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Intro: Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talked through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women. We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life and how to live every bit of our life to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

I'm so excited about today's episode. Today we're talking about the beautiful things that can happen when your life doesn't exactly go according to plan. I recently had the privilege of being a guest on a podcast called On the Front Porch. The hosts are two amazing women from our Girls Night community, Angela and Mary. They are so much fun. They asked amazing questions.

I love the conversation so much, I just knew I had to share with y'all. I asked them if I could share the interview we did for their show here on Girls Night and they so graciously said yes.

I'm excited about this episode because if you're anything like me, you've had this picture in your head for a long time of how your life is going to play out. We're going to attend that school, get that degree, get hired for that one job you've always wanted, get married, have kids, buy your dream house, the list goes on.

But as most of us know, life doesn't always play out like we want it to or in the timeframe we hope it will. Sometimes God has this way of totally wrecking our plans, or at least that's how it sometimes felt to me. And that's the story you're going to get to hear today.

In this episode, I'm sharing about my faith journey and how I met Jesus in the most unexpected way in the most unexpected place. I'm talking about several times, like several, where God totally wrecked my plans when it came to my career. And then finally, I'm going to be sharing how God transformed my outlook on dating and relationships and helped me make the most of my single life.

You guys, I share so much of my story in this episode and how God has shown up in the best ways. And I truly believe He can and will do the same for you.

But before we dive in, I have some super exciting news. And that is that registration for my online course. Love Your Single Life is officially open. Like right now. Today. You go to the website today, you can sign up, you can join us.

The website is loveyoursinglelife.com. Again, that's loveyoursinglelife.com. That link will also be on our show notes.

But I wanted to make sure you guys know that registration is only open for a few days. So if you know that this is right up your alley right now, make sure to sign up soon. I love this course. You guys have heard me talk about it for years. It's one of my very favorite parts of my job. And it's because God has been doing the most incredible things in women's lives through it.

A while ago, I got a DM from one of our awesome alumni, a woman named Jenny. Jenny gave me permission to share her story, and I'm so glad she did. Here's what she sent me.

She said, "Hi, Stephanie. This is overdue, but I wanted to share with you how LYSL impacted my life. It started on New Year's Eve 2018 when my sister shared that she had taken your course and that it was the highlight of her year because it made her live more fully, step out of her comfort zone and try online dating. At the time, she had just started talking to a guy and now they are getting married in March.

I was so inspired by my little sister's example that I decided to sign up for the March 2019 LYSL class. And I have to say that it totally changed my perspective, made me a better person, and it helped me to be more open to people that I wouldn't have normally sought out. I met an amazing guy that September and he proposed in March. We were married this past September and now we have a baby due in June. I credit all those blessings to God and to your course. Thank you so much."

Okay, truly, I'm going to cry if I spend too long thinking about her words. So let's talk logistics. If you haven't had a chance to check out the course yet, this is what it's all about. Love Your Single Life is the only digital course and study for Christian women that teaches us step by step plan to help you savor, enjoy, and truly make the most of your single life all while setting yourself up for amazing relationships and marriage in the future.

Here are just a few of the things we talked about in the four-week course. We'll talk about how to start really enjoying your single life and making the most of every moment. I'll teach you a powerful tool for building confidence, which also happens to be your dating secret sauce. We'll talk about how to find good quality men to date, even when it feels like you've run out of options.

We'll talk about how to invest in your friendships, your relationship with God, your calling and passions, and yourself. We'll talk about what to do with your sex drive while you're single because it doesn't wait to show up until we're married, right?

We'll talk about how to stay close to your girlfriends even when you're in different stages of life and so much more.

Registration for the course only opens up twice a year, so make sure you go and sign up today. You can find out all about the course at loveyoursinglelife.com. That link will also be in our show notes. The other thing is I know that some of you guys may be listening to this after the registration window has closed and that's totally fine. Head to the website anyway, again, it's loveyoursinglelife.com, to put your name on the waiting list. And that way you'll be the first to know next time we open up the course.

Okay, I cannot wait to share this conversation with you. Let's jump in. This is my conversation with Mary and Angela.

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Angela: Hey, y'all welcome to The Front Porch. Thank you so much for joining us this week. We cannot wait to introduce you to our guest. She doesn't know it, but we've been friends for a really long time. She thinks we just met today, but we've known her forever. Y'all may know her as Stephanie May Wilson. You've seen us share her posts and her podcast episodes, and even little excerpts from some of her devotionals.

Steph, we're so glad to have you here with us today. In your own words, will you introduce yourself to our listeners who might not know you yet and tell us what you do for a living?

Stephanie: Oh my gosh, I'm seriously so honored to be here. You guys just know how to make a girl feel so comfortable. I really do feel like I'm just settled in, I'm on the front porch and just ready for some friendship. That's my favorite thing.

So I'm Stephanie May Wilson. I'm an author and a podcaster. And my heart is to walk women in their 20s and 30s through some of the giant transitions that we go through in this time in our life. In my community, we talk about being single and kind of transitioning into dating and what that looks like and dating into marriage and moving to a new town or starting a new job, and really how to keep your friends and your faith kind of through it all.

