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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 talk 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 lives 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.

Today's conversation is a heavier topic, but a really, really important one. Today we're talking about what to do when you're angry at the church, or at God, or honestly both. We've had conversations on the podcast before about wrestling with doubts or what to do if your faith isn't feeling like it used to. But this time we're taking it a step further.

Today's episode is for the woman who feels totally lost in her faith right now. It's for the woman who feels angry with God or with the church, and she honestly isn't sure what to do or if there's a place for her anymore. It's also for the woman who needs to be reminded that she's not alone in this.

Our guest for today's episode is my dear friend Caroline Schandel. Caroline is an associate pastor at an incredible church in Atlanta, and she is one of my favorite mentors and friends. She is so kind and wise and wonderful, which you know because she's been on the show several times now. And I'm just so grateful for the voice that she's had in my life over the years.

Here are just a few of the things that I'm talking to Caroline about in the episode. I ask her if there's still a place for us in the church if we're messy and unsure about basically everything. I ask her if we're feeling distant from God, is that our fault? Like, is it because we haven't been trying hard enough? I think it feels that way sometimes.

We talk about whether or not we need to agree with our pastors about everything in order to go to a particular church and what to do if there are things happening within our churches or church leadership or just the church in general that we don't agree with.

We're talking about what to do if we're feeling totally lost in our faith or angry at God or angry at the church and what we should do about that, and if it's okay for us to feel those things. We talk about how to heal from church hurt and how to talk to God about it and seriously, so much more.

Friends, these are really tricky questions and of course, we don't have the answers to all of them, but Caroline handles my questions like a champ and she has some amazing wisdom to share with us. I hope you leave this conversation knowing that you're not alone and feeling just a little more peace and comfort in where you are today.

But before we dive in, since this is a tough episode, I wanted to share resources that's helped me through some of the most difficult times in my life and my faith. And that's been counseling. One of the sponsors we have at Girls Night is a company I love. It's Faithful Counseling.

If you've been considering going to therapy, but you've been wondering where to find a good counselor or how to afford it, there's a resource I want to share with you. It's one of our amazing Girls Night podcast sponsors, Faithful Counseling.

Faithful Counseling is a website where you can get matched up with a Christian counselor for professional online therapy sessions. This truly is the easiest and most affordable way to find a faith-based counselor. Now, you may have heard me talk about Faithful Counseling before, but just in case you haven't, I wanted to tell you a few quick reasons why I love them so much.

First, it's really easy to get started. All you have to do is go to their website, fill out a form about yourself, what you're going through, and what you're looking for in a counselor, and within 24 hours, Faithful Counseling will connect you with a licensed, vetted, faith-based professional counselor.

The second reason I love them is that it's really easy to find the right counselor for you. In order for counseling to be truly beneficial, you have to find a counselor you connect with. And often we don't find the right person on her first try. But with Faithful Counseling, if you don't love your counselor or if you find that you're looking for something different, you can switch by clicking a button. It's easy and it's free. They really make it easy to find the best fit possible.

Then the last reason I love them so much is that it's so much easier to fit into your budget. Now, don't get me wrong, I love traditional in-person counseling, but it can cost more than \$100 per session, which just makes it a total no-go for so many of us, especially in a time when the economy is in flux.

But Faithful Counseling is significantly less expensive and you guys, they have financial aid available. And if you sign up through the special link that they gave me, you can get 10% off your first month.

Friends, if therapy is something that you've been considering or something you think might be helpful for you right now, head on over to stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling. That link will also give you 10% off your first month. Again that's stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling for all the info and you can get 10% off your first month of counseling there too.

Okay, you guys ready? Let's jump into the episode with Caroline.

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Stephanie: Okay, friends, I am so excited for who we have back on the show today. I'm sitting here with my dear friend Caroline Schandel. Caroline, welcome back to Girls Night.

Caroline: I am so honored to be here. I love your community, and seriously, such an honor to get to be back on.

Stephanie: We love you. This is, I think, your third time being on the show.

Caroline: Yes.

Stephanie: Although, we've replayed some of your episodes because they're just so good. You and I actually got to spend some time together in Atlanta a couple of weeks ago. And even just seeing your face, ah, it was the best deep breath. It felt like our breakfast was the warmest hug. And I loved it so much. As we're sitting there, I'm like, "Caroline, we need to have you back on the show."

Caroline: I love it. I love being here.

Stephanie: Okay. So for women who haven't gotten to meet you yet, can you tell us who you are, what you do in the fun fact about yourself?

Caroline: Yes. My name is Caroline Schandel. I have been married to my husband, Mark, for ten years. We have three kids, ages three, five, and seven. I've had my hand in a bunch of things for the last few years. I wrote a book. I had my own podcast for a quick minute. But recently, as of actually just a year ago, I just hit my one-year mark, I am an associate pastor at a church here in Atlanta, Georgia.

Stephanie: I love it. Can we say what church?

Caroline: Sure, yeah. Grace Midtown Church.

Stephanie: Awesome.

Caroline: Oh, and my fun fact. So this is such a challenge because now I have to come up with fun fact number three for you.

Stephanie: I know. It's a tall order.

Caroline: Yes. But you know what I was thinking about? I actually was just sharing the story recently. This is like a friend's random story of how... When Mark and I first... our first date actually was the biggest mismatch of expectations that we could have ever imagined.

I showed up thinking that he was totally interested in my roommate and wanted to get to know me while she was out of town for a variety of different reasons. So literally our first date I showed up sweaty from my bootcamp class and walked into this restaurant to meet him for dinner. And that was the beginning of our relationship.

And even ten years later, we just think it's hilarious because typically I pick up on all the cues from people. Like I just love people-watching and feeling out in a room. But I 100% missed it that night with our very first date.

Stephanie: That is so amazing. Do you know the first time that Carl and I hung out outside of work, because we met at work, he came over to our apartment with another friend of ours because they wanted to watch the vice presidential debate. Riveting.

