



# That Sounds Fun

THE JOYS OF BEING AN AMATEUR,  
THE POWER OF FALLING IN LOVE,  
AND WHY YOU NEED A HOBBY

## Annie F. Downs

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF 100 DAYS TO BRAVE

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Revell

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Annie F. Downs, *That Sounds Fun*

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To the *That Sounds Fun* podcast listeners.  
You show up, you love our guest friends so well,  
and you always remind me that  
what we are making matters.  
You taught me, and continue to teach me,  
how to chase the fun,  
knowing I won't be alone when I find it.  
Thank you.

Laying on grass with friends TORI | Boating with friends & family JULIE | Ice skating or swing dancing KAYLEA | Making a positive difference every day RICHIE | Clean comedy show with family LESLIE | Hiking with my friends CONNIE | Lattes and deep chats STEPHANIE | Kayaking with my sister Sue PENNY | Tubing the river with family NICOLE | Watching grown sons play together MARCIA | Night away with my hubster KAROLINE | Face-to-face time with my people ANNE | Crocheting and meeting new friends ALYSSA | Community, creativity, friends, and obviously, food MACKENZIE | Laughing with the grandkids JANET | Family trips JANET | Jeeping in the mountains ALEXIS | Meeting friends at Five80 Coffeehouse CHLOE | Coffee, friends, worship, Oreos AUDREY | Dance party with the grandkids JANET | Walking down Main Street in Disney MARYCOLE | Playing soccer with my son AUSTIN | Going on a beach picnic CLAUDIA | Going to the Holy Land THOMPSON | Campfire under the stars TIFFANY | Serving Jesus's Bride locally GRACIE | Hanging out with my niece SIERRA | Road trips with best friends KATIE | Saturday morning breakfast out ANNE | Disney World at Christmas MELISSA | Pet an elephant KENNEDY | Warm sun, Bible open, Listening, CRYSTAL | Spending uninterrupted time with friends ALLY | Date night with my husband DANIELLE | Visit all major zoos LIZZY | The beach with my people JESSICA | Impromptu patio parties MELISSA | Walk beach with whole family LAURALEE | Having a Harry Potter marathon LYDIA | Taking long, hot baths KIMBERLY | Family vacations on Sanibel Island LYNNE | Hallmark movies and Christmas cookies AMY | Laughing with my friends JENNIFER | Going to a country concert KATIE | Being with my family ESTHER | Taking a nap KRISTIN | Vacation in California with family SANDY | Adventures with awesome friends MADISON | Climbing and soccer with friends MORGAN | Visiting Disney World with family JULIA | Watching African sunsets with friends ROSIE | Dancing in raining confetti BREE | Travel to Disney with family BECKY | A good game of rugby KYLE | Taking a cross-country road trip EMILY | A sleeper in a castle KATELYN | Laughing with my coworkers AMANDA | Hot bath and celebrity magazine MONICA | Card games with friends TESA | Doing photography for a living HEATHER | Adventures with my kids & wife JOHN | Adventures with my husband HEATHER | Road tripping coast to coast ARIEL | Being debt free in 2020 BECKY | Young Life camp LESLIE | Time at the beach CAROL | Making sandcastles with grandsons ANGIE | A tea party with friends KERRY | Sleeping, rain, reading, music & friends SARAH | Wine on veranda with friends ALICIA | S'mores brownies, Reading, Dancing, LYNN | Traveling the world BRIANNA | A cruise with my family JULIE | Beach with my five boys KASSY | The beach and friends JORDAN | Loving JW and Mary Mac BETH | Disneyland at night with friends JESSICA | Hiking mountains with my family JOY | Time with my new husband MOLLY | Pajama day daughters KATE | Road trip with my Sleeping-infant/toddler mom life at the beach JULI | Time alone with Baking for my friends ASHLIN | Josh KALAN | Hiking on a sunny watching the rain CULLEN | wildlife in Yellowstone REBEKAH | ROBYN | Hiking with my children Sipping coffee with my friends my people drinking coffee picnic BECCA | Being a mirror of with my husband SARAH | Hanging JENNIFER | Living fearless and free with people I love CAROLINE | time ALYSSA | Time at home being creative JULIANNE | Shopping for a great deal EMILY | Traveling with husband and daughter ASHLEY |



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# Hello

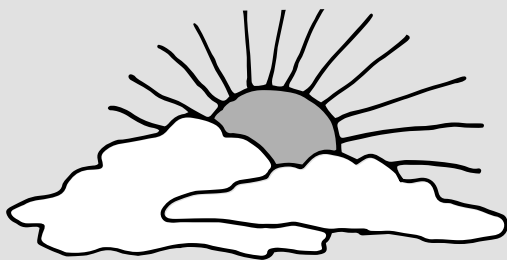
HI FRIENDS.

Welcome to a very special episode of *That Sounds Fun*. I'm your host, Annie F. Downs, and I'm so happy to be here with you today.