The giant transition that I've been going through lately is becoming a mom, which is wild and wonderful. I'm a mom to, gosh, they just turned 16 months, 16-month-old twin girls, Annie and Quinn. I'm a wife. I get to spend my time working with 20 and 30 something women. I have a podcast called Girls Nights. I

teach a couple different courses. One about being single and dating, and then a new one about... It's like a marriage prep course.

I have a bunch of books out. I love getting to be a friend and really a mentor, but really just a friend who's like a couple steps ahead in life to just as many women as needed. And it's honestly the great honor of my life to get to do that work.

Mary: It's our honor that you are here. We are so honored that you're on our podcast with us. Like Angela said, we both love you. We're already friends

Stephanie: We're already friends. It is truly established.

Mary: But I have a quick question for you. You said 20 and 30 something-year-old women. Do you plan as you grow older to increase your reach? Like still have your 20 something, 30 something and then say when you get up to your 40s, will you be including things for like 40-year-old women? Because soon I will not be a 20 and 30 something-year-old woman, so I want to make sure I'm still in the correct demographic.

Stephanie: You are. You are. That's been a thing. Really my family and friends have been asking me that from the beginning. Because my first book and my blog in the beginning and stuff was really to college women, because I had graduated college just a couple years before when I started it all. So I really talked a lot about college. Then it was sort of your early 20s. You're sort of an adult now and like, what the heck does that look like?

Now I don't talk very much about college at all. I don't know that I necessarily made it a super intentional decision to do that. But in each stage of life, I find that I really have... Like kind of once I've gotten out of it and I've had enough time to really process it and then look back on what just happened, then that's when I have the most to say about that season of life. And it seems like that's when I just end up finding a bunch of women who are kind of in that spot.

So, as I get older, it really does tend to be like a handful of years behind me or just the stage of life right before me. So my goal in each of these, as I get older, is to just take as much out of my head as possible and get it down on paper or get it into a podcast episode or something so that it can kind of live on once I'm thinking about sort of the next thing.

All that to say, yes, I really have been... I thought that I would be in college ministry forever. My heart was so for women who were in college, that I kind of thought that I would do that forever. But that hasn't been the case. That really has been like, okay, well now that I'm married with kids, now I'm like, "Man, that

transition into marriage was wild. That was a lot. So what did we learn? Oh my gosh, we learned so much." We have to share what we learned along the way." And so maybe by the time my kids are like 20, I'll be like, "Gosh, transition into motherhood was crazy. Let's talk about it."

Mary: We definitely want to circle back to some of those topics. But you know what? I blew right past our stop sign of where we introduce you a little bit more to our listeners. One of the questions that we like to ask is, what are you known for in school. It could be high school, junior high. Just something that listeners might not know about you.

Stephanie: I mean, my school was giant. I went to a huge high school. There were 2,500 kids in my high school. Yeah, it was a lot. So I don't feel like you have to be pretty crazy to have a pretty serious reputation. So I don't know if I was really known for much but I think it probably would have been like the achiever. That would have been like my persona because I was involved in everything.

I was in AP classes, I was in choir, I was in Student Council, I did yearbook for a minute, and then I was a dancer. I was on the dance team as a cheerleader my freshman year, and then on my dance team the last three years. So I wasn't like a straight A student. I was more like a B plus student, which kind of drove my dad crazy. He was like, "If you worked a little bit harder, you'd get all A's."

But I was so much more interested in Student Council and in my relationships and in friendships and all of the extracurriculars, which is kind of fun, because I feel like my actual life has centered way more around the extracurriculars than it has around, I don't know, whatever, chemistry or something. So I think I was the achiever. That was my thing.

Angela: I totally see that. And that's definitely translated into your life after school, like the way that you were, like you said, super involved in extracurriculars and friendships. Like that is your life and your career now, which is awesome. I also love knowing that you were on your dance team. I had no idea that that was a thing.

Stephanie: Oh, my gosh, I feel like I need to talk about it more. I mean, there are definitely videos, there are photos. I was. Actually, it was pretty intense. I mean, different schools may not have this, but it was like cheerleading, but it's called Palms. We would dance at halftime. We would kind of stand on the side of the cheerleaders and do some dances. But really our thing was competition.

My senior year we won state. We were really good. So it was like an enormous time commitment. And all of my time and heart went into dance. Which that didn't end up being my career, but it definitely taught me a lot about persevere and some

hard work and stuff. So yeah, I'm really good at false eyelashes as a result. I'm really comfortable with a giant bow in my hair. And I can do the vowels smiling. Like go, a e i o u. Cheerleaders know what I'm talking about.

Angela: Oh my gosh, that's so cool. I'm totally blown away. Because if I have heard that fun fact about you before, it didn't stick until now. And now I'm picturing you in exactly what you described, the huge eyelashes, huge bow. And state champions, that is the coolest thing ever.

Stephanie: It was really cool. It was really cool. That is so funny. I think that I just assumed it was obvious. I also was a sorority girl. I feel like that's obvious. But maybe I'm trying to be like, Listen, you can still be friends with me even if you're not a person who likes cheerleaders or likes sorority girls. We can still be each other's people. So maybe I've been downplaying it for years but that's definitely me.