Caroline: It's so riveting.

Stephanie: So they wanted to watch and they didn't have cable and we did. I mean, it was like they didn't have cable and we did so they came over. My head was not anywhere... I wasn't thinking, I'm trying to be impressive, I'm trying to be cute, I'm trying to whatever.

So I was wearing pajamas. And as Carla tells the story, I was dipping pancakes in butter and sugar. That is absolutely not what happened. I was lightly dusting by pancakes. Anyway. But, yeah, that's his first memory of me, too, is being like, "Okay, this girl's not picking up on any of these cues because I didn't bring my cutest A-game freshly showered that night. But hey, it worked out for both of us.

Caroline: I know Mark talks all the time about how persistence is what won me over. It's like, guys, you just have to sometimes be extra persistent because it does work.

Stephanie: Just keep going until she... Yeah, that's amazing.

Caroline: He had a vision for what we are going to be long before I caught it. So his persistence definitely paid off in that.

Stephanie: That's really cool. That's really cool. I love you guys. This has nothing to do with what we're talking about today. What we're talking about today is kind of heavy and pretty serious. But before we dive in, you just did a really cool trip with your family and I wanted to hear about it because I haven't gotten to yet.

Also, I wanted to hear about, like, why you guys did it. Because you told me a little bit about the why before, and as you were talking about this, I just made this mental note in my head of like, That was a little piece of your life that I got to tuck away in my heart as, like, I want this to be part of my, too.

Caroline: Yeah. Yeah, I'd love to. So we took our three kids over to Paris and London for a week. My daughter had spring break, and we just jumped on an opportunity with some extra miles. We had to take them over there.

The heart behind it really is just that we want to raise our kids with just more experiences. I think on one hand, it can be so overwhelming just the consumer nature of everything. So feeling like, as a parent, you always have to buy more and get more for your kids. In some ways, we didn't end up actually really giving them Christmas presents. We were traveling a bunch.

So it just felt like this is more of like... I'm not a staff person. So I loved the idea of just prioritizing experiences with my kids. And I think part of it is just in motherhood specifically, everyone loves giving opinions and best practices. And so many people would tell me like, "Oh, well, I would never take my kids over somewhere until they could remember it." It was like this idea of like, Oh, not until like their middle school or high school. And that's fine. That's great if that's how you want to do things.

But for us, I feel so compelled to, as much as we can, to prioritize adventure with our kids, getting them out there, letting them struggle through time differences and new food and the metro system. I mean, our kids became masters of the metro system. They walk so many miles every day. Like we just went for it with them.

Sure we had the tantrums and the meltdowns and the moments of exhaustion. That's just to be expected. But I also think it's like we're strengthening parts of who they are that I want to continue to grow. And in my mind, I just feel so empowered as a parent to be like, "Oh, I get to pick what I want to grow in you and foster in the idea that you can be our adventure buddies and we can do this together as a family.

It was fun and wild and all the stuff. But honestly, we just came back and we had the best time. Like I would do together in a heartbeat. We just had so much fun.

Stephanie: I'm so glad that we asked. So glad that I asked that is like... I've heard so many people say that, you know, don't take them until they... Well, one, people say you can't travel once you have kids. And that just scared me for years because I'm like, I love travel. Travel is such a deep... I mean, I know it's the same for you. It's like such a deep part of who I am and what makes me me and what makes me come alive and how I experience God.

It's such a real part of me, that to think about having kids being truly the end of that was just... I just had the hardest time with it. So I decided it wasn't true. And I had enough people echo that, but that's not true.

But then also, yeah, people say that to us now too, where they are like, "Well, they're not going to remember it. It feels like you're just flushing money down the toilet." But I don't think you are. It's practice. Even if they're not going to have memories, they'll have pictures, and one experience will lead to another one. Your kids will be better at the metro next time. So even if they don't remember... I think the experiences build on each other, right?

Caroline: Yeah. And for us, it's not even about one trip. It's about building a family culture that's just like, this is part of who we are and something we want to prioritize our finances to as we can, our time to. Like we just want to continue to take them to all parts of the world.

Mark and I met traveling the world. It just feels so true to who we are. Again, I think in parenting, it can feel so overwhelming the amount of opinions and shoulds that just get loaded on your shoulders. So ways that I counter that, it's like making purpose decisions for our family that even feel at moments like, Yes, this is against what everyone else thinks. This is a really great idea.

But for us, in our family, this feels so in line with what makes us come alive. So we come alive traveling, and so we're going to take our kids with us and they're going to have experiences doing that. And we'll have fun stories to laugh about. So it was just great. I loved it. I loved it.

And if you're a parent and that feels overwhelming, even just like taking a shorter... it doesn't have to be so grand. But the idea of just putting your kids in front of new challenges, new environments, new foods, I think is just a great way for all of us to grow.

Stephanie: There's an art museum here in Nashville that Carl and I both wanted to go to since we moved here but we hadn't had a chance yet. And we were going to take the girls to the zoo last weekend and it was too cold. So I was like, "What if we just take them to The Frist? What if we go to the art museum this weekend?" And Carl's like, "Do you think they're going to like it? Do you think that they're going to destroy it?" I don't know.

But we went for it. We were like, "Okay, I mean, what's the worst that can happen? If it goes terribly, we'll just come back home or leave or do something else. We might as well try it." And we did keep the girls in their stroller the whole time because they're almost two and a half, they touch everything. The art pieces in the main exhibit didn't have any glass. So I was like, "Oh, these are very much within a toddler's reach. So we kept them in the stroller.

But they liked it and they were taking it in and they saw all the colors. And Carl was so good being like, "Hey, do you see this triangle?" There were cool artistic videos of people dancing and playing music and there's like a kid's exhibit where they could color and do beads and stuff.

