



WSIRN Episode 198: Reading for the FUN of it
Hosted by Anne Bogel, with guest Annie F. Downs

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[CHEERFUL INTRO MUSIC]

Hey readers. I'm Anne Bogel, and this is What Should I Read Next? Episode 198.

Welcome to the show that's dedicated to answering the question that plagues every reader: What should I read next?

We don't get bossy on this show: What we WILL do here is give you the information you need to choose your next read. Every week we'll talk all things books and reading and do a little literary matchmaking with one guest.

Ever since I visited today's guest, Annie F. Downs, on her podcast That Sounds Fun a little while ago to talk about all things summer reading, I've been wanting to talk all things books and reading with her [HERE](#), on What Should I Read Next. Readers, I wasn't sure what direction our conversation would go in today, but I KNEW it would be fun. It IS that — and also we wandered in directions I did not expect today. We're chatting about the author who made Annie a better storyteller, her surprising love for reading what she calls "Dead Men's writing," we take a detour to totally fangirl about all the literary good Dolly Parton has done in the world (and do I have a new book rec for that? Of course I do.) And then I recommend a few books I didn't expect to recommend at the beginning of our conversation, but felt absolutely perfect by the end.

Let's get to it.

ANNE: Annie, welcome to the show.

[00:01:33]

ANNIE: Thanks for having me, Anne. I'm so happy to be. I love you. I love what you do. I love your podcast. This feels very exciting to me.

ANNE: It was a joy to be on That Sounds Fun recently, and so thanks for coming to my house this time.

ANNIE: The response to you being on my show was so fun because everybody was like, oh my gosh, I love Anne. I already listen to everything she does. I read everything. It was so, so fun.

ANNE: Well that's so kind. And I love that people are excited about books. So today we're going to talk about your books and your reading life, but first, what is your given name, Annie Downs?

ANNIE: It's actually Annie. That's the fullness. That is my full name.

ANNE: Middle name?

ANNIE: I don't tell my middle name [ANNE LAUGHS] because it's weird and it's complicated, so we just say Annie F. Downs. That's enough. We say F is for fancy because as Reba says, I might have been born just plain white trash, but Fancy was my name.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] My mind went to Reba immediately. You know what I still so sad about?

ANNIE: What?

ANNE: Every year of my childhood, my parents took us to Opryland for one last hurrah before school started.

ANNIE: Really?

ANNE: And there is no Opryland, not with the mall.

ANNIE: Well there is, there's an Opryland, but it's not the theme park that it used to be. Now it's a mall.

ANNE: There's no screaming delta demon, and there's no-

ANNIE: No! [LAUGHS]

ANNE: Whatever, side by side, roller ... I'm a wuss. Like I don't do loops, but there's no like rollercoaster that I can handle. I think maybe even now, my like ageing, achy back could handle.

[00:02:55]

ANNIE: Yeah.

ANNE: Anyhow. I don't know why I'm telling you my Nashville beef. Okay, so, Annie is your given name.

ANNIE: I moved here about maybe ten years too late to really appreciate the Opryland theme park because it was gone by about ten years ago, before I got here.

ANNE: Let me just say though I think my appreciation for the Opryland theme park is 100% nostalgia based.

ANNIE: Oh, right. In real life, it might not be quite as-

ANNE: Maybe not. Maybe not.

ANNIE: My enneagram-7-ness tends to remember everything better than it really was. [ANNE LAUGHS] But then I work myself into no, this is as great as I thought it was when I get there. [LAUGHS] So I don't know that feeling of it not living up 'cause I force it to. But I believe you, and it still would be fun to like, one of the things I like, really love about Dollywood and Disneyland over DisneyWorld is the nostalgia feeling that's attached to it in general. I kinda love that Dollywood feels like you're getting this experience that is nostalgic as well as modern.

ANNE: Annie, I've never been to Dollywood.

ANNIE: What?!

ANNE: But I love her.

ANNIE: Right.

ANNE: In fact, I read a book coming out in November by a Tennessee author where there is a big debate at the family dinner table about who the greatest Tennessean is of all time.

ANNIE: Yes.

ANNE: The Senator at the table is like, Dolly Parton, are you kidding me? And everybody else is like, oh come on! We're going to convince you right now. It's a great scene.

ANNIE: Oh, yeah, for sure it's Dolly Parton. [ANNE LAUGHS] I 100% ... I mean, but not only for her Dolly Parton-ness, and not only for Dollywood, we're about to dive deep into Dollywood for about 10 seconds.

[00:04:22]

ANNE: She is a lover of the literary arts. So I feel like we are still in the right space here.

ANNIE: Yes. Yes. Yes.

ANNE: But no, I don't, why?

ANNIE: Okay. Because she grew up in Sevierville. She grew up in that area of Tennessee and all of her parents' friends and all of her community did not finish school. So like her dad never knew how to read, okay? 'Cause they're like old school mountain people. There weren't enough jobs for all the people that lived there, especially as coal mines kept closing down. And so she built Dollywood to employ all of her neighbors.

ANNE: Wait, really? I knew the story about her dad not being able to read 'cause I listen to her audiobook *Dream More*, which is so good.

ANNIE: Yes. Yes. There's a new *Dream More* place as well, a new resort. But yeah, the original reason she started building and creating all that stuff in that area was so that she could give employment to all of her neighbors that she grew up around. Imagination Library as you're talking about literary things, I mean, there's a program in Tennessee where you sign your child up when they are born, and for free, for the first five years of their life, they get a book mailed to their house, to their name, once a month. So every kid in Tennessee gets 60 books by the time they're five-years-old.

ANNE: Yeah. She's given away more than 100,000 books.

ANNIE: Yeah. It's incredible. She is the most impactful Tennessean, bar none to me.