Mary: Well, it's so interesting too. At least where I grew up, there weren't dance teams. There was color guards that had the flags that would perform with the band. And then I moved out to Texas, and you have cheerleaders and then you have these girls that wear skirts and boots and cowboy hats. And then you also have the color guard. And it's like we had cheerleaders and color guards and there's like four extra teams here.

Stephanie: Yes. Texas is... I mean, yes... Like a whole... If they can happen in a football game, I feel like there is a thousand iterations, which is pretty fun.

Mary: Oh, yeah. Football is like a religion here in Texas. It's crazy. So we are on the front porch, what are you sipping on, what's in your glass?

Stephanie: If I'm just reading a book or something, then it's probably iced coffee. But if I'm with friends, then if it's in a warm time of the year, then it's probably Prosecco. And if it's in sort of a fall, winter, spring, it's got to be red wine. Cabernet Sauvignon is always my favorite. I've tried to like other different kinds of red wine and I like them but that's just really what I want. So it's either Prosecco or Cabernet Sauvignon.

Angela: You fit in so well here you don't even know.

Stephanie: So good.

Angela: We would love to hear because I think one of the best ways for people to get to know you better is to hear the story about how you and God met. So would you share that story with us?

Stephanie: Yes. I kind of maybe told a little piece of this, but I didn't grow up a Christian. I think my family we were more Christians than anything else. We would go to church on Christmas and Easter. And that was kind of about it. But I didn't grow up in Christian culture. I didn't grow up with a relationship with God, a personal relationship with God.

Honestly, for the longest time, I didn't think I needed one. Especially when I was in college, we talked about me being an achiever in high school. And I was the same way in college. I was a little lazy in some of my core classes, but I was a journalism major. And I loved it. That felt like getting to have an extracurricular be my major, so I just threw myself into it.

So I was achieving highly in my future career. I was in a sorority, I loved it. I was on the leadership. Panhellenic Council, for any Greek people who know. All the parts of my life were going really well, I was in a great relationship with a really great guy, had lots of friends, but on the inside, things just weren't quite going as well.

I ended up going through just a really sad breakup with that guy and I had way more of my identity and just my whole life wrapped up in him. So when he exited my life, I really didn't have a lot left. And then even though these different parts of my life are going really well, my relationship with myself was just in a really ugly place. I just didn't like myself honestly. I didn't love myself. My inner critic was just absolutely brutal.

So I feel like the outside of my life I was a pretty solid... not solid. I was a pretty shiny shell, but I really did feel like a shell. And then I think going through that breakup halfway through college, it was just kind of this thing that just cracked me and everything fell apart. So I honestly was in the darkest place I've ever been in. And that lasted for a while. In the wake of it, every part of my life just felt like it kind of fell apart all at once.

The cool thing was, and I highly recommend this anytime it feels like your life is falling apart, is that I got to leave the country right at this time. Like truly, if everything's going wrong, buy a plane ticket, get your passport out. But I got to study abroad in Serbia in Spain, which is truly my favorite place in the world.

We kind of made this decision independently, but my best friend from my whole life growing up also decided to study abroad in Serbia. And then her other best friend, Kelsey, also decided to study abroad in Serbia. So I kind of went thinking I wouldn't know anyone there and ended up going with a best friend and someone who really quickly became another best friend.

And the interesting thing about the two of them is that they were both Christians, are both Christians. And I kind of was afraid of Kelsey because of that fact. I was not sure what to think about her because I just didn't know really anything about God, about Christians except for that they like... I don't know, we're kind of giddy, giddy like always do the right thing. I don't know. I just sort of rolled my eyes a little bit at the things that I didn't know about people who follow Jesus. And then Michelle was also a Christian. She had kind of recently become one. But because I already knew her, I wasn't as weirded out by her.

So I ended up studying abroad for a whole semester with these two women who were just really instrumental in putting my heart back together in a lot of ways. They, first of all, treated me differently. I feel like I got to see a different side of Michelle because she was kind of in the process of becoming different herself. Like I just got to see a new side of her that I've gotten to see in different seasons of life.

And they just showed me the most wonderful friendship. They were so kind and neat and so good to me. They were people I could talk to about the deepest things going on in my heart. And I just hadn't really known where to bring those things before. So I showed up in Spain just this total disaster and got to roam around the most beautiful city ever with two people who really loved me and who were such a safe place for me. And that was so healing.

But in the process, as I'm trying to put my life back together, I started asking a lot of questions about God. And especially because they had a relationship with God in they would talk about it and I just wanted to know what I believed. I think that now that my life had fallen apart so completely, I was in need of something more in a way that I hadn't been before.

So I was asking a bunch of questions. I honestly slowly [unintelligible 00:20:05] with questions. Anything I could think of, I asked them. And they were, again, so kind to just talk with me through anything that I wanted to talk about. But I was pretty sure that Jesus, while He was different than I thought, as I got to hear more about Him from them, He was different than I thought, but I just still wasn't totally sure that He was for me.

Then we ended up going to Italy for spring break. And we were in Rome at the beginning and we ended up doing... This is an important detail, you'll see why. But we ended up doing a pub crawl and they gave us free T-shirts as part of the pub crawl. Again, this was in a different time in my life. So I was really good at chugging beer at that time.