I mean, it was such a fun day. It was like little mini travel day. I feel like, in theory, taking two-year-olds to an art museum is a bad idea, but actually, it was really cool. It's a really cool experience. I actually thought of you while we were there because I think you were in Paris as we were there, and I was like, "This is a step towards that." I really love that.

Caroline: I love that. Great. Because why can't we? Why can't we try? Sure, maybe it'll go terribly, but then we just leave. And why can't we try? Why can't we just give it a shot?

Stephanie: Yeah, give it a shot.

Caroline: I love that.

Stephanie: So our topic today is pretty heavy but important. We have talked about a couple of times on the show, you know, what to do if you're in a season of doubt in your faith. That's something that I think everybody goes through at different points. Or you know, what to do if you're feeling far away from God. In every relationship, there's going to be ebbs and flows. So we all come to points where we're just not in as good of a place in our faith.

But I wanted to take today one step further because I know that there are a lot of people in the world right now who are in the process of potentially completely walking away from their faith, or walking away from the church, or both. You are

such a safe place for me, I wanted to just kind of open up this safe space for anyone who needs it. I almost feel like this is rent-a-sister time.

I have just a whole bunch of questions for you sort of on behalf of anybody who's in a really rough spot with their faith or with the church right now. And I've told you and I want to tell everybody else, I do not want you to be in a position where you have to answer impossible questions that none of us have the answers to.

But again, for years, for more than a decade, you've just been this really warm, safe place for me. And I think that there are a lot of people in the world who need a warm, safe place, specifically within the church. So that's a really cool thing.

I love that you are a pastor and actually you're sitting in the church right now. So I just feel like I want to ask some of the hard questions that I know women are asking to a really warm, safe place within the church because I just think we need it.

So here's my question. To start out, while there might be some of us who feel really content in our faith, there are also a lot of us who feel really lost in our faith or in our lives, or in the church right now. We feel like we're not shiny, we're not put together, we don't have all the answers, we're confused, maybe we're angry, we feel like we're on the outskirts, the things that felt sure to us for a really long time don't feel sure anymore.

And I think that for a lot of us, it feels like there really might not be room for us anymore, that there's not a place in the church for us anymore. And I think that maybe we're worried that God's mad at us also for feeling the way that we're feeling.

So I guess my first question is, is there still a spot for us in church if we are feeling really messy and we just don't even know which way is up anymore? And then also, I guess, is God mad at us for being in this place?

Caroline: You know, I meet with so many women who find themselves, I think specifically, honestly coming out of... You come out of college, and for a lot of us, we are told throughout college like, "Oh, this is the beginning of the amazing seasons of your life."

And the reality is that for so many of us, what we think is this launching pad to fulfillment and purpose, and belonging in actuality carries a lot more questions than answers. Systems that maybe fit in a certain season don't necessarily feel like they fit so well. Friendships become a lot more work than they are ease.

It's just so much transition. So just in general, it's just, I think, a much harder season than a lot of people coming out of college. And myself included, I think about that first season. But we just don't feel prepared.

And then on top of that, it can be that people have failed us or the church has hurt us. So it can end up feeling like such a heavy place to navigate. So on one hand, I just want everyone to hear that what you feel or what you've experienced, those are real and have a place. I think the worst thing we can do is try the best we can to just push it all under the surface for as long as we can until one day it just all comes up and the whole thing blows up.

I always love the idea that God is wherever we are. Like He is in it with us. And sometimes it can be so easy for us to want to put a value to certain things, even we feel like they're good emotions or bad emotions.

I'm a mom now. I have three kids. We talk a lot about feelings. Even just what you feel is real. Your anger. Anger isn't a bad emotion. It's a very real emotion that we have. And there are moments and places and people that that's real.

People have hurt us. The church has made some serious mistakes, all of that. But always just think about how God just draws us back to His table. I just think about, again, I'm just a mom who just wants my kids to sit at my table for every day of the rest of their lives. My dreams are them in college and post-college and just still coming back to my table, and us, even in moments of disagreement, just sitting back at the table. There's just something so beautiful of like you will always have a place at my table.

And I just think about flipping upside down this whole idea that when it comes to church or faith, we have to come with our shiniest and brightest, and most put together selves. So that's where a lot of shame and guilt and frustration comes from because we feel the tension.

I am supposed to be feeling or looking a certain way, but in actuality, if I could just be honest, I recognize I'm just as far from that maybe as I'm supposed to be. So then it just becomes so overwhelming. Gosh, the truth of faith, is that we come in our total brokenness and our complete need and all of our mess, in our places of uncertainty and doubt and questions.

I remember even when you and I had breakfast that morning saying that questions are meant to not pull us from God's table, but draw us to it. Like we're supposed to just come with the fullness of who we are to where we are. So I just think about women even listening who may feel that place of I'm so mad or I'm so angry or I

feel so hurt, and what then does it look like to come and actually sit with your full self back with Jesus at the table and have the conversations there? Right?

Stephanie: Like bring all that stuff with you instead of feeling like you have to get rid of it before you can come to dinner.

Caroline: Yeah. That will never sustain you and that will never heal you, honestly. It's about bringing it all in and saying, "This is how I am, God. This is what I'm really feeling. I'm asking it here, where can I go? And who are you if I can't bring it here? I mean, the whole thing feels so false unless it's true that You really can't handle everything that I'm walking through."

Stephanie: I think that when we're in a hard spot in our faith, there's this temptation to blame ourselves. Or maybe that's just me. Like when I feel like I'm far from God or not in the best place, I feel like it's my fault. Like, if I just tried harder or pursued it more consistently, then I wouldn't be in this place.

Until I was writing this down, I didn't realize that this is how I've always thought of it. But it's like God is a rock in a river, in a lake or something, and I'm in a canoe. And if I don't consistently paddle really, really hard, I'm not going to be able to hold onto the rock. And if I get lazy or tired or distracted or something like that, I'm going to put my oar down in my boat is just going to drift away. So if I find myself far away, it's totally my fault and it's due to my lack of effort. Is there a different way to think about this?