ANNE: Okay. You moved to Nashville, but you're so ... I just think of you as so Nashville now, but it's not your hometown?

ANNIE: It is. You know, as I like to say, I was raised in Atlanta, but I grew up in Nashville. [BOTH LAUGH] In so many ways that is true. I've been here a little more than 11 years. Or actually 11 years this month. I moved here 11 years ago this month. So I've been here since 2008, but up until 2008, I grew up outside of Atlanta in Mariota, Georgia, kinda Kennesaw-Woodstock area. And went to University of Georgia, so I lived in Athens. I ended up living in Athens for about seven years, and then I moved back to my hometown for a couple years and then I moved up here.

ANNE: And the rest is history.

ANNIE: Yeah, that's right.

[00:06:14]

ANNE: Exactly. Okay. So, what is it you do exactly in Nashville, Annie Downs? Do you have one of those names were people want to say the whole thing?

ANNIE: Yeah, yeah. I get AFD a lot. I get Annie F a lot. I get all sorts of things. I'm great with all of them. But yes, you can call me Annie Downs.

ANNE: There are like three people in my life who call me Annie.

ANNIE: Oh, do they? That's so sweet.

ANNE: Yeah, yeah.

ANNIE: So one of my other best friends in Nashville is also named Annie, and we are in the same social group pretty much every other day of our lives. All the other families have kids that are in our little group, and so a lot of kids call me Annie Downs. [ANNE LAUGHS] So there's like one whole family where like the three-year-old girl when she wants me to come color with her, will be like Annie Downs, come over here. And I'd say to the parents, don't ever correct her. That's adorable.

So, I am in Nashville because for my day job, for what I do with my life, is I write books. I travel and speak at conferences, events, churches. I have the podcast called That Sounds Fun. I'm a co-host on The Relevant Podcast, and then also I am on the teaching team at my church here in Nashville called Crosspoint, and I'm in leadership there. So that's part of my life that is not really any of my official job titles, but is a big part of why I am on this planet. But what I work on day to day is books, speaking, podcasts. Yeah, yeah. [LAUGHS]

ANNE: That's a lot.

ANNIE: Interestingly enough, that's the conversation my team and my counselor are having as well. [BOTH LAUGH] That's a lot for one business to run.

ANNE: But you're a seven.

ANNIE: Yeah, but I'm a seven, and I love it. I think it's really fun. I like having a lot to do every day. If I don't, idle hands, you know, are a problem for me and I don't want to have idle hands, so I like having a lot to do. This season from August through the rest of 2019, I am not traveling. We are looking at a world where we take breaks from certain portions of my career in order to get the kinda focus that they need, and bringing more people on the team to help run the pieces that I don't have to run by myself and shouldn't run by myself.

ANNE: I apparently use the word resonate wrong and every time I say it now, I get emails from readers say, you should really know--

[00:08:16]

ANNIE: Tell me how! Tell me how-

ANNE: Well I don't know! See now I want to say I really resonate with what you're saying, but I think maybe that-

ANNIE: Yes. That's true.

ANNE: It might be true, but I'm not sure if it's grammatically correct.

ANNIE: Oh.

ANNE: Regardless, Annie Downs, I really resonate with that. [ANNIE LAUGHS] In fact, we have a whole team meeting today for everyone in Modern Mrs Darcy/What Should I Read Next land to figure out how we're going to keep all the plates spinning.

ANNIE: Yes. I have the same one. It's the meeting right after this.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Are you serious?

ANNIE: Yup. We all are kinda figuring out what is 2020 and 2021 look like and how do we do this well and who are we missing on our team that we need and what can we take off of Annie's plate and what needs to stay on Annie's plate. We are figuring out all the exact same things on this very day.

ANNE: Well it is that kinda day.

ANNIE: It's great. And those days are really ... They really matter because it reminds me ... A core question I've always had in my heart is who will take care of me? Who is taking care of me and it's just a good reminder even though I run the company and I'm the president of the company and the company depends on me showing up every single day that is a work day, I do not have to carry this by myself. There are other people that are taking care of this for me and with me.

ANNE: How does the seven feel about being the president of anything? 'Cause I have to put president on my tax returns and I feel like such a schmuck.

ANNIE: Oh, my gosh, really? Why? Tell me more.

ANNE: Because it sounds pretentious. [ANNIE LAUGHS] And I'm a nine.

ANNIE: It's true.

[00:09:35]

ANNE: I don't want to be pretentious.

ANNIE: Yeah. Yeah, I get that. I don't feel that.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] I like that about you.

ANNIE: I am super proud of the hard work we do at our office, and I am super proud to be the president of a company that does the kind of work that we get to do. Now I don't do all the work. I probably do 50% of the work, maybe, compared to what my employees and partners do. But I am incredibly proud that 11 years ago, I was teaching elementary school and decided one day that maybe one day I would try this writing thing. And now I'm president of a company that has three distinct wings that are all operating in their own way. And so, I am proud of that title 'cause I didn't know I'd ever have it. I just thought I was trying something new.

ANNE: High-fives, Annie.

ANNIE: Thanks.

ANNE: So, you're a person who literally works with words professionally.

ANNIE: Yes. As do you.

ANNE: I do. And for some people, that can be detrimental to their reading life.

ANNIE: Yeah.

ANNE: Either they don't read or it just ends up feeling like work or like a chore. What role does reading play in your life?

ANNIE: You know, it's been an interesting journey because before this was my job. Also, before our phones encouraged the kind of distraction that they encourage now or invite us to the distraction. I don't know the phone is a neutral tool, but they invite us to a distraction that I didn't have. I was an insatiable reader. I mean, I just read books. Constantly read magazines. Read constantly. When this became my job that I write full time, speak full time, and am constantly working with words in one way or another, and about the same time Instagram comes along and Twitter comes along and Facebook comes along and all these other things that will let me read in tiny chunks. I really had kinda a mountain valley experience of how much I was reading. It really dipped pretty low of how many books I was reading for awhile until I realized that I felt like I was missing something. It felt like a friend was missing or an experience was missing. I went okay, what am I doing? Oh, I'm on my phone until I fall asleep. That's different. I used to be, I used to fall asleep holding books my whole life.