So I participated in this, I don't know, chugging contest or whatever and I got second place. But I swear that the guy who won first place was enormous. He was

like a beer-chugging professional tank of a human. So he won. I got second, though. And that was the night.

So then the next morning, we woke up, and we thought we've had fun in Rome, we should also do something kind of cultural. You know, we're here. So we decided that we're going to go visit Vatican City that day. We didn't shower before we left, so we smelled like the pub crawl the night before. I was definitely hungover. Definitely hungover. And we've just been given free t-shirts that all matched, so we decided to wear them. So I showed up at the Pope's house hungover, smelling like beer, and wearing a free pub crawl t-shirt.

So we're wandering around the Vatican and getting this tour. And then we walk into the Sistine Chapel and I'm looking around and the ceiling is incredible. Our tour guide kind of signals to us that it's time to go and right as I am about to leave, I turn around and I see the Last Judgment, Michelangelo's frescoes on the back wall of the Sistine Chapel.

To be fair, as the art critic that I am—I'm not at all—it's not my favorite painting ever and it's not my favorite depiction of Jesus. Actually, it's a little scary of a painting, but I didn't see any of that in the moment. All I saw was Jesus. And I just, in that moment, felt like I made eye contact with Him. I can't describe really what happened because what happened doesn't make sense. But it felt like in seeing Him in this painting that I was locking eyes with an old friend that I was so happy to see. And all I wanted to do was run and give him a hug. It was such an odd feeling but it was so true and so consuming.

All of my thoughts of like, this is what I think Christianity is like and this is what I think God is like and this is what I don't want, all of my judgments and preconceived ideas just were quiet in that moment. And all I could think was, "I want to be friends with Him, and I want Him to know me and I want Him to like me."

So really, I think in my head, I said some version of like, "All right, Jesus, I'm in." And I walked out of the Sistine Chapel, still smelling like beer, still wearing a pub crawl t-shirt, still hungover, but I walked out a Christian. And that was the day that my relationship with Jesus started.

Mary: That's such a great story. And I feel like I'm hearing it for the first time all over again.

Angela: One of my favorite stories of like it's a Jesus meet cute kind of, and it's like one of my favorites of all time, because I relate to it in a lot of ways. Particularly the stale beer and pub crawl t-shirt part, that's where Jesus found me too. That's a whole

other story for another day. But just that it really is kind of a moment like, whether you grew up knowing God or thinking that you know God or something, there's always a moment that He really just shows up to you and comes and meets you where you are and says like, "All right, let's do this. I'm here. Are you here with me?" That's such a beautiful moment. It's one of my favorite stories of all time. So thank you for sharing that with everybody.

Stephanie: Oh, thanks for asking. I haven't told it in a while, so it's so fun to relive that. And it's my favorite thing because it reminds me like since that day, I've gone back and forth trying to clean myself up. I've totally fallen into the trap of thinking that like, Well, no, now God loves me because like I do the right things and because I spend time with Him every morning and because I've read my Bible this many times or whatever. Like I start to think that maybe I've earned it. That's always when my relationship with God is just the worst.

Or there's times where I feel like I can't be close to Him because I'm really messy. And I always have to think back to that, that like, Okay, He found me messy. And if I'm any less messy than I was then, it is 100% because of Him. It's not the kind of thing where you shine yourself up to meet Jesus. He comes and sits with you wherever you are. And it's my favorite thing about Him.

Mary: That is also my favorite thing about Him. I don't know if I heard this on your podcast or if I heard it, listening to church on TV. But Jesus and God, they love you. It doesn't matter who you are, where you're at in life, they love you.

And they use the example of, Look at Jesus, He kept the company of some of the most undesirable people, and He loved them. And He loves you like He loved them. And it doesn't matter if you're lying or stealing. He doesn't want you to do those things, but He loves you.

Stephanie: You're welcome. You're welcome. You're welcome with Him, you're safe with Him.

Mary: Obviously, God changed your life at that moment in the Sistine Chapel. But can you tell us a time when God completely wrecked your plans and how it turned out?

Stephanie: Oh, my gosh, yes. I told you guys I was studying journalism in college and I loved it. I just wanted to be a journalist with everything in me. But the crazy thing was that as I fell more in love with God, almost like at the exact same time, I fell out of love with journalism. And it wasn't that the career was... I mean, there's all kinds of things that stink about being a journalist. Like for the first bazillion years of your career, you're paid in peanuts. You know what I mean? It's like you make nothing. It's really hard. The hours are crazy. You have to move all over the country.

I knew all these things but it wasn't that that deterred me. I had this passion for journalism, but the more my passion grew for my relationship with God, it's almost like it replaced it. And it didn't join it, it replaced it. And that's not always the case. Like God does not always zap us of our career. But He really did for me. And looking back, I think He just needed more of my focus. The way that my brain works, the achiever in me was busy thinking about these other things. I feel like He was like, "I just want you to be busy with Me for a little while."

So I was about to graduate college and had to figure out what I was going to do. My options were to go take a job in Washington, DC working for a news outlet, or to go on a 10-week mission trip to West Africa in Ghana to partner with a church there and basically be an intern. So I had to figure out what I wanted to do. I really, really felt like... I don't know, I feel like God gave me the option. And that was hard.

