoy watching when he doesn't say things that we don't like to hear?

Ashlee: Right. Is he comic relief?

Annie: I mean, I just saw this morning that the stats for... what's it called when...? The amount of people who watch for Tokyo was so low that he is one of the things they're hoping, the NBC, is hoping Snoop is one of the reasons that people tune in.

Ashlee: That's right.

Annie: And I think they do. I think that's true.

Ashlee: Yeah. Absolutely.

Annie: I'm curious to see when he comes back home and gets involved politically, if he chooses to, I don't know that he has in the past, gets involved politically, if that will change anything.

Ashlee: Right. Are we going to see people turn on him?

Annie: Right. That's my question.

Ashlee: Let's pause-

Annie: What do you think?

Ashlee: You know what? I think he is going to go back to being beloved by some. I don't know that he is going to be necessarily received by the masses in that way. I don't know that people are going to be looking at his platform saying, "Snoop, tell us what you think politically. We shall follow you." I don't think that's going to be it. But here's the deal. I don't think he cares because he's Snoop Dogg.

Annie: I mean, D-O-G-G. That's exactly right.

Ashlee: So there's confidence. And this is part of what I write about in *Say Good*. Part of saying good is being so grounded foundationally in who you are that it doesn't matter circumstantially how people receive you. What becomes the measuring stick is am I being obedient to the thing God has asked me to say? Yes. Yes.

Ashlee: Yes or no?

Annie: Yes.

Ashlee: That's ultimately what it boils down to. And I think for him, whether this has been formed in him and through him because of Christ or not, he has his confidence about him that says, I wanted to go there and I can choose to not be on that platform and still come back and have people respect my music and still honor me for what I've done for American culture, Black culture, rap culture. He knows what he's already achieved. And so if he wants to take that platform and bolster it politically, he can. But if he chooses not to, I still think he knows that he's loved by those that matter.

Annie: I want to tell you an experience that happened for me last week, and I want you to... in the, say, good world, I would love for you to reflect back to me what you hear.

Ashlee: Perfect. Let's do it.

Annie: I finished a project I... One of the things I try to do, and for our friends listening, I learned this from someone else, but I think it's a really good practice is when I finish a project, I try to put it in front of as many different people as possible to see is there something I don't realize I'm saying, is there something I'm not saying that you wish I was saying? Does this read in any particular way that I can't know? Because I only have my own eyeballs? So I send it to married women and I send it to dudes and I send it to people of other races.

My pastor friend, Dwan, our Black worship pastor at church, he very kindly almost reads almost every one of my sermons and will be like, "Say this and this, and then you've made it more inclusive."

Ashlee: Love it.

Annie: So I'm finished something, I send it to one of my girlfriends, a Black woman who has a whole group of friends that I am a tangential friends with, but I don't have all their phone numbers. And I say to her, "Hey, would you look over this for me? I would love your thoughts." She's done it before. And then probably two hours later, she writes back and says... and I thought this was... so I want to preface by saying, I think this is beautiful. What she did. She said, "Hey, I would love to help you, but

Black women are really struggling right now and we don't have the bandwidth to step into anything for you. If this was another time, I would love to do this."

I had no idea what she was talking about. And I went, "Oh, I'm not on Twitter. I hadn't been on Instagram all day. And it was right after Kamala was... and I thought, "Is this about Kamala Harris?" And so I just wrote back and I said, "I'm so sorry for my insensitivity. I love you. Let me know what you need." She was very kind back and said, "The reason I could say all this is because I know you're not insane." She said nice things back. And then we just left it.

I didn't know anything had happened. So what do we do?

Ashlee: Fair question.

Annie: I would have never... So what do we do? I mean, I feel like my friend handled it so beautifully being like, "I can't and our group of friends can't." And all I could do was apologize, even though I didn't know why.

Ashlee: Here's the deal. I think there's this interesting tension, particularly as a Black woman to feel like you need to feel out the spiritual and emotional temperature of what's happening in the world on behalf of all Black women. It could be the case that there are some Black women who are tired and who might choose to read their friends' projects just because they want to.

Annie: Right. Sure. No biggie.

Ashlee: At a macro level though, I think there's this weariness that I think is weighing on a lot of women, a lot of Black women, a lot of people groups who have been marginalized over and over again, that wears you down.

Now here's the caveat. I don't know that I would expect my friends to know the implications of that for me specifically. But what I want to affirm in your friend is that there's clearly this trust. And we talk in the book about relationship, how these conversations-

Annie: The [are? 00:15:06] of there.

Ashlee: Yes, that's right. They have to pair. They have to be grounded in relationship in order to live and to illuminate the subject. So for your friend to say, "We're tired, I don't have the bandwidth to do this." That means she trusts you enough to say, "Hey, there's something simmering for me that saps my capacity." Not everyone, not everyone will be on the other end, on the receiving end of that sort of vulnerability. So that tells me y'all are really good friends.