[00:11:37]

ANNE: What happened that made you realize that something had changed? 'Cause a lot of people don't even notice, you know? Like when change happens overtime, sometimes you don't even realize that you've really moved the marker.

ANNIE: That's right. And I think it's the same with any other part of your life, like if you're not paying attention to the gauge, your car is going to run out of gas and you're going to know right when it ran out of gas. Or you could have caught it at halfway and you didn't. You know? Or with your health, where something happens where you go like, I used to be able to do this and now I can't do this. When did that happen?

I don't know that I paid attention as gradually as I should have, but I just began to realize that I was ... I didn't have any stories in my life. I didn't have any stories in my head that I wasn't living or weren't friends' stories and I didn't have this, like, fictional world existing in my mind that I have when I'm reading novels. I missed that, and so I just started making the choice. I plug my phone in at this time and I don't touch it again and I read and I have an intentional sabbath day every week, or just about every week. And I don't use my phone at all on my sabbath day unless I'm responding to someone who needs me personally, not for work.

But I read books all day long. And so all that just restored probably in the last three years, my love of reading novels, reading books, and in Nashville, a new bookstore opened called Parnassus. You know it. You've been there. And Parnassus is a locally owned bookstore owned by Ann Patchett, who's an incredible writer, an incredible novelist. And when we had a local bookstore again that was fun to peruse, it increased my love of reading again.

ANNE: Is that because when you walk into a place and you look around and you see all the things you could be reading, you get real excited all the things you could be reading?

ANNIE: Well, I'll tell you one of my favorite stories of Parnassus is ... I was working on my last book, *Remember God*. I just didn't think I had the motivation to finish, so I went to Parnassus and I walked around and I was like, look at all these people who finished. [BOTH LAUGH] They all finished what they started. You can too.

ANNE: That is amazing.

ANNIE: Yeah, that's helpful for me at Parnassus. I think you and I talked about this on my show, but I love the section of every bookstore, Barnes & Nobles has this. Barnes & Noble. Your local stores most will have this. The section where the employees are telling you what they love to read. 'Cause I really trust people who spend 40 hours in a bookstore. It's why we trust you, Anne, because you spend 40 hours telling me what to read every week.

ANNE: Mm-hmm.

[00:14:00]

ANNIE: It's why I love book clubs. And so I love that part. I will always look through those. Parnassus has a table — new releases, new releases nonfiction, and new releases local authors.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] You're basically describing my bookstore strategy. Staff picks, new fiction, new nonfiction.

ANNIE: I go through what the employees want me to read, and there's always a big Ann Patchett section as there should be, trust me. If I owned a bookstore, you're dealing with two bookshelves of Annie F. Downs, no question.

ANNE: Oh, 'cause people make pilgrimages and they want a souvenir and what better to take with you than a signed Ann Patchett?

ANNIE: 100%. I peruse there and then I just sometimes look ... I love young adult fiction. John Green is one of my, like, all-time favorite authors. And so I like to go back to that section sometimes. I loved the *Mockingjay* series, *Anne of Green Gables*. There are just books that were intended for young adults that I have always really enjoyed. I usually will sweep through there too and see something where the cover doesn't like, totally disgust me or repeal me. [BOTH LAUGH]

Especially 'cause sometimes they'll go, if you like John Green, you'll like this. Or if you like the *Mockingjay* series, you'll like this. And so, sometimes I just look through those and see if there's anything back there that I like too. Everytime I go into Parnassus to buy a book, I also try to buy a magazine. Just because I like the magazine medium and I don't want it going away, so I try to be a part of it. [LAUGHS] Once a month or so, somehow, besides the one I subscribe to.

ANNE: You know, I used to read magazines so much and I miss them. That hasn't actually encouraged me to read them.

ANNIE: They're the old school Twitter, right? Yeah, it's like back in the day where short form was put in our hands once a week. And I really love ... I love Real Simple. I love Good Grit. I love Garden & Gun. Those are both kinda Southern-centric magazines.

ANNE: Mm-hmm. I've got both of those, unread, on my back porch right now waiting to go to the library magazine basket.

ANNIE: So, yeah, there's just a couple that I still really like to read.

ANNE: So it sounds like reading for you is a way of ... oh, this is cheesy, Annie, but a way of filling your story bucket.

[00:16:02]

ANNIE: That's 100% it. And that's a funny thing to say again, enneagram, because one of the things people say about sevens is we live with a bucket that never feels full.

ANNE: I've not heard that!

ANNIE: Yeah. The problem with sevens is our bucket has holes in it. For me, reading and stories, particularly fiction stories do a real good job of filling up my heart and my bucket.

ANNE: This might be a really unfair question because it's going to be so broad, but whatever, we're going to go with it.

ANNIE: Yeah. I'm into it.

ANNE: What kind of stories do you find really satisfying?

ANNIE: I really love stories that could really happen. I am super satisfied when a story ends well. It doesn't have to end happy. I just want it to end well. I want it to end thoughtfully. I am really, really enjoy when the characters are people that I feel like I can know. Even if it's a historical fiction, which I really enjoy, I want characters that I feel like are humans. I don't want ... I'm not like sci-fi, outer space, and I'm not ghost, thriller-y kind of reader. I'm like real life. In TV terms, I love This is Us. I love The Food Network. I love things that are, like, real, you know? [LAUGHS] And so that's the kind of books I love to read as well.