It's really hard when you have two choices, but I just knew the place where I was being pulled, where my heart wanted to go was to go and spend time in Ghana. So I did that. And I totally walked away from this career that I just spent the last four years working towards. And it was crazy. It was like, "What am I doing with my life?"

[00:28:30] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Our sponsor for today's episode is an amazing female-founded company called [Olive & June](#). Now I don't know about you guys, but I love having my nails done. I just feel more put together when I have a fresh manicure. But to be honest, I rarely do it.

A few times a year I do treat myself to a salon mani, pedi. I always walk out of the salon having spent like \$100 and I usually end up chipping my newly painted nails as soon as I get in the car. So then I go through a period where I decide I'm just going to do my nails myself. But no matter how hard I try, my nails always end up looking like they were painted by a 6-year-old. And that's why I'm so happy to have found Olive & June.

Olive & June founder spent a year doing and redoing and redoing her own nails, identifying all the reasons it's been impossible to make them look good on your own. And then, you guys, she fixed it. She created their Mani System that helps you achieve beautiful salon-quality nails for just \$2 of Mani.

The Mani System comes with all the tools you could possibly need, including the poppy, which is this awesome thing that you put on top of the nail polish handle to make it easier to grip and paint your nails on both of your hands. This is a

game-changer. With a poppy I can finally keep the nail polish on my actual nails instead of getting it all over my fingers.

I'm not going to lie. I actually enjoy painting my nails now and the end result is seriously so good. Recently I've been wearing their nail color called Pink Sands. It's this gorgeous light pink neutral color that I love.

Along with their Mani System, they also have press-ons available, which are my other go-to lately because if I have 10 minutes to do my nails these days, it's a total miracle. They have four lengths and four shapes and a bunch of different colors and designs to choose from. And each pack of press-ons includes 21 unique sizes. So that's a total of 42 nails. That way you can always find a perfect fit. They look so real and truly beautiful.

The press-ons can last for up to 10 days and their glue is non-damaging so that your nails stay strong and healthy. And what I really love about these is that they're made from 94% post-consumer recycled material.

Friends, I seriously love this company so much. Their Mani System is going to be my new go-to gift for all my closest people so that we can use them together at our girls' nights. Seriously, I hope none of my people are listening to this because this is actually what they're getting for their birthdays.

Friends, painting your nails can actually be fun and affordable all because of Olive & June. Visit oliveandjune.com/girlsnight for 20% off of your first Mani System. That's oliveandjune.com/girlsnight. Olivandjune.com/girlsnight for 20% of your first Mani System. Olive & June, thank you so much for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

[00:31:08] <music>

Stephanie: But kind of right around that time I ended up getting offered an internship at my college ministry when I got back. I mean, again, it was an unpaid internship for the year after I graduated from college. So I had to figure out, "How am I going to pay my bills?" So that ended up being my next step.

So I spent the summer basically being an intern with churches in West Africa and then came back and was a college ministry intern, which is not at all what my plan was. But it was really cool because in that, God just lit this fire in me that I didn't know it was there.

In my job there, I got to lead a Greek Bible study. So it was like any sorority girl who maybe would be intimidated to join a Bible study, I was like a safe person for

them. And so I'm like, "I speak your language, I'm not going to be weird, I'm not going to be judgmental, so you can join my Bible study."

So we had almost 30 Girls join my Bible study. And I got to be their Bible Study leader for a year, and then just meet them for coffee throughout the week, and just talk to them about life. That year, I feel like I got to really discover what my actual calling in life is. And it's just to be who I needed when I was younger.

So it just was like, I'm just going to meet you and what you're going through right now and I'm going to tell you you're not alone and I'm going to give you a hug, and I'm going to tell you you're going to be okay, and I'm going to share with you anything I can think of, anything that has helped me along the way so that you don't have to figure it out the hard way so I can make your journey just like even a little bit easier. So that was my job for a year.

So I thought that I had found my thing forever. Like I said earlier, I thought I was going to be in college ministry for the rest of my life. But then an opportunity came to travel around the world for a year doing humanitarian work and also writing. And you just don't turn down something like that. It was a really hard decision but I ended up deciding to go.

At this point, I felt like God had asked me to give up two giant dreams. It was journalism and then it was women's ministry, like college ministry. So I'm like, "Cool. So what am I going to be? Like backpacking vagabond my whole life? Is that what my future is?"

But as I traveled, the organization asked us to keep a blog to just keep track of what we were going through as we traveled. And part of it was for people who had supported us to go on the trip, and I don't know, it was marketing for them and stuff. But I took it really seriously and I started writing about the things that God was doing in my life and in my heart as I traveled. And before I knew it, I was doing women's ministry, college ministry through journalism, basically.

It was the coolest full-circle thing. You know, God led me away from something and led me closer to Him. And then He led me away from something else that I loved and even closer to Him. And then He led me into something that was those two things I've just walked away from, but just this perfect marriage of them that I never ever, ever could have dreamed up on my own. And even closer to Him. And it just like we can trust Him. He knows what He's doing. I'm so grateful. I'm so grateful because honestly I never would have come up with this on my own.

Angela: We are super grateful to you for so many reasons. Quick thing, we asked for like one time God wrecked your plans and you gave us like a million. So that's awesome.

Stephanie: Because He does it a lot.