Now, if the conversation had gone past that, I probably, if I'm you, I'm going, "Hey, I don't know why. I would love to know why so that I can come alongside you."

Annie: So you know what I did?

Ashlee: What did you do?

Annie: I called one of my Black guy friends. I said, "If she just said it's women, let me ask one of my Black guy friends if there's something I don't know."

Ashlee: "Let me pivot."

Annie: And there was. It was the new story of the Black woman who was shot by a policeman-

Ashlee: Yes, 100%.

Annie: And I had seen it weeks before but new things had come out and I just didn't know. And he initially said, "I don't know." And then he called me back 30 minutes later and said, "I do know." I opened Instagram. So it was partly a bad timing because that had happened, but also enough exhaustion is a reason to say no. And also there are times... the thing I did work myself backwards from shame, but you can tell me I'm wrong, was we can't know everything.

Ashlee: No, we can't. We can't. And that's part of the reason why I wrote *Say Good* is because I wanted to release the pressure valve from us to have to say we need to know everything all the time. If that were true, Annie, that also means I'm not wading into the waters of the disciplines of like silence and solitude.

I can't know everything. I can't be up to speed on everything. If I'm taking those rhythms seriously, if I'm actually saying yes to Sabbath. There will be things I miss. And as someone who's pastored in churches, that was one of my greatest fears and highest anxieties was to say, between the time I write a sermon and the time I give that sermon, there could be-

Annie: What could happen in the world?

Ashlee: ...myriad headlines-

Annie: Same. Same.

Ashlee: ...that I feel like I have to address, particularly if it involves racial minorities, particularly Black women, because I am one right. So now does that mean I have to say something? Now, I will, majority of the time, choose to say something because I know the bomb that that offers people who so badly need to solve, right, who need some sort of comfort in the midst of heartache and grief and trauma. But I'm also going, God, all the more reason for me to know specifically what part of the body you created me to be so that I am not out here trying to function as every single part of the body. I can't do it.

Annie: I love that when you talk about the hand and the foot and you're like, the foot cannot be the hand.

Ashlee: No. You can't be. So you have to be able to identify, celebrate, and then appreciate the other parts of the body around you. And so a lot of this work, we have to put down this kind of frantic propensity to feel like we have to know it all, and to say, God, based on the part that you've created me to be, what do I do with this? What do I listen for if I'm an ear? What do I carry if I'm hands? What do I walk toward if I'm feet? And if I'm walking, then I need people around me to act as those other functions in order for this to be a more holistic picture of kingdom.

Annie: It's really interesting because... I'd like to quote you to you. This book was very good, by the way.

Ashlee: Thank you.

Annie: I'm grateful that you wrote it. You said, "Because here's my hunch: for as eager as we may be to hold others accountable for the ways they choose to use their voice in the world, holding others accountable means very little if somehow everyone else but us needs accountability.

Ashlee: A hundred percent.

Annie: I think that's an interesting thing to talk about because often we assume everyone else's role in the kingdom and then we go to them and say, Hey, you're supposed to be a foot. Why are you not footing? And then the person goes, hey, because I have an Instagram doesn't mean I'm a foot. I'm a hand and I'm doing my hand part.

And so how do we... I think it's okay to express when you're not happy with someone who you follow and how they're talking about something.

Ashlee: Yeah, sure.

Annie: At the same time, you talk about the tension in here. Talk about the tension of like, how much do we know of what they're called to and how much can we speak into it as the person on this side of the keyboard?

Ashlee: So here's the deal with social media, Annie. Like we are choosing how much of our lives to portray to other people publicly. It is not the whole picture. These are bite-sized snippets and they're usually the best parts. And if they're not the best parts, they're the manufactured versions of the not great parts.

Annie: Right.

Ashlee: So we have to-

Annie: They are the work through.

Ashlee: Yeah. They're like the edited version of my breakdown.

Annie: I'm telling you, when someone is sitting and crying on their Instagram, I'm like that ain't the first time you had these tears. You've refilled this four times.

Ashlee: That's right.

Annie: I know.

Ashlee: You've cried through it. You've cried through the takes. So I think that's something we have to keep in mind. What's the role of our engagement on social media in the first place? If we are looking to social media to solve all of our gaps in thinking, if we are looking to social media to be the filler for the mystery that God promised us would be part of our working at our faith, then we're going to see social media as this idol that ultimately falls short.

So I think there's this retooling of what's the motivation for being on there in the first place before we prop up influencers or people with followings, people with platforms to say, now I need you to speak to this thing or else I can't think about it for myself. I need you to speak first so I can react, whether it's a positive reaction or one that's countered to yours.

