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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.

So today's episode requires a bit of backstory, but I promise it'll all make way more sense once you hear the context. So a few summers ago, the summer of 2018 to be exact, was one of the toughest, darkest, saddest, most difficult times of my whole entire life. I found myself in an absolute tailspin of anxiety and depression.

And as the anniversary of this season rolls around every year, I always find myself remembering with just total clarity how it all felt. As the weather gets warmer and summer sets in, I always feel this fresh wave of gratitude for the fact that I'm not stuck in that dark place anymore. And I tear up every single time I think of the women who carried me through it.

I also take this time each year to check in with myself. It's a time when I check in on how I'm doing and when I try to get really quiet and listen to the answer. It's my own personal mental health awareness time. And next week, I want to invite you to join me in it.

Next week, we're going to do two things in our little corner of the internet. Number one, I'm going to tell you the full story of what happened that summer. Side note here. Make sure you're on my email list because that's where I'm gonna be sharing the story. You can sign up for that on my website. It's [stephaniemaywilson.com](http://stephaniemaywilson.com).

But I'm going to tell you the full story of my mental health journey. And I want to do this because I have a feeling that someone in our community is struggling right now, and needs to hear that she's not alone in this.

Then number two, after I tell you what happened, I'm going to tell you how I was able to get the help that I needed. Along the way, three friends showed up for me in positively, life-changing ways. They showed up right when I needed them, and they carried me through that season. And as much as I possibly can, I want to pass along to you what they give to me.

My friends encouraged me to get help, and then helped me actually get the help I needed. And so if you're in a rough place right now, that's exactly what I want to do for you too.

So along with telling you my full mental health story next week, we are going to do something really cool here on the podcast. Over the next few weeks, y'all are going to get to hear from two really, really important women in my life. My own personal counselors, the one I worked with back in 2018 and the one I'm working with now.

These are women who have been in my corner over the last several years, helping me heal from some things from my past, helping me through the difficult things I've faced in the present, and making it so that I not only have gotten to the other side of those things, I've actually come out on the other side better and healthier and stronger than ever before.

These women have helped me grow and heal so much. They've helped me become a healthier version of myself. And every single part of my life and every single one of my relationships is better as a result. I'm so excited for you to meet them, and for you to get a sense of what therapy has been like for me. Because I feel like it's sort of a way to sample the kind of help and support that's available for you too.

Now, okay, I have to give a quick disclaimer here. Confidentiality is something that is taken really seriously when it comes to counseling and therapy. So it's pretty unconventional for me to be introducing you to my counselors, both former and current, and for us to be sharing some of the things that we've talked about in our sessions.

I wanted to let you know that we have had all the conversations and signed all the necessary paperwork when it comes to the ethics of having them on the show, especially with my current therapist who you'll meet next week.

We have done all the work to make sure to protect my privacy, the work we've done together, and the integrity of our therapeutic relationship. That's just super important that you know that. So I wanted to make sure to say it.

So with that out of the way, that brings us to today's episode. My guest for today's episode is my former therapist, the one who walked me through that dark season in 2018, and so much more, Blake Blankenbecler.

And today, I've invited her on the show to talk about people-pleasing. People pleasing and how to set boundaries are things that she and I talked about a lot during our time together. I cannot even tell you how much of an impact that's had on my life, how much freedom I've been able to step into as a result.

Friends, if you are a people pleaser, if you have a hard time saying no or feel guilty for setting boundaries or worry constantly about how other people are perceiving you and often feel resentful because you're so depleted from it all, this episode is for you.

And one last thing. Like I said, next week is going to be a really big week here in our corner on the internet. I shared my mental health strain for the first time last year and it was one of the most impactful things I think we've ever done around here. I had no idea that that was going to be the case, but it really was.

So if you want to make sure to hear the story and take part in all that we're going to do during our mental health week next week, make sure you're on my email list. Again, you can sign up at [Stephaniemaywilson.com](http://Stephaniemaywilson.com). I'm so excited to dive in.

All right, without any further ado, here is my conversation with Blake.