Angela: Well, but that's the cool thing too is when things don't go according to our plans, we know that it's only because there's a better plan. I just love that so much. Fun fact about us. We actually met in college in a sorority. Mary was my big and I'm her little. And that is how we met. And our relationship has just evolved so much since we met. But we both have benefited from God ruining your plans, if that makes any sense.

Little backstory. After college, I took a job with an animal pharmaceutical company that moved me from Northern California where we had met, where we had gone to school and kind of near where I had grown up. So Oregon, where I didn't know anybody. And aside from Mary and maybe like two other people, I didn't really have a lot of girlfriends. I've been pretty wounded, I guess, by female friendships. And when I moved to Oregon, the funniest thing happened. This random... supposedly random...

So I'm working for an animal pharmaceutical company, right? Well, I was their rep for beef cattle. So I had the whole state as my territory. So I was driving around a lot and started listening to podcasts more often. And this one was recommended called Girls Night. I know. So then I started listening to it and I was like, "Huh, well, this seems really cool."

So retrospectively, God planted the seed in my mind and in my heart to be receptive to female friendships because of things that you were talking about on Girls Night. So then all of a sudden, I look around and the only friends God brought me when I moved to Oregon were women. And He started healing my relationship with female friendships, if that makes sense.

So that is a small piece of my history with your ministry, Steph. But I'm struck by like... it's been so powerful. And now it's so obvious. Like, yes, of course, this is what you were made to do. Of course, this is what God wanted you to do. It's perfect for you. You're so good at it and you're changing so many lives. But there had to have also been a time where you were like, "I think this is what I'm called to do, but am I going to be able to provide for myself? Am I going to be able to be good at this?"

I would love to know because there's probably somebody listening who has a calling on their heart and they're afraid to pursue it because first of all, they're not

totally sure that it's what God is asking them to do. And second of all, it looks kind of like instability maybe. Can you talk us through how you knew that this is what God wanted you to do and how you navigated what looked like instability at the time?

Stephanie: Oh, those are such good questions. I think that sometimes God speaks to us really clearly. I don't know. Some people He speaks to audibly. That's never happened to me. I think I probably would have a heart attack if it did. I kind of want it to, but I think I would also have a heart attack.

I mean, He can speak in any way He wants. But I think that a lot of times when we're looking for our calling, we expect for it to be like written in the sky, tattooed to our foreheads, or an audible voice telling us to do something. And so when we don't get that, we kind of feel like maybe this isn't what I'm supposed to do. It's really scary to step into something you want to do, no matter what it is. It's really scary. Like, you feel like a fraud. It's almost like you want to know that that's what God has for you, so that you have the permission to do it.

But I think that much more often for me, and for most of the people that I know and love, it's less often that they get an actual word from God saying like, "Turn left, start a podcast, you know, do something like that." More often it's where the things you're passionate about meet the things you're good at, meet your story and what you've been through, and meet what people in the world are needing.

I think that God really weaves those things together. And I think that that is where we find our calling. And I know this because it's different for everybody. There are people who are really into chemical engineering, and they could talk about it all the time. Okay, I don't know enough about chemical engineering to even give this example. But the medical field, praise the Lord for literally everyone in the medical field.

But there are people who are really good at science and who are really good with people who are really hurting. And that's a skill that they have. They're really passionate about the body. They could talk about it all the time. They are the ones who want to peek when they're having surgery or something instead of pretending that it's not happening. So it's something that they're really interested in and they could think about it, talk about it all the time.

Maybe they have something in their past where they had a medical scare once in their life, or maybe their life was really impacted by the nurses who took care of their grandparents when they were passing away or something like that. And then also the needs of the world. Like that is a need. We need people to take care of our bodies. That is just a desperate need.

I feel like the way that God talks to us is by putting those things in us. So like if you have the desire to take care of people when they're really sick, that's not a selfish desire, first of all. It's also not a desire everybody has. So that's telling you something. Or your story. Like when we've been through things in our lives, we're uniquely equipped to walk other people through those same things.

And not everyone has the same story, so not everyone's going to have the same ability to do that. We need people who've been through different things. There are so many needs in the world. And so if you're going to meet any of them, I think you're on the right track.

And then what we're good at. We are all good at so many different things. And so all of those things, just to me, point exactly back to God. So if those things are in you, a passion, a skill, pieces of your story, or if you see a need of the world, and you feel like, "Why isn't someone doing something about this?" I think that that's a pretty good indication that that's where God has you.

And the other thing is when you make a decision to do something, I think we always feel like it is a permanent decision. And for most things in life, if you take a job and you're like, "Whoa, this is not what I want to do," you can always quit the job and get a different one. Or sometimes one step isn't the perfect step but it leads you to something else.

Like I'm not a college pastor. I thought I was going to be but I'm not. I'm not a journalist. I thought I was going to be but I'm not. You can take steps into something only to then take a left turn or a right turn. And just because you don't continue walking straight it doesn't mean you took the wrong direction. Like one step needs to lead to another. And it will.