So there's this kind of great leveling and the story in the gospels that I think of in Mark 6, Jesus sends out the 12 disciples. Here's the deal. He's saying, I'm sending you all out with authority, but I'm sending you two by two. Here's what's interesting to me. He didn't send them out individually to kind of go and be scattered. He said, there needs to be some accountability there. I need y'all to go together because with accountability, there's also this... there's a perspective of authority that is both

witness and humility. So you have someone to bear witness to what's happening in that space, but you also have someone to say, Hey, slow down, take a step back.

And the unfortunate thing about social media is it's largely an individual sport. We play solo. We comment solo. We see people in those squares or in the rectangles of reels on their own, giving us content that in many cases shows themselves in their own perspective.

But Jesus said, I'm not sending you out like that. I'm sending you together.

Annie: That's good.

[00:22:28] <music>

Sponsor: So I'm headed to New York and it is time to get my [Thrive Market](#) order ready. It is legit one of my favorite things. I've got some of my favorite snacks and pantry essentials. I want them on my doorstep when I arrive.

Y'all know I don't love grocery shopping, but I love Thrive Market because I can easily shop for healthy groceries without actually leaving my couch. Thrive Market has a filtering system on their website to make it easy for you to find what you're looking for: Low sugar, high protein, gluten-free, nut-free. Plus I save so much time and money and I find exactly what I'm looking for all while having it delivered right to my door.

They have some of my favorite snacks. I love all things Siete brand. I'm sure you do too. We were just snacking on their chips and salsa at lunch. It's so good. And if you're in Single Purpose League, you know we bring a cracker snack to every chapter meeting this year. And Simple Mills has some of my favorite crackers.

Save time and money by getting it all in one place with Thrive Market. Go to thrivemarket.com/thatoundsfun for 30% off your first order plus a free \$60 gift. That's thrivemarket.com/thatoundsfun. [Thrivemarket.com/thatoundsfun](https://thrivemarket.com/thatoundsfun).

Sponsor: Okay, friends, I've got to tell you about an organization that I have loved for over a decade. If you're looking for some really cute fall items, but also want to do some shopping that makes a real difference, you've got to check out [Mercy House Global](#).

Seriously, their fall collection has some adorable pumpkins you can decorate with, fall candles you will love, and some super cute earrings too.

Every purchase supports their mission to empower vulnerable women and families worldwide. There are a ton of women around the world who face economic

hardships and have limited opportunities. So Mercy House Global shop provides beautiful handcrafted products and a pathway to self-sufficiency for artisans in need.

When you shop with them, you're supporting real women, promoting fair trade and sustainable practices, and providing crucial income to those who need it most. Every item tells a story of hope and transformation. Visit mercyhouseglobal.org to browse their fall collection and make a purchase that truly counts. And if you use the code ANNIE, my name A-N-N-I-E at checkout, you're going to get 25% off you guys.

Every item provides hope and a step towards a better future. Mercy House Global shop with purpose change lives. Go to mercyhouseglobal.org and again use the code ANNIE at checkout for 25% off their fall collection.

Sponsor: Since 2017, [Prose](https://prose.com) has transformed traditional hair and skincare with a made-to-order custom model that reduces waste, celebrates your unique beauty over one-size-fits-all all beauty standards, and works better than off-the-shelf alternatives. Y'all know I love Prose. And I'm always grateful when you compliment my hair. And it's because Prose works.

Prose combines the know-how of its team of in-house cosmetic chemists with an advanced AI algorithm that personalizes your formulas based on 80 plus unique factors, so you're truly getting a custom-made-for-you product.

They're backed by more than 500,000 five-star product reviews and a clinical study that proves personalization works better. And me, I love it. AFD loves it.

Prose also offers custom skincare. So you can also check out their custom skincare that's made just for you because with the Prose promise, if you don't love your first order, it's on them. So there's never been a better time to switch to custom.

Prose is so confident that you'll bring out your best hair that they're offering an exclusive trial offer of 50% off your first haircare subscription order at prose.com/thatoundsfun. Y'all, this is the time to try. Take your free consultation, get your one-of-a-kind formula and see the difference custom haircare can make with 50% off at prose.com/thatoundsfun.

Now back to our conversation with Ashlee.