ANNE: Are you looking for like relatable real life or do you just want it to feel believable? It doesn't have to be believable for you.

ANNIE: Yeah, it doesn't have to be relatable. Like I really liked *Girl With a Dragon Tattoo* and that's incredibly unrelatable to me. [ANNE LAUGHS] But I liked the book. So I don't need them to necessarily be something I could actually experience. I just need them not to take me into a super foreign world. Like I love Madeleine L'Engle. In fact, I made a goal in 2018 to read her entire nonfiction catalog. But what I found in *A Wrinkle In Time* series is I tried to read those as well as the more sci-fi they got, as they continued on, the less I could stay in the story.

ANNE: That makes sense.

Readers, if you think going back to school means you have to rush around town to replace a pair of worn out shoes, pick up that one weird and very specific school supply item, and then stock up on countless car snacks for all that drive time in your near future—well, getting all those things in your hands isn't as hard as you might think. Instead of running all over just Postmate it.

Postmates is your personal food delivery, grocery delivery - whatever-kind-of delivery service, all year round. Anything you're craving, Postmates can deliver. They're the largest on-demand network in the US, and offer delivery from all the restaurants, grocery and convenience stores, and traditional retailers, you could possibly want or need.

Download the app for iOS or Android for FREE, browse local restaurants and businesses, and track your delivery in real-time. Twenty-four hours a day, three-hundred-and-sixty-five-days a year - Postmates will bring you what you need within the hour.

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Readers, it still feels like summer where I live, but despite the high temperatures I am READY for fall weather and a fall wardrobe. I've been scanning my closet, making sure that I'm ready for fall. That means making sure my jeans and sweaters are ready to go, of course, but it also means tending to the foundation garments, because when those fit well, every thing you put on your body just looks better.

ThirdLove has all of your undergarment needs covered—from their classic t-shirt bra to a lacy plunge or strapless. ThirdLove guarantees comfort for any occasion with their Perfect Fit Promise.

Start with their online Fit Finder Quiz which you can take at home in 60 seconds. Then they'll match you with one of their 70 different sizes. If you need more help, a team of expert Fit Stylists are available everyday to help via text, chat or phone.

Not only will you get a precisely dialed in fit, but the bras are made with lightweight super thin memory foam cups, straps that don't slip, and tagless labels. All of these details really do make these the most comfortable bras I've worn.

ThirdLove's commitment to comfortable is obvious in everything they do. And I KNOW you think it's obvious because so many of you thanked me in person on book tour for introducing you to Third Love.

ThirdLove is so committed to making you happy that they give you 60 days to wear it, wash it, and put it to the test. And if you don't love your new bra, just return it and ThirdLove will wash it and donate it to a woman in need. I love that.

ThirdLove knows there's a perfect bra for everyone, so right now they are offering my listeners 15% off your first order!

Go to ThirdLove.com/READNEXT now to find your perfect-fitting bra... and get 15% off your first purchase! That's ThirdLove.com/READNEXT for 15% off today!

ANNE: Annie, you know how this works. You're going to tell me three books you love, one book you don't, and what you're reading now, and we will talk about what you may enjoy reading next.

[00:21:22]

ANNIE: Okay.

ANNE: So, how did you choose your favorites?

ANNIE: That was very easy. As soon as I was thinking about it, I knew exactly what I was going to tell you. So my all-time, very favorite book, hands down, bar none, will never be topped is *Christy* by Catherine Marshall. Have you read that? I'm sure you've had, right?

ANNE: I have not read that book.

ANNIE: [GASPS] Oh my gosh. Oh, gracious.

ANNE: I know that book. I've heard people talk about that book.

ANNIE: Yes.

ANNE: I have never read that book.

ANNIE: In the truest sense, a book that literally shaped my life because I read it in middle school, and it is about a young teacher in the 1920s who ... Or the teens. Who moves from the city to rural Appalachia to be a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse for all these children that are raised kinda out in the hollers. It is why I became a teacher and it's why I picked the schools that I picked to work in when I was teaching school. It's why I work with the nonprofit that I work with

most closely now called Christian Appalachian Project because I am just super passionate about seeing my neighbors get educated and get the resources that they deserve, even though they are currently underprivileged because of where they live. Mostly their geography than anything else.

Two that I've read really recently that I loved: *Maggie* by Charles Martin, but pretty much when it comes to Charles Martin, I have not run across a novel of his that did not become one of my favorite books I've ever read. I mean, he is becoming a modern day ... My modern day very favorite novelist for sure.

[00:22:53]

ANNE: What is it about his work, Annie?

ANNIE: He tells every day stories to me. He really takes me out of my life and invites me into the book. And I don't find all novelists do that. He does that very well. I like that he's a faith person. I like that makes appearances in his work, but I like that ... It's not a Christian fiction book. Any of his that I've read. It is a fiction book with Christian characters, which I think is really interesting. I'm a little bit amazed by him honestly.

ANNE: That's a good place to be in as a reader.

ANNIE: I was introduced to him maybe five or six years ago. My mom gave me a copy of his book *When Crickets Cry*.

ANNE: Which has been a guest favorite on What Should I Read Next before.

ANNIE: Yes. Has it? I'm sure.

ANNE: But that's the only Charles Martin book that I think we've ever talked about on the show.

ANNIE: So the reason my mom loved that one is, we have a house on Lake Burton that we grew up going to every summer.

ANNE: What? Oh, that's such a great connection.

ANNIE: And that book is set on Lake Burton. And so, Mom was like, you've gotta read this! And I didn't read it for a long time.

ANNE: Yeah.