Angela: That is so cool. And your story is a perfect illustration of that when you kind of are going in a general direction and there are certain desires that God has put on your heart, and you get to kind of marry them all together. So it's thinking back to Episode 146 of Girls Night that will link in the show notes with Danielle Coke about how you guys were talking about present purpose and it being a marriage of the things that... something that is on your heart... And I'm sorry if I'm totally butchering this. But basically something that is on your heart plus a need in the world plus the things that you're good at. That's just so beautiful.

And that doesn't always look super glamorous. I think sometimes we also get distracted by what we're told we should be when we grow up, or what we look around and see other people being that looks really fun or shiny. And maybe it doesn't always look like that but it can still be really good and super necessary. So

thank you for sharing that with us. I hope somebody's life's being changed right now. I just feel it.

So we talked primarily to all of our listeners for the majority of this conversation. Let's dial in on our single gals for a second. So this is such a beautiful part of what you do, Steph. I took the Love Your Single Life course in September of 2018. I had no idea. Basically, I was fed up with dating and dating apps and dating culture. And I was just like over it. I was very much in a space of I don't actually want to date, I just want to love being single more than I love dating.

I just didn't have a good grasp on how to do that though. So again, it was one of those things where I'm just scrolling Facebook, and it was like, "Take this quiz." And it took me to your website again. And I was like, "Oh, yeah, I'll do this. I'll register for this course." And I just loved it. I loved it so much. I still do.

I'll even go back through because like I printed out all this stuff and I had the little workbook and everything. So I'll even like go back through just for fun and see some of the things I wrote and some of the things that I was processing. And it's so cool to see it. I met my husband like four months later. And I know that's not like everybody's story but that's what happened to me.

Anyway, can you tell anybody who maybe this is the first time they're hearing about the course, what the Love Your Single Life course is?

Stephanie: It is just like the greatest. We make things in life or do things in life and a lot of times you have no idea... I think every time you have no idea how it's going to turn out. And sometimes you'll be like, "This is going to be awesome." And then you're like, "Cricket, cricket, troop, troop." Like, "Okay, this did not go out how I thought it was going to."

This is one of those things where I knew this was important. It really started because of, one, my own story. I feel like I learned more than my fair share of lessons while I was single and dating. Like I have long seasons of nothing. Like no one on the horizon. And times when everyone around me seems to be getting into a relationship, which is just really hard to watch when that's the thing that you want so bad.

I dated a lot. For seasons, I dated the right guys who I thought were the right guys, and then they didn't turn out to be. And that was really hard. I dated people who I knew were the wrong guys. I put way too much pressure on marriage at different times in life and really felt like I really wish I could just skip over this season of being single because it feels like marriage is when you arrive and singleness is basically the waiting room.

And in all of that, you know, as I just kind of wandered around this maze for years, some things finally clicked for me. It's not that I got rid of my desire to be married, because I don't think that's something we need to do. And the next time someone says that it'll just happen when you stop wanting it, honestly, I could just punch someone. It's just like, what are you supposed to do with that?

I finally found something that worked. Something clicked in my life. And that was that I started not forgetting about my desire to be married but I started focusing on some other things. It finally clicked in my head that this was a season to not be wasted. Like really good things were happening in my life right now. I was having opportunities I never have again. I had a freedom that I would never have in the same way again. This was an important part of my life. It wasn't a waiting room. It was a time to actually live. And I was missing it.

I had this question pop into my head as I was brushing my teeth one day, and honestly, I feel like it was God just speaking to me. But it was "if you knew that you were going to meet your person and get married in four years and it was going to be amazing and everything you'd always hoped for and you just knew it was going to happen," how would you live today?" And I was like, "Oh my gosh, I would live it up today. I would do all the things. I would go on adventures. I would travel. I would hang out with my girlfriends. I pursue my dreams. I would do all these things.

Once that pressure of like I need to make sure I'm in the right place at the right time to meet my person, once that lifted, I was able to live. And I did. It also kind of put a fire under my butt because it was like, "Okay, if your person was going to show up in four years or whatever, is there anything you need to take care of before they do?"

And the answer for that was absolutely for me. And one of the things I really need to take care of is some insecurity and some identity stuff. Like circling back to college, I needed to figure out how to not look to another person to make me feel good enough about myself. Because I'd even tried that in relationships and it never worked. Like no one can ever love you enough to convince you that you're worthy of love. So I had a lot to do. I had a lot to do.

So I really did start living my life to the full. I feel like in a lot of ways I was finally living the life I'd always wanted to live as the woman I'd always wanted to be. And it was really cool because that's when I met my husband. I didn't meet him because I was sitting at home making sure I didn't move just so that he could find me. It's not like getting lost. If you get lost, don't go anywhere, just stand still. Finding your

husband's not like that. And I thought it was for a long time. But it was because I was doing all these things that I actually met him.

And it was because I was doing all these things. Like the first time that he noticed me, I was at my first speaking events. And I felt so tall and confident and proud of myself. I just felt like I was really me in that moment. I wasn't thinking about who might be watching me, which is not why he showed up. I didn't like trick gods in how we met. That's not why he showed up. But I really was just living my life really well and really fully. That's how it happened and why it happened.

We've been married for a while now and I can see the fruit of all of the things that I did and Carl also did them in his own life. I can see the fruit of all of that growth and all that healing and all that living well in our marriage even today. Even this far into our marriage, I still see the goodness from it.