[00:26:22] <music>

- Annie:** And I'm thinking about Psalm 1. We've done a lot around Psalm 1. And it says, Don't walk in the ways of the wicked. And don't stand in the paths of sinners.
- Ashlee:** That's right.
- Annie:** And the paths of sinners, it's just like when you get to a crossroads, if you are by yourself, it is a lot harder to decide which way to go.
- Ashlee:** That's right.
- Annie:** So I think that's really interesting that Jesus sending them two by two is also meant to be accountability and witness. Like humility and witness. That is really helpful.
- Ashlee:** So I didn't put this in the book, but Proverbs 18:22, The Message version says, words kill, words give life. They're either poison or fruit. Here's a catcher. You choose, the text says. The text says you get to choose whether the words that you are putting out into the world are going to create a world that kills or lend itself to a world that gives life.
- Annie:** We just do not take that seriously.
- Ashlee:** No, we don't.
- Annie:** We do not take that seriously. I did a text today on my computer. The fast backstory is, on my birthday, the Lord and I had a pretty serious conversation. I brought some complaints. He also did.
- Ashlee:** It's a dialogue.
- Annie:** It was a dialogue.
- Ashlee:** In fact.
- Annie:** It was a very important conversation about how I use my words. I started a text today about a thing that I absolutely get to speak into. I started a text about it. And then I literally sat there and I went, what if this is gossip and one of this needs to be said? Like, what is your spot and what is not your spot? And even your tone, because this person knows you so well, your tone in text is either going to be gossip or grateful.
- Ashlee:** That's right. So good.

Annie: I mean, you're right. It's a "you choose". Because I wrote up what I wanted to say, tic, tic, tic, and then I went, Okay, take out three of those sentences because that is... And why do we gossip? Because we feel insecure.

Ashlee: Yeah, that's right.

Annie: And so where's that need? It's about me. It's not about either the people I'm talking to or about.

Ashlee: No. And here's one of those filter that's part of the accountability filter for me. If you are in a situation, particularly on social media or through texts, as you were, Annie, where you feel like you're being held hostage, like you have no other choice but to rage, but to cut someone down, that's not of God because you do have that agency. And what I hear so beautifully that you've done, you paused, you took a second to think about.

Annie: I mean, it only took me 44 years, but yeah, yeah, I did. You're right.

Ashlee: A second, 44 years, just about the same time. But here's what's so dangerous in my perspective is that we live in such a fast-paced day-to-day. At least I do. I'm guilty of going at warp speed that I don't actually take the time to think about the words that I'm saying. And I feel like God's been challenging me and He did so through the writing of *Say Good* to reclaim the power in the tongue. To say like, no, when I created the world, there was darkness hovering over the deep waters. The spirit was there. And then God said, Let there be light.

Annie: That's right.

Ashlee: So through God's word, light came to be in the darkness. And I feel like God is saying, will you take me seriously when I say there is power in the tongue?

Annie: Right. Right. Because what if we just actually believed Him? What if we just actually thought... I mean, we don't have to do a science experiment as a sixth grader to know that talking to plants makes a difference. I think one of my plants in my office is going nuts. I'm like, Is Lillian reading the Bible to this one plant?

There's a thing you say in the book that I think is really interesting. You said, "The process of using your voice will ask you to let go of something." So whether that is in racial justice, whether that is in choosing life over... I mean, I had to let go of something today. I had to let go of my own insecurities and my own pride today to send a text that was not gossipy. Obviously *Say Good* is much deeper than that.

Will you talk a little bit about like, when we do use our voice, it isn't like just do it, it'll be fine. It's like, No, this is going to make you let go of something.

Ashlee: Yeah. So when you choose to use your words to say yes to God in giving life to the world around us, I feel like that is directly coming against all of the false gods that prop us up on the daily. The false God of ego. The false God of insecurity.

I feel like for our day and age now, particularly as we march toward another big election here in the United States, there's this need to be right, this need to be self-validated and affirmed. To be like, "I need evidence that what I'm doing here, what my life is about actually means something, that the values that I have adopted over time, that I've been taught or grew up with were the right ones."

Annie: Right.

Ashlee: And so for some of us, we need to let go of that assuredness to maybe say, even if I'm wrong, what if I'm wrong? Is there a possibility that my choosing to say good, to let go of gossip, to let go of slander, to refuse to cut other people down, to uphold the worthiness and value in every single human being, regardless of if they look like me, vote like me, love like me, whatever that might be, to say, can I let go of that need to be so right that I risk saying death to someone or speaking death into the world? So it's this holy surrender.

Annie: Will you tell the tightrope analogy? Because I think that is so helpful when we're thinking about speaking out in our neighborhoods or speaking out online or even talking to our friends. Like me and my friend in our texts. I didn't realize we were about to have a vulnerable conversation when I went, "I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. My tightrope is high off the ground. This isn't public. I don't know... And so talk about that analogy. I think it helps a lot.

Ashlee: So, funny story. The original title of this book was supposed to be Talking the Tightrope. So it was supposed to be a whole thing, Annie.

Annie: I mean, *Say Good* is so good. This is the right title. But Talking the Tightrope needs to be your course you build or the next thing.

Ashlee: Thank you. And I was really inspired by this book I read when I was growing up on the high wire. I'm someone who thinks... I'm a six on the Enneagram. So I'm a thinking center, but I'm a deep feeler too. INFP. So deep in my feels.