Caroline: Yes. Yes. I understand completely that picture. I think so many women will hear you talk about it. And it sounds so exhausting to me. I just don't have the capacity to keep putting my oar and trying to work with everything in my strength to stay right here.

Stephanie: I don't know if anyone has canoed that much, but I have, which is a random fun fact, I guess. But like there's a finesse to it also, where I don't totally have mastered. Where like if you're trying to get your canoe right up next to somebody else's, there are some paddling back and forth and kind of pulling the water this way.

It's this weird, awkward driving thing that doesn't work like anything else to get your boat right in the exact right spots. Like it's not just a matter of effort, it's a matter of doing it exactly the right way. And I think that's what it feels like, too. That it's not even just like, you know, brute force moving forward. That if you do this kind of the wrong way, you're going to end up backwards or not closed or part of you will be closed but the rest of you will be far away. There's just some detail to it that also feels exhausting.

Caroline: Yeah. Yes. I love this question and I love it because we all have felt moments and seasons of distance with God. So the truth is that even in moments that we feel like God is distant, we know that the promises that "I'll never leave you, I'll never forsake you, I'll always be with you."

I mean, that is such a promise from Jesus that is true. That God is always with us. He's with us in our sorrow, He's with us in our joys, He's with us in our mistakes, failures, all of it. Like He's always with us. So this is the thing I think that I have such a hard for. And yet we can think that means that we always feel Him because He's always with us. So then in seasons we don't feel Him, we begin to think that we're doing something wrong because you're not felt as close to me.

I just think what's so important is to rethink even that there are very much real seasons in our lives where God is felt less or is felt distant from us. I think instead of believing like I've got to paddle harder to be, it is actually in some ways just settling into and being okay that I'm in a season, Lord, where it seems like there is such a distance, even though I know the truth is you've never left me. But I feel like there's such a distance and without it having to be like I'm doing something wrong.

But it's just actually part of journeying with Jesus through a lot of different seasons is that there are going to be certain ones where we just don't feel God as close, even when we know He is.

I always think about in Acts 1, I mean, this has brought me so much just personal peace and distant seasons with God. Because Jesus is about to go and He tells His disciples, "You need to wait here. The Holy Spirit is coming. It's like dynamite power is about to come in you. So you wait." And then he leaves. He leaves them. He leaves them. And they're left.

We get so quick to just go to the next part of like, And then everything happens. Yes. And also there is a moment in these days where He is not with them. And the beauty of it is that what He is doing in this felt absence. Like it is. It's this felt absent season. But what He's doing, obviously, is preparing them and positioning them for what He's going to give them.

We can think so often that distance is disqualifying us from showing up in certain places. I talk to people in church who are like, "God doesn't feel very close and so I'm just not sure I should serve right now." I'm like, "Oh, no, could you actually minister from that place of what you're really walking with God through? Because I bet there are other people in here today who are feeling really similar."

But I also think about how that just rethinking that even the places and moments where there's such distance with God, there's just such a bigger purpose in those

seasons, and how even with the disciples He left so that He could in fact give them something, He could launch them into a whole different season.

I think about this in parenthood. You just did this. How do you teach your child to walk? You have to give them distance. And in fact, the only way your girls learn to walk across the room to you is because little by little, you just stepped away a little bit further. Now, you were always there, you just weren't always right there.

And I think that's part of it, too. It's like normalizing, "Yes, there are seasons that God feels really distant. No, I didn't do something wrong necessarily. It could, in fact, be that God is stretching and growing me and positioning me in ways that require that I don't feel Him like I did in a certain season. But that doesn't mean that He isn't with me and that doesn't mean that I've done anything wrong. It's just actually part of the faith journey with Jesus.

Stephanie: There are times where I feel like we're feeling just a little bit distant, we're like, Okay, you know, maybe it's because... I mean, right now we're in the middle of Lent and I feel like so many people use Lent as a time to examine, like, is there something that is causing distance between me and God, like something that is distracting me from Him or something? I'm going to give that thing up for the season of Lent.

So maybe it's like social media or something like that. I'm going to remove this thing that can sometimes be a barrier from between me and God from more intimacy with Him. I think that that's the way that a lot of people look at it.

So there are times like that where we're like, you know, there's something kind of between us. I'm going to put in the effort to remove it so that we can be a little bit closer. But I think that there are also times where we feel so far away and so tired or angry or so much distance has happened that it's like we can't even bring ourselves to do the things that once brought us close. What about then? If we really stop paddling, what happens then?

Caroline: Yeah. Yeah. I think that's such a great question. I think that you will find that God is right there with you, that it wasn't ever actually on you to paddle really hard to keep up with Him because He is right there with you. I think sometimes we can all get really tired of trying to live up to the standards or check all the boxes, so that's the way we're approaching faith. So every day is like, I just need to do these three things, and then my day's good.

I think in moments like that, it can be so helpful to go back to just real and honest and simple with God. I like to encourage people just even... like could you just sit

down with Jesus across the table from you and have a cup of coffee with Him in the morning for 10 minutes? Like just you and Him. Like no one else in the place.

Could you just find your safest room in the house and just sit down and could you just tell Him how you really feel? Could you not filter it? Could you not have to make sure it's just right or just holy or just as is? But could you just sit down with your cup of coffee that you have anyway and for 10 minutes, just begin to tell Him how you're feeling, who you're frustrated with, how maybe you even feel like God has let you down? And could you start there?

Or could you go on a walk with Him in the forest because you get alive in nature anyway? So with you and Jesus, could you imagine Him next to you and could you just go on that walk and talk to Him like you would a friend, not to check something off a list because you'd want your friend to know how tired you are, exhausted, or how lonely you feel? So could you start by telling Him those things?