This is a little different from the normal episodes we share, as this conversation is a whole book instead of a one-hour sit-down between two friends that you can listen to as you walk or drive or work or play.

But my hope is the same. My hope is that you feel like you are sitting at the table with me or that we are out on a walk together or that I'm a fellow passenger on your commute to work, or that I'm on the treadmill beside you as we dig deeper into this little word. F—U—N. Fun. How to find it, what it looks like, and why you long for it. And maybe, just maybe, by the end of this time together we'll both be a bit different, a bit lighter, and a bit more understanding toward ourselves and each other.

By the way, throughout the book you will see pages of small font turned sideways (as a matter of fact, you've already passed a few of them!). When I asked my podcast listeners to tell me what sounded fun to them, these were their answers!



**What  
Sounds  
Fun  
*to* You?**

# East Pole Coffee Company



IT'S FALL, and I'm grounded from flying and traveling for work for a few months. By choice. By invitation from God. Though I'm not sure what I think about that.

Over the last seven years of this career, I have racked up miles in the air like a professional, which, according to my status with Delta, I pretty much am. I love to travel. I love seeing places and being places. I love flying.

Travel has always been one of the best parts of my job. But about a year ago, I felt God whisper to me, "You're going to want to be home next fall." It felt like an invitation from Him, and with time in prayer, for me and my team of employees and managers and agents, we decided that I would spend fall in Nashville. What? Fall is my busiest time of year—conferences and events typically keep my travel schedule fully booked in autumn. And God wanted me off the road?

But I heard what I heard and I agreed to obey. And so as I write these words, here I am: grounded.

For a change of scenery, I drove south from Nashville to see my family and I'm posted up at my favorite Atlanta coffee spot: East Pole Coffee Company. It's bright and beautiful, and it looks like it seats about thirty people. In the corners, there are green plants hanging from the ceiling, and the vines are dangling down to the floor, almost camouflaging the electrical outlets. The coffee bar is made of a long and dark maple, and there are these really lovely scalloped white tiles climbing from the white floors to the bar.

I'm sitting with my back to the windows. I like the hubbub of a busy coffee shop, and this one has constant traffic. Also, across the room at a little table for two are my cousin and his wife, who are home from abroad for just a few weeks. I like being able to see them in the same space.

I have a chai with oat milk (which, come on, milk made of oats is ridiculous and hilarious and so bougie but also delicious). The playlist I found on Spotify is a collection of instrumental classics called "refreshing pieces," and I'm switching between it and Jon McLaughlin's instrumental music. Still, all I want to do is slam my computer shut and escape. As I was driving here, my mind started dreaming of all the places I could run to and drive to and fly to and be right now. All the other places but HERE. But if there's one thing I've learned, it's that even if I did run away, there is no getting away from my insides. It's as if the sadness has taken residence, and it's not going to be left behind just because I leave.

And leaving isn't an option right now anyway. I've stopped traveling for work for a couple of reasons, one of them being

my physical health. A few months ago, I started getting migraines on almost a daily basis, and I was almost guaranteed to get one every time I flew on a plane. After months of this, my doctor put me on bed rest. Two full weeks of bed rest.

The decision to take the second half of the year off the road was sealed before I started getting daily migraines, but God knew. He knew before I did that the winter would be the winter of migraines and that a full fall calendar probably would have continued to feel invasive. While my body and heart would have been up for it, I worry my brain would not have. But there's lots more to this season off the road. I know there is.

At the start of this season, my friend Matt asked me how I was feeling about being grounded. Matt and I have similar personalities and he told me, "Don't be surprised by a sense of mild depression in this season." WHAT? THAT IS NOT WHAT I WANTED TO HEAR. But even his short message whispered something to me that I haven't been able to ignore. It amplified the chorus that had been singing in the background of my brain for the last few months, leading up to the season of no travel, so quiet it was barely audible. But when someone else called out the lyrics, I heard them clearly: There is something scary to me about months at home without anywhere to go. I haven't done this in almost a decade—been in my own house every night of the week for a lot of weeks.

Fast-forward to spring 2020. If I had only known that just a few months later, we would all learn what it would be like to spend endless amounts of time in our own homes as we collectively experienced the beginning stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first global pandemic of our lifetime. Everyone

at home. No one in school or church. Most professionals no longer going into the office but working from guest rooms and couches and dining room tables. Some friends of mine thrived; some did not. We began to ask big questions of our world but also big questions about ourselves.

What happens to me when I can't go? When I can't get away from here?

Truth? I wish I were flying away right now. This has been a tough year. It included migraines and heartbreak and quarantine and really hard decisions. And as I think about all those things, something makes me feel like being in a different city would feel better. (It wouldn't. I've done this—tried to fix my problems by hopping on a plane—enough times before. But the whisper is still there. *Run from this and you will feel better.* But I won't feel better. I never do.)