That was kind of how it happened in my own story. But really, I think, because I got lost so often and had to figure so much out in my own life, I started to become the relationship friend for people. And then as I started my blog, as I was traveling and started my blog, I got so many messages from women being like, "I'm getting all this dating advice. I'm single, and this is all I heard about it. I'm getting all this dating advice. I'm so confused about all of it. Like, what do I do? What did you do? How do I get through this?"

And I found myself having so many conversations I couldn't keep up. So that's when I finally decided to make this course. I didn't even know that courses were going to become a thing. I made it this way because I was like, "What is the closest I can get to having everyone over to my house and all of us just hanging out?" Like it was my small group, like it was we're all eating pizza and we're on our sweatpants, and we're just talking about life and our relationships. And the closest I could get to that. But I really did not know when I made it. I knew that that journey was really impactful for me, I had no idea how God was going to use it.

At this point, we've had more than 6,000 women take the course. Actually 6,000. I'd like to quadruple-check that number because I'm like, "That cannot be possible." The first time I taught it was in 2015. So that's seven years ago now. We've had women go on to adopt kids definitely to foster, lots of people have fostered. We've had women travel to all different countries all around the world. We've had women quit jobs that they needed to quit, take amazing jobs, step into their calling, step into their identity. And we've had a lot of people meet and marry some really, really incredible men.

Like God took this thing... this doesn't always happen. Sometimes I'll make something and it's like womp, womp. But I made this thing and I feel like God took

the baton and just has sprinted with it for years and I'm trailing behind being like, "Whoa, you're crazy." But it really is just the coolest thing that I get to do. And so getting to hear stories like yours, Angela, I just am amazed. It's 100% God. And I'm just so grateful that He lets me sit on the sidelines for it.

Angela: I guess like all that debate, yeah, me too. I'm so grateful he did that through you too. And I'm so excited. Every single time... because now I get to be a mentor to the Love Your Single Life girls-

Stephanie: You're the best.

Angela: And I just love it. It's the best. Every time I get the email that like we're opening registration again, I just get so excited because the other thing too, like part of the reason we do what we do with the Front Porch and having these conversations and trying to build community for women is because if one person is changed because of it, if like one person get something from it, then it's all worth it. Oh, I'm so excited.

So the day that this episode airs, Love Your Single Life registration will be opening as well. So we will link that in the show notes.

Mary: Real quick. How long is registration open?

Stephanie: So registration opens on April 4 and it'll be open through April 8 at midnight. And we open registration usually twice a year for five days each. So it really is crazy that it's only available 10 days each year. But we have an incredible, incredible crew of women join us every time and they become real-life friends.

I mean, Angela, you've gotten to see that. It's like maybe my favorite part of the whole thing. It's just the connections that women get to make together. You get to find a whole group of like-minded women who are awesome and also in your same season of life. And that doesn't always happen especially when we're single and dating. We don't always have people that we can really talk to about that. So yeah, that's when it opens.

And thank you so much. I think I just need to lay on the floor and cry a little bit for the fact that you're going to gift it to women. You have to keep me updated too. That's part of the deal.

Angela: Definitely, definitely will.

Mary: Okay. So before we sign off, Steph, you've shared so much great information with us today. Definitely ladies, I know Angela's done Love Your Single Life. I had

already met what was going to be my husband at the time. But if I hadn't, I would have definitely taken that course. So definitely go do that. Steph, before we sign off, can you share one last piece of advice with our listeners?

Stephanie: Absolutely. I've been thinking about this. I think the biggest thing is if you need help, ask for it. Like in whatever area of your life. You don't get brownie points for doing it by yourself. You don't have to do it by yourself. The most successful, healthy, wonderful, doing great in life people are not doing it by themselves. And you don't have to either.

So if there's an area of your life where you need help, whether it's big time help, or where you're like, "This is really important to me and it's not going the way that I want it to," ask for the help you need. It's not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of strength. That's just the biggest thing I think. Ask for help where you need it.

Angela: One of my favorite things that you've said all day. It's all the other wonderful things. That is one of my favorite things you've said today. Steph, thank you so much for being here. Thank you so much for being part of our Front Porch family. We're so grateful to get to share our community with you and share you with them. Thank you. And cheers to the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Stephanie: 100% Thank you, guys.

Outro: You guys, aren't Angela and Mary amazing? I am so glad I got to share a conversation with you. Don't forget that if you ever want to find the links for anything we talk about our Girls Night episodes, you can always find those over in our show notes. Just head over to girlsnightpodcast.com and you'll find links for everything, including links for Angela and Mary, so you can listen to their podcast and follow along with all the great stuff they're doing.

All right friends, that's it for today's episode, but we have so much good stuff ahead this season. So with that in mind, now is the perfect time to make sure you're subscribed. Subscribing to the show is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode. We won't send you an email or anything. Just make sure your phone downloads the latest episode when a new one is released.

I did want to take a quick second to ask y'all a favor. If you enjoyed this episode, or if you've been at Girls Night for a while now, would you take just two quick seconds to leave us a rating and review on iTunes? Those reviews help out our podcast so much and it really would mean the world to me. So if you'd take two quick seconds to do that, I'd be so grateful. Friends, thank you so much for joining me for Girls Night and I will see you next week.