I'm not saying that that fixes it, but it keeps the conversation going and it keeps the connection there. I think in really dry and weary seasons, us continuing to do what we can to just have conversation and talk to Him and listen. Maybe just seeing if for even a second you could tune your ear into the quiet and hear if there's a whisper in that place.

Those are just all beautiful ways that we can stay connected in seasons that we probably feel just really exhausted by a lot of the shoulds or the to-do that at times it can feel like it feels too much.

Stephanie: I love that so much. That feels so... Like yeah. Yes, that.

[00:35:24] <music>

Sponsor: Hey guys! Our sponsor for today's episode is a company that I just love. It's [HelloFresh](#). Now, I know that lots of y'all have heard of them. But just in case you haven't, HelloFresh is America's number one meal kit that shops, plans, and delivers your favorite step-by-step recipes and pre-measured ingredients so you can just cook, eat and enjoy.

But there's nothing better than a good home-cooked meal. But as you guys know already, I'm not the best at it. Now, I've definitely become a better cook over the years. I still don't love meal planning or cooking. It's just truly not my gift. And plus these days, cutting down on shopping time is absolutely essential for us. And that's why I love HelloFresh.

First of all, with HelloFresh, there's something for everyone, with 40 recipes and over 100 seasonal and convenience items to choose from each week. I made these incredible HelloFresh chiquitos recently, and you guys, they were so good, I'm going to be thinking about them for ages.

And not only is the food delicious, but the process of making it is so easy. All the ingredients come pre-measured in handy labeled meal kits so you know which ingredients go with which recipe. That means there's less waste.

And I'm telling you, I am a beginner in the kitchen and even I can get these recipes. They are so simple and they kind of outlined on pictured step-by-step instruction cards. They walk you all the way through the whole thing and it actually feels like a fun cooking lesson.

I'm also a huge fan of HelloFresh because it's cheaper than grocery shopping and 25% less expensive than ordering takeout. This is great news for those of us on a budget, right? Plus HelloFresh owns Green Chef, another one of our amazing sponsors, so there are even more meal plans to choose from.

I love switching between the brands and now my listeners can enjoy both brands at a discount with me. Speaking of discounts, I love HelloFresh even more, because they want to give you a promo code for 50% off. If you go to hellofresh.com/girlsnight50 and use the code GIRLSNIGHT50, you can get 50% off plus your first box ships free.

Again, go to hellofresh.com/girlsnight50 and use code GIRLSNIGHT50 for 50% off plus your first box ships free. HelloFresh, thank you so much for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

[00:37:31] <music>

Stephanie: I like consistency and discipline and ritual. I'm just a believer that if you want something, if you want to end up in a direction, like get up every day and just take a couple of steps in that direction. So that's always how I've operated in my faith is like, if I want to spend time with God, or if I want to be close to God, then I need to put some action to that.

So for that reason, I've always really valued consistent time with my Bible, consistent time with my journal, or consistent time in prayer. I'm like, I know where I want to go and so every day I'm just going to get up and try to walk in that direction a little bit. But then there do come times where I know that that's not why... Like I'm not doing it to perform, I'm not doing it to check boxes, but that line between those two is just really razor thin.

And then there's all the shoulds of the way that, you know, I think all of us are trying to figure out how to describe what sort of invisible relationship is like. Something that's also always helped me is to think of, well, okay, if this was a person... So yeah, think of Jesus as a friend, you're talking to Him, He's with you, how would you communicate with Him?

But then, because I'm such a relationship person, sometimes I take it a step too far and I'm like, "Oh, God's feelings are going to be hurt if I don't invest in Him today," or like, "Jesus is going to feel abandoned by me if I don't like..."

It becomes another relationship that I need to take care of instead of being taken care of. And that's another way where I just get exhausted because I feel like I need to make sure I call my mom and make sure she knows that I love her, and I need to call my dad, make sure he knows that I love him, and I need to check in with my sister. And the list is really long. And it's like, I need to call God and talk to Him and make sure that, like, our relationship is good. You know, it's another thing for me to tend.

There's some good in both of those things but I don't know, it's just a really easy line for it to tilt or tap into something where this is, you know, a box for me to check every day, this is what I should be doing. And if I don't do it, there's consequences. And then also, this is a relationship. Yeah, it's a relationship that if I don't tend to it, it's going to fall apart.

Caroline: I completely hear what you're saying. And I think part of it, even in that place is prioritizing stillness in our lives, which is something that's really hard for us to do. But I think that is such a discipline. Because I think about like when we just go still with God and not even have to say anything or do anything, but just be, I think it does heal part of us that feels this constant need to do things in awe... like you're saying, to paddle, paddle, paddle, paddle, paddle. Which I know so many people resonate with that feeling of. But also the place of just stillness, just being and letting the silence be really holy presents to us.

My life is constant noise. It feels like it's just constant noise. Especially with three little kids. And yet trying to find those places of just quiet and stillness where I just sit. I mean, that would be such a strengthening discipline to all of us. If you just even sit for 5 minutes, maybe you hear something, maybe you don't but you just sat with God.

I think about even in relationships, it takes a certain level of trust and intimacy to be comfortable in the silence with someone. Like if you're sitting with a stranger in a room, it's like I'm fidgeting. You know, you're feeling this, like, "Oh, what do we

say next?" But I can sit in silence with my husband and be so comfortable and so happy just sitting.

And so I think the same thing with God of "Am I sitting with you? Am I allowing the presence of just being with you to refresh my soul today?"

Stephanie: I love that so much. On a side note, yesterday was the loudest day, I think, of my life so far. Both of the girls just want to... They know every word that exists and they want to use them all at once. And they're using them at full volume, and they're doing them at the same time. And I think because their voices sound so similar, they melt into each other really. So it's really hard to understand what one of them is saying if both of them are yelling.

They have so much to say and they're just saying it so loudly that both Carl and I finished the day yesterday and our ears actually hurt. At bedtime we were like, "We're nervous right now." And then one of them comes in and is like, "Mama, is that a turtle?" You're like, "That is turtle. We're going to use our quiet nighttime voices now."