ANNIE: I was speaking at a conference in Chicago and a woman walked up to me in my signing line and handed me a copy of *Long Way Gone*, which is another one of his novels, and said, "This may seem super weird, but I feel like I'm supposed to give this to you." And I was like, all

right. Like kinda like ... [ANNE LAUGHS] I was super grateful. And I didn't read it for probably two months, and then I read it and was like, oh my gosh, I think this is the guy that wrote the book about Lake Burton. So I read both of those, and then you know me, Anne. I started stalking that guy. I found him on Instagram. I found his email. I emailed him and said, will you come be on my podcast? I mean, like, I forced that man to be friends with me real quick. [ANNE LAUGHS] Because I was like, I need everyone I know to know that you write magical novels and have been for the last two decades.

And so it's been super fun to get to know him as a human as well. I've become a better storyteller based on how he writes his book.

[00:24:42]

ANNE: Tell me more about that.

ANNIE: I can just tell. I can feel in me a better observing of the world around me because of details that Charles puts in his books. He notices things in the setting in his mind about places that I want to start noticing about the places I'm really living. Like the shades of the grass or the air temperature or what someone's wearing or who's in the background of a story. He just seems to do a really nice job of that. I'm working on a book right now, my next nonfiction. I feel like it's better because of ... I've read so much Charles Martin lately.

ANNE: When it comes to reading, you've used the word novels a bunch. I know you must read nonfiction. When you're looking for books, just purely for enjoyment and to fill your bucket, is it fiction that you're on the lookout for?

ANNIE: Yes. I end up reading a lot of nonfiction because that is what my friends mostly write. And so if someone asks me, I do very few endorsements and even fewer forwards. I think I've written two forwards in my life and that's probably all I'm going to write. In those asks, people send you their book. The nonfiction I read is more often reading my friends' books in preparation for them being on the podcast or because I'm writing an endorsement or a forward. I don't often pick up any nonfiction book, particularly by someone that's alive. Not near as often. That's one in 50 I pick up from a stranger that's alive. I like reading dead guys.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] Wait.

ANNIE: So let me clarify. I like reading dead guys who write about faith and who write about spiritual disciplines, who write about prayer. I think someone who wrote about prayer in the 1800s, I trust them a lot for some reason. Particularly one that comes to my mind is E.M. Bounds who wrote a ton about prayer and revival and relationship with God is full spectrum of his life now that we know because he's dead, his full spectrum of his life proved that that was who he really was all the way through. And so I love reading his work about his faith life.

Okay, the third one, which is truly the best nonfiction book I've read in years probably as far as motivating and storytelling and novel feeling is David Platt's new book that comes out September 17th. It's called *Something Needs To Change*. And it's an eight-day journey of his through the Himalayan mountains, seeing different church plants and home churches, and I was just ... I mean, I was crying reading it on the treadmill. I was so moved by the experience of him and by the experience of what he said and felt about that week of his life.

But even that one, Anne, even when I was thinking about this for you. That book reads like a novel. It doesn't read like a nonfiction that's trying to teach you something on every page. I don't want to be taught on every page. I want to read a story and learn from it.

[00:27:44]

ANNE: I just circled a book in my notes ... I might have to, like, uncircle it.

ANNIE: Oh, no, no. You can teach me on every page. [ANNE LAUGHS] And I'll still listen to you. But I really like ... And so his was very story driven, which I really, really enjoyed.

ANNE: All right. I love it. Although, like, holy superlatives.

ANNIE: Yeah. I know. That's very Annie though.

ANNE: I know that as a fellow podcaster and author, you don't want to throw any authors under the bus and I get that.

ANNIE: Yes.

ANNE: But tell me about the kinds of books that you find not to be either right for you or worth your reading time.

ANNIE: I really struggled with this because I was like, Anne, don't make me say books I haven't liked. [LAUGHS] I feel bad about it.

ANNE: Do you read stuff you don't enjoy?

ANNIE: Uh, I do not finish stuff I do not enjoy. I think life's too short.

ANNE: I support that plan.

ANNIE: I don't force myself to finish a book. Usually for fiction, if the book's 300 pages, I try to give myself 70 and then if I go, I'm just not feeling this, I'll put it down and return it to the library or sell it McKay's, which is our, like, local used bookstore that I really, really love.

ANNE: Readers, PSA, McKay's is a thing of wonder.

[00:28:49]

ANNIE: Yes. Just don't send me pictures of the section that has all my books in it because it always hurts my feelings just a little bit at how many people have sold my books back.

[LAUGHS]

ANNE: I'm sure they were moving.

ANNIE: Yes, yes, yes.

ANNE: Internationally.

ANNIE: They loved them once.

ANNE: And they wanted to spread the book love to readers who could still enjoy them.

ANNIE: That's right.

ANNE: [LAUGHS] What does that say about me as a nine? That that's the story I tell myself to make everyone feel better?

ANNIE: And I'm the one who's like I'm avoiding the pain, don't show it to me. [ANNE LAUGHS]

Here are the ones I don't love. I tend to not love books where I feel like someone has been given the opportunity to be an expert on something there's no one way they've had time to be an expert on. And so a book on marriage that is by someone who's been married three years, I probably am not going to read that whole thing because ... Unless it's a book on your first three years of marriage. I want to read marriage books by people who have been married 25 years.

And so I don't like books where people are set up as an expert when I'm not totally convinced they're an expert. Particularly nonfiction. Now I don't want someone to pretend that they're an expert or to feel like they're an expert and me not to believe that. I'm not going to read a book from an author that got to write a book because they had some other success. So they had a viral video. Or they had a ... They're a movie star. Or they're a bachelor. They are an Instagram influencer. Because of that, a publisher found them and offered them a book.

ANNE: I feel like you're holding out a tray, inviting me to, like, place my pet peeves on it as topics of discussion.

ANNIE: Do you agree with some of those, some of that stance?

ANNE: Oh, hard yes. Of course I do. I can see a bunch of listeners going right now, ohhh. Right.