[00:05:00] <music>

**Stephanie:** All right, friends, we have a treat for you today. I am sitting here with my friends, but more importantly my former therapist, Blake Blankenbecler. Blake, we haven't gotten to catch up in a while but I feel like I've talked about you so much in the last handful of years and the things that you've taught me and the things that I learned while I was in therapy with you.

I'm so excited for women to get to know you. Also, as we talk about mental health and therapy a ton in, you know, our corner of the internet, I'm so excited to get to introduce my women to someone who has actually been in my corner for a really long time. So welcome to Girls Night.

**Blake:** Thanks for having me. I'm so happy to be here.

**Stephanie:** This is so fun.

**Blake:** I know.

**Stephanie:** So for women who haven't gotten to meet you yet, tell us who you are, what you do, and I'd love to hear a fun fact about you.

**Blake:** I got this question.

**Stephanie:** Fun fact.

**Blake:** Fun fact. I am Blake Blankenbecler. Quite a full last name. I married into my last name. I was not born with this. But-

**Stephanie:** What was your maiden name?

**Blake:** Snyder.

**Stephanie:** Oh, that's a lot easier.

**Blake:** So much easier. This was how I knew. I was like, "I'll probably end up marrying this guy because the chances of a name like Blankenbecler don't really happen."

**Stephanie:** I love that.

**Blake:** I'm a licensed therapist. So I have in these past few years moved way too much. So currently live in Charleston, South Carolina where I have my therapy practice. It's called Big Holistic Psychotherapy. And I do a lot of work with trauma, eating disorders, codependency. Honestly, just being human these days. Let's be honest. Those are like big words, but a lot of it's just being human.

And then kind of out of that and seeing people from all over the country. I started doing... like just noticing friendships and like we don't talk about these parts of our life enough. We don't give them enough time and the spotlight, and they're always these kind of side relationships, but they're actually deeply pivotal to our well-being as women.

Okay, fun fact. I thought about this. It came to me this morning as I was getting ready.

**Stephanie:** All the best things to do.

**Blake:** Yes. It's really true. It's really true. I thought about and I was like, "What is this? So most normal moms put their kids in normal sports like basketball, tennis, soccer. My mother put me in water ballet. So, yes, I grew up doing synchronized swimming. So Monday nights I went to this pool at Queens College in Charlotte, and me and my little friend did synchronized swimming.

**Stephanie:** Synchronized swimming is really hard.

**Blake:** Oh, it's very, very hard. Yes. And this is like novice level, like elementary school vibes, but had a teeny tiny... you have to wear a nose clip so you don't get water up your nose. During recitals, you put gelatin in your hair so it doesn't move.

My friend Josie and I, one of our recitals before we got in the water we did the Parent Trap handshake. So that was a big thing. It was like a full-circle moment. I was just in Moab and celebrated her wedding to her beautiful wife. So fun.

**Stephanie:** Oh, my. Did you guys do the Parent Trap handshake?

**Blake:** We did not do that.

**Stephanie:** I mean, I actually don't know that I totally know it, which is kind of shameful. Like I know everything else about the Parent Trap but I don't know that it was ever my thing with one of my friends to do a handshake. So I don't know. Maybe I'll get Carl to learn it with me.

**Blake:** I mean, I feel like it's a pivotal moment in the psyches of all 90s kids.

**Stephanie:** I know all the songs, I know everything. And now having twins, I'm like [inaudible 00:09:16]. Okay, I really love knowing that. So actually, it's funny that you said the thing about friendships. I'm really glad that you're talking about friendships more on Instagram and just having it be more of a focus of what you talk about.

And I don't know how much I'll share about our year and a half or two years of therapy together. But I will say that the hardest I cried in your office and the most surprising moment of crying in your office was talking about friendships.

I mean, we talked about a million things like all kinds of things working together, but I do remember one day we were talking about friendships, and I just burst into tears. And I remember kind of looking at myself like, "What's happening right now? Why am I crying?" But it was the hardest and most surprising.

And I think we both were like, "We've hit on something here." Because it is. It's a really... We talk about this all the time here but I think we can be the best parts of each other's lives as women, but also we can do some real damage to each other. And I've experienced both of those things.