How often do we call escapism “fun”? That's the real question for me. When I'm looking to define fun in my own life, to figure out how to handle the thing I don't know how to handle or how to process the pain I don't know what to do with, I wonder if I'm actually planning fun or just using fun to describe running away.

Today, I want to run. I'll pack a bag with my stuff and a bag with my feelings, then I'll leave the feelings bag behind, grab the other one, and board a plane that will fly me somewhere.

Anywhere.

I FEEL LIKE I'm a good person to tell you about fun and to tell you why you absolutely need fun in your life. For those who don't know, I am the host of a podcast called *That Sounds Fun*. Episodes release twice a week, Mondays and

Thursdays, and in every episode, I get to interview a friend or someone I wish I were friends with. Sometimes they are authors or musicians, and other times they are chefs or athletes or actresses or doctors or anyone who says something I think my listener friends will love.

Because we do need fun. We all have to find it. My friend Emily P. Freeman and I will often tell each other to “chase the fun.” Whether your life looks exactly the way you thought it would—financially, spiritually, emotionally, relationally—or one or more of those categories feels out of sync with what you thought today would look like, fun is an integral part of what God has in store for you.

And the pursuit of fun will actually bring you some of the answers you hope exist, answers to some of the deep questions rooting around inside you.

A weird thing has happened to me since people started listening to the podcast. When people come up to me in public, whether it be at the airport or in a restaurant, at a coffee shop or at church, they often tell me what they do for fun.

Because we always talk about fun on the show. At the end of every episode, I ask each guest the exact same question: “What sounds fun to you?” And because listeners hear me ask that question twice a week, they want to answer it too.

It’s hilarious, really, how much we want to talk about fun. I usually have to interrupt people and ask for their name because they are so quick to tell me their story that they forget to tell me what their parents put on their birth certificate the day they entered the world. So I stop the friend, ask their name, then tell them to continue. And once we’ve

finished the conversation, their next question is “Can I tell you what I do for fun?”

And my answer is always yes.

Because I love fun.

WE FEEL SOMETHING lacking in our lives. We sense that this place in us that used to be filled just isn't anymore, even on our best days. It may just be a squeak sometimes, but other days it is a roar in our ears that something has been lost and we don't know how to find it and won't be able to find it. But we miss it. Because we know it used to be filled.

What is that thing? What are we missing that makes us feel its loss? You think I'm going to say fun here, and while that isn't wrong, I've realized that it's actually too simple an answer. But you know that, don't you?

You know that like I know that because it doesn't matter how hard we try or where we look, we can't seem to find that thing we've all lost. That buzz you get from a glass of wine won't get it back. His hand around your waist, while it feels awesome, doesn't return to you what you've lost. Even the best day lined up from start to finish still leaves you wondering if it's all going to crash down around you tomorrow. Because that thing, whatever it is, is still missing.

I saw a video on Instagram the other night (when I should have been sleeping) of an outdoor event where multiple massive games of Jenga were stacked on tables beside each other. You know the ones I am talking about? Where each Jenga piece, instead of being the size of a finger, is the size of a forearm. They were set all up and down two sides of a sidewalk in the middle of a grassy knoll. They were stacked

and being carefully played by multiple groups of people. Everyone seemed to be having a great time playing these large versions of a fun group game. Suddenly, a college-age girl ran by the camera and shoved all five Jenga stacks, sending pieces flying. A drive-by (run-by?) destroying of everyone's good time. In the video, a woman screamed and people threw their hands in the air and everyone was super frustrated that they were playing a game until this girl came and crumbled everything.

After I watched that video, I couldn't fall asleep because I kept wondering if a cosmic version of that was going to happen in my life the next day.

I'm not here to tell you to *carpe your diems*. That's not the solution. To me that is just the other side of the same coin, asking where to find the thing we have lost and what's the quickest way to escape from here or fill in the gap of what is missing with anything we can find.

I think the truer statement is that what we have lost is real. That thing we know is missing is no joke. It's legit. While the world may look at your life and tell you that you have everything, you know the quiet, nagging whisper of truth. We have lost Eden, we have lost peace, we have lost the foundation upon which genuine fun can be built. And we have to go search for it.

SO THAT'S WHY we are here. That's the journey I've been on in my own life. A journey of sobriety (in more ways than you'd think), a rappelling trip into the depths of my own pain, a search for understanding. I thought I was writing a book about fun, but I realized we both need more than what that

could offer. We need a way to find hope, to believe what we have lost can be found.

I think it can. But only if we will go where this story asks us to go. We cannot be afraid here—or at least, we cannot let the fear win. Let's all be brave, right? If we have to walk into our pain on the way to Eden, then so be it. Let's rebuild a foundation that used to exist just under our feet, so we can add layer upon layer of the good stuff, the heartbeats, the loud laughs, the tears of joy. Because, this won't surprise you, that sounds fun to me.