[00:30:30]

ANNIE: Yes, but I'll also tell you I'm the girl who has, on my bookshelf, the Dog the Bounty Hunter autobiography because I think Dog the Bounty Hunter is a fascinating character.

ANNE: I don't know what you're talking about.

ANNIE: He's a guy on TV.

ANNE: I don't know this guy on TV.

ANNIE: Reality show guy that he is a bounty hunter in Hawaii.

ANNE: You know what, sometimes this kind of thing is really good. Like just because the person has an Instagram account with four million followers does not mean that it's necessarily garbage.

ANNIE: That's right.

ANNE: But it does usually mean that the publisher thought they could make some money.

ANNIE: Girl, listen. I mean, I've had calls with friends of mine that publishers have pursued and my friend goes, hey this publisher called me and wants me to write a book because they really love what I say on Instagram. And I go look at their Instagram, and they have half a million followers and I'm like, I bet that publisher does. And they go, they say, the publisher says I don't even need an agent! And I'm like, fire shooting out of my ears, you know? [ANNE LAUGHS] And I'm like the Renegade, I will help my friend get a lot of money if this publisher is going to do this. [LAUGHS] And so often those books just aren't literary experiences that I want readers to have. Sometimes they are. Sometimes they're really good books and they sell really well and I'm glad they exist. But in my limited time I chose to spend reading nonfiction, I am next to never going to pick a book by someone who got a book deal because of something else. Does that make me a monster? I'm sorry.

ANNE: No, I think that makes you a savvy consumer. I'm sorting through the books I've read in my mind that have been launched by a 10,000 word piece in the Atlantic or a viral blog post, and there must be some that were truly good.

ANNIE: It used to happen so much when someone would have a viral blog post and they would go, oh, that thing you wrote about dating, let's write a whole book about it. And then you read the book and you're like, hey, that was 100 pages of the same thing you said in those 500 words.

ANNE: And then the viral post was chapter four, and that was the best part of the book and really the only part you needed. Yeah. Which is just not respectful of people's time.

[00:32:32]

ANNIE: Yes, that's right.

ANNE: Or money.

ANNIE: Right.

ANNE: Yeah, I find that really frustrating. And I think there is ... I'm a trusting soul on the whole and I just assumed for a long time that if a book was published then it must be good.

ANNIE: Mm-hmm.

ANNE: I mean, there are all kind of reasons that books are published and the quality of contents therein is not the only one.

ANNIE: Yes. And to me, a person has a viral blog post that becomes a book, what I watch to see is what happens with the next book. 'Cause that's the one I'll probably open up 'cause I'm interested if you had more to say than just being that first person.

ANNE: Which is so interesting, because when it comes to fiction, the phrase sophomore slump exists for a reason. It's true for artists, too.

ANNIE: I have that fear because one of my books has had a strong freshmen experience [LAUGHS] My 100 Days To Brave devotional, and of course, publishers want me to write a lot more of those, and I am terrified of the sophomore slump.

ANNE: I didn't really understand this until my brother explained it to me. He's a big music guy. And he was like, look, before a band made their first album, they spent 10 years refining. Of course, this isn't true for everyone.

ANNIE: Yeah.

ANNE: But it's true for many. They spend 10 years refining every note of every song and every line, and then the ... Is it called a debut album? I really only speak publishing.

ANNIE: Yeah.

ANNE: But their first album is the culmination of years and years of effort.

ANNIE: Yes.

[00:33:54]

ANNE: So they get signed, and it's good and they're like, well, great, we really like this first one. We need another one in 18 months and you spent 10 years of your life giving it everything that you had, and then you have a tiny window to do it again.

ANNIE: Yes. Yes.

ANNE: And some people do it again, but that's a lot of pressure, and those are not circumstances that set people up for success.

ANNIE: Right.

ANNE: There are many great second novels, Annie.

ANNIE: Yes.

ANNE: And I'm sure second albums as well.

ANNIE: I hope your listeners say to me, hey, Annie, this person who had a book after they had a TV show or yada yada yada, is an awesome read, you should read it. I will read it. I just haven't had that experience. I haven't had a book jumped off the shelf to me like that yet.

ANNE: Okay, listeners, you know where to find us in the show notes. If you have ideas, we would love to hear them.

ANNIE: Yes.

ANNE: Okay. Annie, what are you reading right now?

ANNIE: You know what's funny is I am actually reading *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C.S. Lewis. I posted a couple of days ago about like a personal season I'm in in my life of feeling a little bit uncomfortable in my own skin, just kinda ... Not in a self esteem way, but in like a ugh, there's just a lot of stuff going on and I feel like I just want to get out. I just need a break, yada yada. So many people said to me, you should read *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* because of this one scene. And I think I've read it before and I don't remember it near as well as *Prince Caspian* or *The Last Battle*, and so I pulled it off my shelf and that's what I'm working through now.

ANNE: It's so interesting to me how a book can mean different things to you at different points in your life. How you could have read that book before and taken plenty away from it and enjoyed it and yet, reading it now, years later, is just a totally different season for you and totally different reading of the book.

[00:35:29]

ANNIE: I mean, I don't know a lot of people who don't love the *Chronicles of Narnia* series. Simply and kind, but it's also profound and deep. You know, there's something simple about reading a good children's ... Do you know a book I pull off the shelves sometimes that I loved is *Surviving The Applewhites*. Really random children's book that I used to read it out loud to the kids every year and it's just a really sweet story. And so I just have a couple of those really children's books that I still go back to every now and again.

Oh, which makes me want to tell you one more story. [ANNE LAUGHS] Can I tell you one more thing, Anne? And then you can tell me what I need to read.

ANNE: This is on brand.

ANNIE: For us? I know. Well for me maybe. Someone asked me the other day my two favorite books as a kid and there are two books that I dropped in the bathtub constantly. I would read them over and over again and I'd love them, and one was *Starring Sally J. Freedman As Herself* and other was *Harriet the Spy*.