And as I read, I imagine not just pictures, but feelings. So I was thinking about the framework for this book, I said, "I know no better tension than what a tightrope

walker must feel, a funambulist, if you will, when they are like scooching out onto this millimeters thick wire going, I need to move forward, but what if I fall?

And so to me, that really wraps up so beautifully much of what I felt with a lot of my friends have felt because this book was birthed from a major headline kind of dropping and friends reaching out to me saying, Ashlee, what do I do? I want to honor Black voices. I want to make space for voices that have been historically marginalized, but I also really, really care about this thing. How do I not show up as performative?

Annie: Ahmaud Arbery, right?

Ashlee: Yes, it's Ahmaud Arbery.

Annie: Do you know that's the one that changed my life too?

Ashlee: Really?

Annie: Yes.

Ashlee: Wow.

Annie: I don't know why that one was different for so many of my friends and I, but yeah, that one changed me forever for me.

Ashlee: For me, it was something about being at home or in a different environment and seeing kind of the headline set and going, "Wait a minute. I have space and time to think about this and feel about this differently than I would if we weren't quarantined." But I could sense that tension in my friends going like, Do I go left and just say something because I really care about it and risk being called someone who's virtue signaling or do I go right and stay silent and then risk people thinking I don't care about racial justice? Like what do I do? And that tension I felt viscerally.

Annie: Do you literally mean left and right, like left toward left politics or are you just meaning the two directions?

Ashlee: No, just two directions. I just picked that. Maybe that wasn't such a perfect word picker.

Annie: No, that's great. I was curious as the listener to your story. Or that could be it.

Ashlee: Or that could be it.

Annie: **Annie:** That's why I asked.

Ashlee: Maybe so. And I imagined someone at great heights trying to defy a chasm and I said, "This is what we're trying to do so often, day in and day out, whether it's from a massive platform or across a coffee table, there is a chasm there that we're trying to cross. And if we're showing up... this is the caveat. I'd say, I'm assuming that people want to show up to this work. This isn't a book for people who are just like, no, I don't actually care what you think. This is for people who are saying, There's space for difference of opinion and I want to be better at this.

Whatever that chasm is, I wanted to honor the feeling of doing the work gingerly, but doing it. And that's what I feel like tightrope walkers do. They're artists who balance across chasms between risking it all and showing up victorious. And to me, that's what a picture of faithfulness and trying to march toward Christ-likeness in this way with our words and with our lives across difference, across spaces that a lot of people wouldn't dare defy what would it look like if we tried to do that faithfully?

And so that's the picture that kept coming to mind and that's what I wrote toward. And it ended up, despite the title change, still being a main theme in the book. And I'm really glad that a lot of people who've read the book have really resonated with that because it does connect to a feeling.

Annie: Oh, it makes so much sense to me because even as you're talking, the sentence that comes to my mind is, it feels like a little bit of what happened in 2020 as people said, tightrope walk across Niagara Falls or die. And I went, I've never been on a tightrope. Is there a version where I can practice?

Ashlee: How?

Annie: I mean, that's kind of how it felt as a public person is it was like, get walking. Tightrope. You better go across Niagara Falls. And I wanted to be like, someone tell me the first three steps of being a tightrope walker before you put me over Niagara Falls.

And what your book does is kind of goes like, here's how you practice at home. This is called a slack. Like a slackline. This is a slackline you do at your house with your family.

Ashlee: And you start really low.

Annie: Yes, And you start really low.

- Ashlee:** We don't start across a national treasure. You start in your living room.
- Annie:** That's right. And that's what we could have used... You couldn't have known, but had we been gifted this book in 2019, I think some of the tensions would have been so different because we'd have gone like, oh, we've been practicing.
- Ashlee:** That's right.
- Annie:** And now I have been practicing and therefore these conversations are happening more frequently publicly because I've been tightrope walking for four years now in some way or another.
- Ashlee:** That's right.
- Annie:** Not perfectly, not in the way that pleases everyone, but I at least own a tightrope.
- Ashlee:** No, that's right. A hundred percent. And to your point earlier, it's not just what we are doing on the offensive, the words that we're putting into the world. It's also our reactions. And I'm hearing in your story with your friend, you probably received her response differently than you would four years ago.
- Annie:** Yeah, that's right. Even like, What [inaudible 00:38:17]. I was like, "I'm sorry. I don't know. I love you."
- Ashlee:** You said something anyway. You had a response and it was loving. It wasn't panic. And it wasn't, Oh my gosh, I've messed up. I'm never talking to her again. It wasn't like-
- Annie:** Which would have been a version of me at some point, for a lot of things, but fear used to have me go, "Uh, I just won't ever ask anyone to do anything ever again. Bye."
- Ashlee:** That's right. And that's not how we were created to live with each other. Like this is going to be imperfect. So if perfection is the goal, we've already lost.
- Annie:** Yes.
- Ashlee:** We have to have a different center. We have to have a different bullseye when it comes to these kinds of conversations. For me that bullseye talk about coming back to like the centered value to say, what's your why? Like, we talk about that at the beginning of the book, you have to have something to come back to, because if you don't, it's going to be so disorienting. You'll be like, why am I even doing this? Why

did I call my in-law or my parent or the sibling from whom I'm estranged? Like, why did I actually place that phone call?