I mean, we finished the day needing silence more than I think either of us have ever needed it in our whole life yesterday. Anyway, that just was like, Yeah, baby, that's a turtle. "Mama, it's a turtle. It's a turtle." Yeah, this is a turtle. Oh my gosh.

I really like that. Like, just doing nothing. I feel like all these questions it's like we know the answer, but also we need to hear it again. Is there a point at which we could push God away so far that He would just give up on us?

Caroline: Oh, I feel that question because I know people are wondering it. And that breaks part of me knowing that. Someone would think that they could be any two of something that God wouldn't be with them anymore. The truth is that, no, no, you can't push God out of your life to a point that He no longer wants to be with you or no longer loves you or sees you or delights in you.

I mean, the Lord is... Yeah, I know we know this, and yet I know you're asking the question because women are wondering, But what about here? Yeah, even hear, even with this. I mean, the power of the gospel is truly that in every area of our lives, in every season of our stories, in every valley and heartache and mess up, there is no place God walks away from you. There's no place. There's no place that God walks away.

But I know that women can wonder and it can feel like... I think especially if we have been hurt or wounded by people in our lives and have experienced true rejection, which is very real. People leave us. People hurt us on their way out.

Especially if that is some spiritual mentor in our life, if it's a pastor, if it's someone who has helped ground us in faith who then we experience that with, that hurt is very real and can feel like, Well, if this person did it, then what about God?

I know that that can become very intertwined in areas, and yet people fail but God does not. And God will never fail you. He will always be with you. But I know the heart of it is also very real.

Stephanie: You're doing a great job, by the way. I know I'm asking you completely hard questions. I'm so glad that we're talking about this with you. In the last handful of years, and really honestly for all time, there have been things that have happened in our country that have made a lot of people step back from church. It's like different people's actions, the way that they talk about God.

There have been some really hateful things done in the name of Jesus and I think that a lot of people are sitting here going, "That doesn't match up with who I thought that Jesus was." Are these people portraying Him incorrectly or am I wrong? And is Jesus really who they're saying He is? How do we separate God from people doing crappy things in His name?

Caroline: Yes. Yeah, absolutely, people have done really terrible things in the name of Jesus. We're in such a stage. I don't know if this has been forever, but I know as of the last... I know in the time we're living in right now that we can look at people who have these really big followings or platforms or levels of influence and think somehow that they are the fully... I mean, that their God essentially, that I seem to follow them because if I follow them then I'm close to God.

We can truly idolize people and worship them and think that somehow they are higher than just being human. And then in moments that things crumble or they do really terrible things, in some ways this shocking reminder of like, we really are all human and we're all broken and hurt in certain ways and some people have experienced more healing than others. But there is the reality of that, of like people are people and people can really hurt.

I think also if we idolize certain people, then when that person does something and we've put a lot of faith in them... This was even a moment in my own journey that there have been times where I've wanted to put my faith in people. And then when those people disappointed me, they disappointed me or hurt me in a very real way, then I began wondering about the whole thing. Like, well, what really is real then because I saw that you had it all?

I think on one hand, it's really important that our faith is in Jesus and not in people. People are beautiful pointers and reflections of Him but no one is Him. Sometimes

we get intertwined in that. So that can create a lot of us wanting to just leave it all when there is a part of us having to take responsibility.

But there is. I think it's important to say there's a part of us that has to say, "I cannot put my hope, faith and trust in any person in the way... I can only put my full hope, faith, and trust in Jesus." And then recognize that everyone else is doing hopefully the best they can to reflect Him as truly as they can and yet there are people who do really bad things.

I think in that way, in moments that we experience it, I think it's... it's a broad question. So it's hard not knowing people specific places how to answer it totally. But in Jesus, we have great discernment. And I think that's really important. Like we can really discern out where there's good fruit and where there is goodness, like where someone has messed up and made a mistake and their heart and life are really turned towards God. And so we're going to work through that place with them and stay there and whatever and in church or whatnot.

And then we have great discernment. And I think even trusting that, trusting that as women who here who are following Jesus, we can hear His voice, we can discern out what God is doing in a place and know the times to where it is just time because of the hurt or the pain, or what someone has done to walk away and find a community or leaders that are bearing good fruit even in imperfect ways. So there's that part in it as well.

But absolutely, I think it's a really difficult place when in faith specifically... It's different and it goes really deep when people hurt us and do really bad things in the name of Jesus. And in those moments seeking out really wise counselors and support and leaders who can help us navigate through that, seek out healing, and find ourselves in a body that isn't going to get it all right but is really hungry to go after God and own up to when they have missed it. It is so important. Is that helpful? I don't know if I really answered that totally.

Stephanie: Is there any sort of like when we've been hurt or we see something that's really ugly in God's people in His name, like justified by His name, even if we know they're wrong... I feel like it's still like... Okay, so said reflectors. I really like that. I like pointers and reflectors.

But what if someone is doing something that is so ugly and is reflecting back on to God? How do we not let that change our picture of God? Because it's so hard to see Him... That when people are, you know, running around and saying hateful things and being really exclusive...

I remember there was a guy who would always stand on a college campus and just yell at everybody who went by. He would yell Bible verses that were so random and unhelpful and just tell everybody that they were going to hell. That's a reflector, it feels like. How do we not look at that guy and go, "That's who God is"? How do we not confuse the two?

Caroline: I mean, I think that's where we have ourselves rooted in Jesus and... One, this is why we have the Bible because the Bible is really helpful in moments like this. Yes, people abuse it but this is the word of God that keeps us grounded in the middle of all kinds of stormy waters and in the middle of all kinds of people who will try to sway us on things that we just have the sense I'm not really sure if this is it.