ANNE: Aww. I love that.

ANNIE: When they asked me, I thought I should figure out why I love those books so much. And in both of those books, there's this strong female character who in her imagination defeats all the bad guys, but feels a little bit misunderstood in the real world. [LAUGHS] And I was like [GASPS] that is why I love them! [LAUGHS] I feel misunderstood sometimes but in my mind, I defeat all the bad guys. I don't beat other people. I just ... The bad guys always lose in my mind.

ANNE: That is fantastic. And it's so interesting how when you start pulling at the threads of your reading life, you can learn so much about not only the kinds of books you enjoy reading, but the person that you have always been.

ANNIE: Yeah. I just thought it was so funny. Anyway. Sorry. Do what we're really supposed to do.

ANNE: Let's talk about what you may enjoy reading next.

ANNIE: Tell me everything. I'm so ready.

Readers, these days I'm capturing memories on my phone, like back to school photos, and highlights from track meets and school plays and piano recitals. My own parents captured all of these moments too, but it wasn't quite as easy for them as whipping out their phone is for us. In fact, the technology has changed so much they can't even watch those old movies.

If your own childhood memories are locked away in a technological dustbin, you need LegacyBox.

LegacyBox is a full service digital preservation service. LegacyBox takes all your old analog memories, just put a label on them, drop them in your box, and LegacyBox digitizes them sending you a thumbdrive, DVD or digital download in return.

At my house, we've done two rounds of cleaning up of old photos and a few high school performances on tape. The first time we wondered what was on these negative and old tapes and debated what was worth preserving. The second time we just through it all in—it was so easy.

You'll get peace of mind knowing you haven't lost any of those old memories and a great sense of accomplishment cleaning up that closet, attic, or basement shelf.

There's never been a better time to digitally preserve your memories. Visit Legacybox.com today to get started.

Plus, for a limited time they're offering my listeners an exclusive discount. Go to Legacybox.com/READNEXT to get 40% off your first order.

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Get started preserving your past!

ANNE: You loved *Christy* by Catherine Marshall, all time favorite.

[00:38:59]

ANNIE: Yes.

ANNE: *Maggie* by Charles Martin, which it sounds like it's pretty much a stand in for everything he's ever written. And *Something Needs To Change* by David Platt. Let's start with the nonfiction that I circled, scribbled it out, and then circled it again based on what you said. You're a writer who writes Christian nonfiction and you know how, I feel like there's various circles of authors and genres and Christian nonfiction and I have a Christian nonfiction recommendation for you. I don't feel like he's in your circle, but the themes are similar enough to the Platt book and because you're a human living in the United States of America right now, I think you might be interested in this one. And there are a lot of facts here, Annie.

ANNIE: Okay.

[00:39:40]

ANNE: There's stories that are serving a fact-driven narrative.

ANNIE: No, it's good. I'm ready.

ANNE: And there's a lot of history.

ANNIE: Ooh, yeah. I love history.

ANNE: So he's still writing today in North Carolina. His work has not stood the test of time. I think it will. I'd like to see it. But he's citing lots of people and standing in a tradition that has been going on for a really long time. And this is Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, do you know any of his work?

ANNIE: No. I don't even know his name.

ANNE: A little sad to hear that, but for our purposes today, I'm really happy to hear that.

ANNIE: Yeah.

ANNE: His writing has really rocked our world in my home thinking about how we are going to spend our time and our money and what kind of spaces we want to be in, and how we want to be involved in our community in the past year. He has a new book coming out this ... I think it's December. It's called *Revolution of Values*. And when I first heard that, this is an embarrassing story, mkay, but when I first heard that, I thought, I mean, it's not really catchy. Where that title come from? You know, wonder what it means. I am happy, but also sorry to say for my own historical ... I'm telling on myself here that that phrase is from Martin Luther King Jr. and I should have known that. 'Cause I mean, talk about a man who's good with words. Okay.

ANNIE: Right.

ANNE: Okay. *Revolution of Values: Reclaiming Public Faith for the Common Good*. He shares a lot of David Platt's interests in if your faith is not working for the poorest of these, then your faith is not working.

ANNIE: Yeah, right.

ANNE: He's writing from a Christian perspective, but he's also really sinking his work into the history of, especially the United States of America, and he's saying how The Bible has been abused and misused to serve aims it never would have intended or agreed with, like suppressing the poor or discriminating against people because of race. And it gets called biblical in certain context for very specific reasons, and that is to keep power in the hands of the powerful and to take even more resources away from people who have little.

In every chapter, he talks about an issue, and he introduces these issues by telling stories of real people. Either people of history or people who are struggling through issues right now. Like in a chapter called Give Us The Ballot, he tells us amazing story about a 93-year-old woman who fought for voting rights when she was young and is still doing it, or perhaps it's doing it again when she is old. So there is a real human connection here, but I think it's so good and so timely and I do wish his work was better known. And I think you might be someone who might be willing to let this be one of the 4% of nonfiction books you read of your own volition.

[00:42:04]

ANNIE: Okay. Great. Done.

ANNE: So that is Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *Revolution of Values: Reclaiming Public Faith for the Common Good*.

ANNIE: Ah, I can't wait. And that is so in line with some of the things I really care about. So, if I'm going to pick up a nonfiction right now, it's going to be about justice and helping the underserved feel that they have an opportunity within our faith space particularly. I'm all about that.

ANNE: Those are themes that you will definitely encounter there that are really important to him. And you've talked a lot about Appalachia and the mountains-

ANNIE: Yes.

ANNE: And he lives in Durhman, North Carolina and works with a lot of people in a lot of rural areas. So I think, I think you're all tracking with each other.

ANNIE: Yes. Oh, good, I can't wait.