You have to come back to a why and a greater vision of a, my goal is to love God, love neighbor. And part of loving, loving neighbor well is to say yes to some of these really hard conversations.

[00:39:31] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Hiya Health](#). I know the germs are flying since kids are back in school. So I love that Hiya Health can be one easy way to get my MiniBFFs, their vitamins and help them hopefully stay as healthy as possible.

So many kids' vitamins end up basically being candy. So we are big fans of Hiya because it's the pediatrician-approved chewable vitamin that is made with zero sugar and zero gummy junk. They also come in really cute glass bottles that are reusable and your kids get to decorate them with stickers.

And right now Hiya Health is available in Barbie pink with a limited edition Barbie unboxing experience, including a Barbie bottle and Barbie stickers. Y'all, it is so cute. Also, check out their new kids probiotic and nighttime essentials as well.

We've worked out a special deal with Hiya for their best-selling children's vitamin. You get 50% off your first order, you guys. Five zero. Wow. To claim this deal, you must go to hiyahealth.com/thatsoundsfun. That's hiyahealth.com/thatsoundsfun and get your kids the full body nourishment that they need to grow into healthy adults.

Sponsor: Hi friends, just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible new partners, [Orgain](#). Y'all, this makes me so happy. Y'all know I want to be a protein queen and it can be hard to find protein powders or pre-made protein shakes that both taste great and aren't filled with a bunch of artificial sweeteners. And Orgain is the way to go.

Y'all know my favorite protein ice cream I make is a banana with almond milk and peanut butter and then you throw some Orgain chocolate protein powder in there and you have yourself a healthy frosty. But here's the real tip you need to know. Orgain also has these brand new protein shakes that have 30 grams of protein in them. Y'all, that is such an easy thing to grab on the go for breakfast or a snack and they are really good too. Plus they're packed with real nutrients but without all the added sugar.

Orgain's 30-gram protein shakes are available at Costco and Orgain.com. If you want to get in on this delicious protein-packed nutrition today just head to [Orgain.com/thatsoundsfun](https://www.orgain.com/thatsoundsfun) and use the code THATSOUNDSFUN and you're going to get 20% off your order. Once again that's Orgain.com/thatsoundsfun for 20% off. Make sure you use the promo code THATSOUNDFUN so they know we sent you.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Ashlee.

[00:41:53] <music>

Annie: When my Black friends come on and have a story to tell, a book to share, one of the questions I like to ask y'all... because now by writing *Say Good* you have inadvertently agreed to teach White people.

Ashlee: Yes.

Annie: Right?

Ashlee: Yeah. That's been part of my story.

Annie: Yeah. But not every one of my Black friends is dying to be a teacher to White people.

Ashlee: That part.

Annie: As we're walking toward this election, as we don't know what's going to happen next, as unfortunately between us recording this and people hearing it there could be a massive story that race is the center of-

Ashlee: That's right.

Annie: How do we not be afraid to approach our Black friends and say, can you help me understand this? We don't want to beg everyone to be our teacher but I need someone to help me.

Ashlee: Yeah, you need guide.

Annie: Yes. So how do we do that? Because I'm thinking about our friends who live in Des Moines and they don't have, you know, like a Be the Bridge group in their neighborhood but they have their kids go to school with kids of lots of different races and they have mom friends that are non-White. How do we ask? Or do we?

Ashlee: I'd say before... one, and I talk about examining our motivations for any of this. I'd say if the ask is coming from a place of anxiety that you may not do this well, that's a litmus test.

Annie: Okay.

Ashlee: I'd say-

Annie: So pause.

Ashlee: Pause.

Annie: If you're like, I'm super afraid-

Ashlee: Yeah.

Annie: Okay.

Ashlee: If there's this anxiety and you're like, I just want to do this correctly, I'd say pause because there's a person on the other side of that exchange who likely needs care first.

Annie: Got it. Okay.

Ashlee: So to say, can I... and this is assuming you're in good trusting relationship, mutual relationship with someone. And I've experienced this with my friends. Oftentimes people will reach out to me just to say, "Hey, I don't know how you're receiving the news that just happened. I'm thinking of you, praying for you. There's a coffee on your doorstep." Like even if I didn't ask for it. There is some expression of care.