And here it's not just that I feel a certain way, but I'm looking at scripture and I'm saying, "This is going against the love of God or the truth that I'm reading here." So there's that part of it. And I think that's really important because I think it can be easy as we're trying to navigate through a lot of seasons of our lives to just attach ourselves to any person who's giving us a shiny version of Jesus, even if it doesn't necessarily fit really well with us.

And that's where as women we have to walk into... If I'm anchored with Jesus, I hear Him, I'm reading His word, and this doesn't fit with what I'm reading about of who Jesus is or what God's saying in Scripture. So I think that's where we become really empowered.

We're not just these like kind of go with the winds of what people are saying. We know the truth and we know when something is wrong and can use our voice and our instinct and make choices to then realign ourselves into communities or under leaders or whatever that are in line with what we're reading in Scripture, who we know God to be. So I think that is so important in it.

And sometimes people will say really wrong things in really compelling ways. And having even there to trust that age isn't a component of how well you know Him or your ability to choose what is right and what is wrong. We all have the Holy Spirit. I tell this to my kids all the time. You have the Holy Spirit in you. You follow Jesus. I will have them pray all the time. It's not like you have something junior in you. You're fully equipped in God to make choices and stay in alignment with what God is saying.

So I think just even hearing that of... If you are in a community where you see people making wrong choices in the name of Jesus, then it is time to remove yourself from that community and find a community that is truly reflecting who we read in Scripture that God is.

I don't know outside of that. I can feel so overwhelmed with the amount of wrong that's happening. But I feel so inspired when I find myself around other people who are just hungry and going after God. And I find myself understanding the limitations in my life to "I can't carry it all. I just can't." So I try the best I can to move myself into community and with people who have such a sincere heart for God and trust that God, as God who has limited capacity, can work out a lot of the other parts of it.

Stephanie: I think that what I thought you were going to say for a second was like, when you see someone who's doing something that doesn't match up... You said, move. What I thought you were going to say was like, fight against it.

My next question was like, if we are in a church where we don't agree with or we find that we're not agreeing with things that are being taught or the culture and like, this is how we do things, I think that there's a hesitation to... there's this feeling that you can't switch churches. That you have to stay. You have to stay.

So yeah, I think I thought that you were going to say it's our responsibility to turn it around or set everyone straight or something or just to stick it out until it gets better or something like that. But I don't know. That just sounds so exhausting to constantly be surrounded by people who aren't walking in the direction that you think is right and to carry that they feel like it's on your shoulders to fix it or something.

Caroline: Yes. Yeah. Maybe in certain moments. I'm not saying don't raise your voice. Absolutely. If you are sensing, Oh, this is something that I need to raise my voice on, you raise that voice. I am so for that. Also, there are seasons of just having to make choices to move into a community that is going to help you truly grow as a follower of Jesus. You can't grow all the time if you're just butting up against constant opposition or frustration.

So even in that, there are seasons that I do think... People move churches. I have a mixed relationship with it to be truthful. Like on one hand, I think it's really important that we work things out in a community. I think conflict is really necessary for intimacy. I think that it's necessary to walk through many seasons with leadership in a church, to really dive deep, you know. And a lot of times we just stay at the surface level and then when it doesn't fit us anymore, we just jump ship and go somewhere else.

So I don't think that that is going to ever produce really deep roots in a community and probably will keep us from experiencing certain things that require us having to stay at the table, have conversations, and dig into stuff. And also I think that there

are seasons where it's like, this may not be the best community anymore for my family, for us, for whatever it is.

I don't think that you have to believe every single thing that a church believes in order to be in a community. And I actually just, as talking to some of our... we call them partners at our church, but our partners recently about that. As I was saying, some of the reasons that my family felt so drawn to our church, because when I came here, we just came here as people who wanted to serve and raise our family in a church environment. And we loved this church. And there are few reasons why.

And I was saying that to them and telling them a little bit more specifically about it. But then I didn't want them to feel like, well, you just have to abide by my things in order to be here, because that isn't true either.

So I think it's actually really beautiful to be in a church environment where everyone doesn't believe all the same things, but there are some distinctions and differences and yet such a unity that we're expressing something so beautiful that these people... That maybe we don't see eye to eye at every single bit. And maybe you don't have to. And actually, what if the beautiful part is that we don't and we're all here trying to sort it out and have conversations and work through conflict together as people?

I wanted them to know that this isn't like a check-the-box five things you have to do. You can come here not fully knowing how you think on certain things, and we would love to be a part of those conversations with you.

Stephanie: I love that. My last question for now because this is such a big conversation and one that we can and should keep talking about. There are some really hot-button things in the church and in our culture and in the news and stuff.

And it seems that different groups of people who really love Jesus and are like, "The Bible is true. I am basing my whole life on the Bible. I have a degree in theology. I'm not wishy-washy on this. I'm not messing around. Like my whole life is devoted to Jesus and the following everything that He says." And they are coming up with different answers for what is right with some really hot-button things. What do we do with that? Because it's not like, Well, that's your opinion and this is mine. It's like, no, this is right and this is wrong. But then the other side might say, No, this is right and this is wrong. What do we do with that?

Caroline: Yeah. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Yes. There are all kinds of people who have really strong cemented views that are very opposing for one another. I think it's helpful to hear out people who see things differently. And I think it's helpful to be a learner ourselves and get curious on our own and dig in and sort through it, all of it.

I think it's so important. Sometimes we don't want to... we're like opposed to hearing someone who we don't agree with talk about an issue. But actually that can be really helpful to hear someone who has such a strong conviction about something speak in a way that's passionate about it, that doesn't align with where we have landed.

I also think it's important for us to sort through things on our own. And no, that does it mean that you're coming up with... Not everything is based on our opinion. But it is on us getting curious and digging in on our own. I think sometimes we can become so dependent on what someone else believes on something or so depending on their opinion of "Well, they said it as the authority."