ANNE: All right. More mountain people, are you ready?

ANNIE: Yes! Yes.

ANNE: Okay. This is a newer release. It came out this May. It's called *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*. It's by Kim Michelle Richardson.

ANNIE: Okay.

ANNE: Do you know this one?

ANNIE: No. But you've got me already.

[00:42:58]

ANNE: At the heart of it are the pack horse librarians of Kentucky. Do you know about the pack horse library project? This is 100% historical, in the 30s and 40s, women went into the difficult to reach mountain communities — I almost said towns, but towns would be way overstating it — on their mules to deliver books to people who couldn't either access them or had never had access to them. That is all 100% historically accurate.

This book centers around a 19-year-old librarian named Cussy Carter who works for the project and she lives in eastern Kentucky among these impoverished hill people. Also making this interesting, and this is something I knew absolutely nothing about, despite Kentucky being my home state and where I still live, she's made her librarian one of the blue people of Kentucky. I had to Google. This is 100% real. So these people had a skin condition called Methemoglobinemia.

ANNIE: Oh, wow.

ANNE: Which Kim Michelle called MMG or something much easier to say, which really did give their skin a blue cast. And something you see in the book is just the discrimination these people suffered and it's really interesting to see the pecking order in society in the book. Like who was better than who because of the way they looked or what they did or where they lived or who their Mama was. And it's ... I mean, it's terrible and sad, but it makes for fascinating reading just to see how people felt and lived in this society then. It's a story of ... Let's say long odds and big hope, which I feel like is something we see in your favorites.

ANNIE: Yeah.

ANNE: But also, there's a woman riding a mule to take books to people who don't have them. I mean, come on.

ANNIE: Yeah. I'm ready.

ANNE: I'm glad to hear it. This book, I think, is 100% perfect for you and I think I would have thought of it anyway, but I just did an event recently at my local bookstore which is Carmichael's in Louisville with Kim Michelle and she was in conversation with myself and with Joshilyn Jackson, who has a new book out July 30th called *Never Have I Ever*. It's funny on the surface, I don't think those books have a lot in common, but what I think they have in common, Annie, is that they're really, really good for you.

Here's why. So this one is totally different from *Book Woman* and also from Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove except we all happen to have southern authors today. So Kim Michelle's in Kentucky, Joshilyn lives in Decatur, Georgia, and her books have all been set in the south. *Never Have I Ever* is domestic noir. It's the first book Jackson has written in this genre. It begins

at book club, which is kinda fun and relatable except this book club is about to go horribly wrong.

The hostess has everything ready to be perfect and lovely and just the way it should. And she's read *The House of Mirth* and she's ready to discuss it and respect it and she's probably president of the PTA, but I don't remember that detail in the book, but it would suit her character. But then this stranger walks through the door and she wants to play a game and that is the game of the title, *Never Have I Ever*, and she starts getting these women to talk about the bad things they've done. And you start by saying, oh, what's something you did today that you're not proud of? But it quickly escalates.

The hostess, the PTA president, the woman who has everything all together, picture perfect — you know, admirable life, not a hair out of place — begins to realize that this game is aimed at her because this stranger in town knows what she did way back when, that thing that she's buried.

[00:46:28]

ANNIE: Oh, yeah. Okay.

ANNE: So this is a fun, suspenseful mystery.

ANNIE: Yeah. I'm super here for this.

ANNE: But I wouldn't recommend it to you based on that. So what I really like about this for you is I'm sure that many readers read Joshilyn Jackson and it never crosses their mind, but she said the other night that as an author, she is extremely interested in the mechanics of grace. And that's not what you think of when you pick up the latest, you know, best selling domestic noir at the bookstore, but that's what's happening below the surface here. And she said that she is just fascinated by the idea. Perhaps because she's done a lot of volunteer work in the prisons and worked with women whose lives have really been defined by the worst thing they've ever done.

So what she's exploring here is how much should our lives, not just the characters in the pages of these books, but how much of our lives should be defined by the worst thing we ever did. And at what point do you move on? Can you move on? Can you get past that? Who has to forgive you? Like is it the person you wronged? Is it the person in charge? Do you have to forgive yourself, and do you really deserve that and how will that be determined? And I think having a book that is just a great story, but that has themes that you can really sink into, I think this could be a really good fit for you.

ANNIE: Oh, man, now ... I mean, how am I supposed to live my life when there are these three books that I want to read all the time right now?

[00:47:49]

ANNE: I don't know. Just walk into Parnassus and see what jumps out at you-

ANNIE: I'm going to go ask them for all three of these. The two fiction are out, right? Even if the nonfiction isn't out, yet?

ANNE: They are out.

ANNIE: Okay.

ANNE: Okay. So we talked about *Revolution of Values* by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, *The Book Women of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michelle Richardson, and *Never Have I Ever* by Joshilyn Jackson. So of those three books, Annie, I know you just said you have no idea, but what do you think you'll read next?

ANNIE: *The Book Women of Troublesome Creek* will be next. The third one, the *Never Have I Ever*, feels like a treat I'll give myself when I finish writing the book I'm working on. [ANNE LAUGHS] It feels like the one when I take three days off after I turn in my first draft of my next book, that's what I'm going to do for those three days by the pool.

ANNE: Well I hope you love it.

ANNIE: Anne, you're the best. Thank you so much. You are so great at this and you, you just have no idea what a trusted and lovely resource you are for all of us. So I feel real honored to be on the show.

ANNE: Well you are so kind, and it is my absolute pleasure to have you and thank you for coming.

ANNIE: My pleasure.

[CHEERFUL OUTRO MUSIC]

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Readers, that's it for this episode. Thanks so much for listening. And as Rainer Maria Rilke said, "ah, how good it is to be among people who are reading." Happy reading, everyone.