It is with those friends who have consistently cared for me that I'm way more willing to dive to the depths and be vulnerable to say, When I teach you I'm not just giving you facts. I'm giving you part of my story, part of my lens. And that is sacred.

So if there can be a bridge of care, that's oftentimes what I need, and this is again speaking for myself personally, to say, I'm willing to walk into those waters with you. Now I'd say for those of us who maybe don't have as many Black friends as we'd like because of where we live or the community in which we were raised, I'd say find people online who have already said I'm willing to speak on this publicly, and learn from those voices.

I feel like having a collection of voices who have already said I'm willing toward whom you don't have to ask, hey, would you mind. There are plenty of voices and you can just follow the trail. Pick one and then go, Who do they follow?

Annie: That's right.

Ashlee: And then just keep following those voices and you will then accumulate this perspective that might serve as this aggregate to say like, Okay, now what do I do? What is my action step? How do I advocate without having to tell my Black friends I'm actually advocating on their behalf? How do I show up when no one else is watching? How do I act faithfully when I'm not getting points or likes or retweets for this?

So I'd say lead with care. Find the voices who have already said I'm willing to share publicly in this space. And then challenge your motive by going to do the work silently. To say-

Annie: And I also insert [believe them].

Ashlee: Yeah. And believe them. Believe them.

Annie: Yeah. Because I think that is the thing a lot of my White friends and I have had to process or... especially the online work where we see someone telling a story online and there are racial reconciliation, they are doing this work, and then they tell a story and I go, Eeh, I mean, was it really like that?

So my friends and I, my White friends and I have discussed no matter what, we believe them. We believe them. If it felt like that, it felt like that. Because I'm going to have an experience where I want people to go, Yeah, because you're a woman in leadership... I want men... It would mean the world to me if I said to men, this is what it feels like to be a woman in leadership in this situation, and then go, "I bet it does. I bet it does."

I just had a thing happen at church where I said, "This choice is making me feel like this." And the leader I sat with said, "I had not thought of that. And I can totally see how that would make you feel that way."

Ashlee: That's right.

Annie: That's all I needed. I still did the thing they asked me. I mean, it still moved everything forward. But I think that belief is a part that we can do silently. But pay attention when your body says-

Ashlee: Pay attention.

Annie: Because I think it's important to pay attention to yourself and go, why am I not believing? Right?

Ashlee: Why am I trying to discredit someone's experience that is not an experience that I've lived out?

Annie: Would that make me feel unsafe for their experience to be true?

Ashlee: A hundred percent. And I'd say, as you listen to those voices, as I listen to the voices of Black women, Black men, I have to remind myself just because someone else isn't adopting the same lens or perspective from within that community doesn't discredit their experience.

Annie: Oh interesting.

Ashlee: Because there is mass variety to what it means to be a minority in this country. And I feel like each story... I write about Chimamanda's YouTube video and her TED talk The Danger of a Single Story. And I feel like what we can do sometimes-

Annie: We'll link to that by the way.

Ashlee: Okay, perfect. What we can do sometimes is say, "Oh, I've gathered enough data. I know how this goes now." And then that completely empties the fresh filling of the spirit in a situation where you're going like, maybe it's not the same this time. God what new thing are you doing here in this person, in this exchange in me as I listen and receive? Maybe I don't know how this goes. Maybe this person was willing to tell me their story this time but they're not this time. And what can I learn from that? Or maybe this person is courageously stepping in to a void that they otherwise would not have. And how do I honor that!

This is not a formulaic experience. So it goes with saying good. Even though there's a framework, this is not a formula.

Annie: Yeah, that's right.

Ashlee: Because we have to leave space for the power of the spirit to change us and to change the people around us as we say things. I'm sure you've experienced this anywhere. Sometimes you'll go to the pulpit or you're speaking on a podcast and there are things you didn't even know you were going to say. And you're like-

Annie: More than the team wishes.

Ashlee: And sometimes, sometimes you're like, God that could have only been you. Only you. Because I didn't plan that. That's what I want for us. I want us to show up together with each other in a way that feels like, Hey, I know what we went through yesterday, last month, years ago. I'm coming to the table looking for the new thing that God is doing in us, in this relationship right now might I step up to the plate with a new level of confidence in who I've been created to be, who you've been created to be, seeing you as an indispensable part of the body.

If I don't have you, Annie, if I don't have you, whoever sitting on the other side of the table, I don't have a fuller picture of the character of God.

Annie: That's it. I mean, that's one of the reasons to travel the world.

Ashlee: Yes. One hundred percent.

Annie: You and I both been to Rwanda. I read about that. You go to Rwanda and you're like-

Ashlee: I'm changed.