And this is where I just am so passionate about being someone in my own life and encouraging other people to get curious and dig in for themselves on things. And especially if you are hearing people who are coming such strongly opposing views on something, well, sure, on one hand, it can be interesting to hear them talk about it, but on another is probably important for you to go do research for yourself and read the scriptures they're talking about, understand the context and own some opinions for yourself in it too.

Like, be able to settle for yourself. How in this season you're landing on some things? Realizing that maybe it'll take different forms as you and I grow and mature and whatnot. But it is important to know what we believe in certain things. And sometimes what we believe is it just it's this way or that way. That's just so polarizing. Sometimes it is about even trying to sort out the mystery and tension of holding space for somehow hearts of both to be true.

We had this amazing moment recently at church where the lead pastor—and people were talking about it and even recently to me. The lead pastor recognized that because of some things that were happening, people were coming into our church that day and some were really happy and some were really hurt. How do you pastor and love people when they're feeling such different things in a day?

It was just such a beautiful morning for our community because it wasn't about someone coming up and saying, this is how we as a church believe on this issue. But actually seeing the dignity of people in there enough to recognize that this is a moment that we just want you to know that we see you. And if you're walking in today feeling really hurt because of what's happening in the world, if you're walking in here feeling whatever you're feeling, we just want you to know that we as a community believe that together we can all exist, that we can be unified even when we don't fully believe the same things.

I think people really experienced the beauty of church that morning. Because it wasn't about how these people are in and those people are out. But actually, no, we want to hold space for everyone and recognize people are holding different things here and that as the body we can recognize both those things at the same time.

Stephanie: Yeah, I love that so much. I think I thought that opinion was something that should be left out of finding truth. One of the first things I remember being taught is like, you either believe the Bible is fully true or fully not. So I'm like, Okay, that makes sense.

But people can believe that the Bible is fully true and stake their whole lives on it and come to different conclusions about things. So I think that sometimes, without realizing it, we're following what the loudest person around us, what conclusion they've come to from doing this work in their own life or from, you know, they've compiled different people's opinions and this is the one that they've come to or something.

But there's room and there's need for our conclusions, for us to read for ourselves and come to our own conclusions. And all kinds of people are coming to different conclusions. I just think that I thought that kind of the first church I landed at, the first person who stated their conclusions really forcefully like that must be the right one.

And it's really confusing to see people come to all kinds of different conclusions that love the same God and are reading the same book. So I think that that's just this really important task that has made me pretty uncomfortable throughout the years. Like, what do you mean I have to figure out what I think about this? I didn't know that there was room for what I think. But there is actually. There is. Like, we're responsible for what we do with the information that we're reading and how we live our lives as a result.

Caroline: Yeah. Yeah. And it requires us to wrestle. It requires us to actually get in the stuff and be active. Like an active participant. It's not just sitting on the sidelines, just kind of receiving passively the information being given to us but having an active relationship that is wrestling through with God, issues or tensions or multiple opinions and really getting into it with Him in just a way that is actually so necessary. For us to mature and grow and continue to connect with Him is that we have to be actively in this stuff with Him and sorting through it for ourselves. So I think it is so important that we're not just receiving everything someone else is telling us but that we're doing the wrestling, that holy work with God.

Stephanie: Yeah. Before we go, you know, my heart has always been to have people at all spots in their faith journey, for this to be a space for people and no matter where they are in their faith. I just want to reaffirm that that's the goal.

You know, we have people in our community who have never been at a better, stronger, more certain place in their faith. And we have people who have never really had a faith. And they're kind of wondering if God may have something to say to them and they're just at the very beginnings of figuring that out.

Then we have people who've been in the church forever who are just as solid as can be, and then we have people who are like, What is even happening? I don't know if I believe any of this anymore. This is a place for all of us. And no matter where you are, this is a safe place for you. I just wanted to say that.

Caroline, as we finish out, as our just resident big sister, would you just pray for us?

Caroline: I would love to. I'd love to. God, we just pray for every single woman who is listening to this episode, whenever they find this. God, I pray that in the middle of whatever she is holding, whatever she's wrestling through, whatever she is heartbroken about, that she would find you there and that you would find her there.

That there would be Your presence in the midst of that messy, weary place of her life. That, God, you would be so real to her as she's walking through what she's carrying today. Not in theory, not even in this perfectly packaged place, but in the real grit and the real wrestling of her life, her story, her emotions, her... all of that.

Lord, I just pray that you would be so real and so near. God, you would make a way. That you would make a way, that you would heal, that you would redeem, that you would breathe life into the places that feel so long gone. Because you really are that good, Jesus. You are that real and you are that powerful and you were with her in it.

So I just pray right now that wherever she is today, that she would just feel that presence that You are right there with her. And that today is a part of this grand story of her life that you were writing, that with all of the valleys and all the highs, with all of it, that just tells the goodness and the mercy that the presence and the power of God in the very real and the very hard and the very beautiful of our lives. So I just pray your blessing and your presence and your nearness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Stephanie: Amen. Thanks, Caroline.

[01:13:45] <music>

Outro: You guys, isn't Caroline amazing? I just love her so much, and I'm so glad that I was able to share this conversation with you. One thing I wanted to mention quickly is I know we talked about a lot in today's episode, and so if you want to find the links to any of those things, all you have to do is go to my website. It's girlsnightpodcast.com.

And for every episode, we have a blog post with the show notes. All the links will be there for everything we talked about, including all of Caroline's contact info so you can follow her and so that we all could be friends.

The other thing I wanted to mention is that if you haven't had a chance yet, it would mean so much to me if you would take just a second to leave us a rating and review on iTunes. We've gotten so many amazing five-star reviews from y'all and you've left the sweetest comments. I can't tell you how much it means to me. And it also helps out the podcast more than you can imagine.

So if you haven't yet, please take just one quick second to leave a rating and review. Thanks so much. All right, friends, that's all we have for today but we'll be back next week with another episode of Girls Night. And trust me, you're going to love this one. I'll see you then.