Annie: The world's different. The world is different after seeing Rwanda.

Ashlee: It's so different. But I feel like for us to say there could be almost like this rule of life we adopt in approaching to how we say good into the world. But allow God to surprise you. Allow the spirit to surprise you both in what's happening in you and what's happening to the other people on the other side of the table.

Annie: One of the reasons I was really happy to get to have this conversation at this point in the year right is where people are going back to school, people are in new schools. They're meeting new other parents. And people are moving to new cities. And we are two months from an election.

I mean, I kind of just wanted to have you help us. And this is why friends go and get this book if you don't have it yet. Because I want our friends listening to have real friendships with people who don't look like that.

Ashlee: That's right.

Annie: Whether it's our Black friends listening who need to have White people up close to hear or vice versa. Which is the majority of our audience-

Ashlee: Sure. Yeah.

Annie: ...is white people. I think I could be surprised. We might be surprised.

Ashlee: We might be surprised.

Annie: Based on what we've heard so far. But I just think it is so important. Like you said, real friendship is the basis as best you can in the world that you have. So it's such a gift. It is such a gift. And you talk a lot about the power of seeing people. And it just is like, can you just look at each other and really like make eye contact and figure out how to be in relationship.

Ashlee: Yeah, that's right. And can we discipline ourselves? I write about names in the book a little bit. We all have that one name that that coach or parent or some figure in our lives called us that to this day just kind of takes up more space than it deserves. And I feel like we can redemptively heal one another in each other's stories through calling one another into the names that God has proclaimed over us. Beloved. My child. Loved. I feel like we have more power than we realize, Annie. And if we so choose, we could be part of a narrative that maybe not in our lifetime. It might take longer than us. Who knows. But as for me-

Annie: As for me and my house.

Ashlee: For me and my house and my name, I want to be someone who's chosen purposefully to do the best I can with the words God has given me to be part of the yes and amen to the kingdom's work.

Annie: It may cost us something. It will.

Ashlee: It surely will.

Annie: And it may be harder to reach outside the friend group that comes most naturally to you.

Ashlee: Yeah, that's right.

Annie: But I think of it like I would like to see change on earth. But the thing I don't want to have happen is I don't want to get to heaven and the Lord be like, Hey, you missed out on all of this. All this variety of people that you're now going to be with forever. Because it is so interesting that every tribe, tongue, and nation. That means we get up there and our skin color is the same somehow. Because we are still our nation.

Ashlee: Yeah, we're still our nation.

Annie: And so we're not all going to look the same.

Ashlee: No.

Annie: And so we're going to get there and be in the new heaven, new earth for forever with people who do not look like us and do not speak our language. And I don't know how it's all going to work out, but it is. If I'm not practicing that here... we're practicing everything else here that we're hoping happens.

Ashlee: You're in for a heck of a surprise.

Annie: That's it. That's it. What did we not say that you want to make sure we say?

Ashlee: You said this word earlier, and it was fear. I'd say fear not. And not just fear not other people, fear not the circumstances in your life that might be so turbulent that they prevent you from risking and saying good in the world. I'm envisioning people around their tables at Thanksgiving potentially and being like, "Should I lovingly defy the racist thing that my in-law just said? Like, should I risk that? I'd say, yeah, risk it. Risk that turbulence because-

Annie: It may be weird, but they won't do it again.

Ashlee: It might be so weird. It might be so weird, but I feel like God will affirm that courage.

Annie: Yes, that's right.

Ashlee: And don't fear the hard things. You know, I listened to one of your last podcasts with Davey. And there just going to be some things in our lives that want to shut us up because it's too painful, too hard. I'd say don't fear that either. There's so much beauty in saying good in the world. And may you allow God to say good to you as well.

Annie: That's beautiful. Ashlee, thank you for doing this today.

Ashlee: Thanks for having me.

Annie: You're such a gift. Thank you for what you do to help us be thoughtful and be who we want to be. The beautiful thing about the friends listening to this or That Sounds Fun friends, this is who we want to be. And so it helps a lot when people come in and generously teach us who we want to be. So thank you.

Ashlee: Amen.

[00:54:59] <music>

Outro: Oh, friends, isn't she awesome? I know. I'm so thankful she came on the show. Head over to social media, tell her thank you for being on the show. And go grab a copy of Say Good.

If you like this episode, I think you'll also love episode 906 with my friend Jonathan Merritt and his dad, Dr. James Merritt, or Episode 446 with David Platt. We've linked both of those in the show notes.

If you got any questions from this episode, you can 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. Make sure you're following that account. Fun things happening over there.

If you need anything else for me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that is how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you and I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is being in New York. I'm really grateful to be here. Y'all have a great weekend. We'll see you back here on Monday with our friend, one of your favorites and mine, Sophie Hudson.