**Blake:** Absolutely.

**Stephanie:** So I'm really glad you're doing what you're doing. So before we dive in, we're gonna talk about all things people-pleasing and boundaries today, which is so much of what you and I spent a really long time talking about. But I want to talk about therapy for a second. And just as we're kind of in a therapy theme for the summer, I wanted to share why I started seeing you in the first place.

I think that we have this kind of misconception about therapy where it's like something really bad and really sudden has to happen and then you have to go to therapy immediately after. And I've done that in life. Like after big car accident or different things like that I've gone immediately into therapy and it's been so good.

But when I reached out to you, I had been feeling like there were some random things in my life that... like potholes almost that I kept tripping into. And it was like, "Man, I'm really anxious about this thing," or, "I feel really guilty about this when I do..."

Like when I say no to a friend, I worry for like two weeks that they're mad at me about it. Or I keep getting in this recurring fight with my mom. You know, it was just this random list of things and I started to just write them down like in my phone. I just wrote them down. And it was like, "Things to talk about in therapy."

And then finally the list got long enough and I really... I think what I was feeling was actually just a lot of anxiety but I didn't really have language for that yet. But the list got long enough and the things on the list became annoying enough and hard enough that I finally was like, "I think it's time." So I reached out to you.

I remember in our first session, like I've been in counseling before, and also both my parents are licensed psychologists. Like I am well versed. But I remember sitting in your office feeling so nervous. I think I even made a therapy joke like, "Should I lie down on the couch?" I don't know. I just was feeling so awkward.

Even though I was really well versed in therapy, I just still was kind of uncomfortable at the beginning. But I remember walking out the first day going, "This is the best thing that I could do for myself but also the best thing I can do for Carl, for my future kids, for my work, for my friendships, for everything. This is just going to be really impactful for everything." And it was.

If there are women sitting here thinking like, "I mean, the idea of therapy has crossed my mind at a time or two," what encouragement do you have for them about how therapy could maybe help them?

**Blake:** I think there's so much thoughts of what actually happens in therapy sessions. And it's a lot less sexy than you may think but it's also a lot. It's different. Like it's a challenging, curious, compassionate conversation that is just about you. Certainly, as the therapist I'm sitting there, I'm with you but the focus, the emphasis is not on me. And that can even be really scary.

But I think like, how generous to let ourselves have a space that is just for us to slow down where there's not like a... And I do long term therapy with folks. So it's not like, "Okay, here are your three steps. Get on with life."

It's not really about symptom reduction. It's about how do you come back into yourself? How do you unlearn even some of these messages that you got like, You're too messy. You're too sensitive. You're too much. It's bad to say no. You always need to be compliant with others. You always need to give of yourself. And just this space to begin thinking like, What if there are other options? What if there are other stories?

I often say I work with parts. So it's like we have our anxious parts, we have our really angry parts, we have sometimes our really sensitive parts. And a lot of times when people come to therapy, the idea is like, "Okay, I just want to get rid of this, I just want to be happy and I just want to feel good."

And I'll be really honest and upfront with them, like, "I hear you. I totally get that. I feel the same way. And we're going to slow it way down. We're going to look at why these parts even showed up in the first place. How do we turn towards them? How do we have compassion for them? And how do we integrate them so that in the moment, when you're triggered or when things happen, you have more options than either say just reverting to people-pleasing or reverting to freaking out, that you can slow yourself down."

And like you said, I got chill bumps. Like you doing this work changes you, it changes your marriage, it changes your family, the generations to come. It is such beautiful work.

**Stephanie:** I love that. I love that. So one of the things that came up over and over again was this tendency I have towards people-pleasing. And it came up in several ways. So I've pulled I think four of the things that we really, really talked about. Talking through these things, really working on these things, practicing these things really changed my life. And I know that I can't be the only one who's struggled with these things.

**Blake:** You're not.

**Stephanie:** I just want to talk through them. Just to give people who also struggle with them a starting point, I think that a lot of us, maybe, especially as women would identify as people pleasers. So I wanted to start with, can you kind of define this for us? Why do we struggle with this? Where does this come from? And I have no idea what you're gonna say, but I know that it's gonna be really good. Because I'm like you've

made some sort of connection that I don't know about, about where this comes from. So I'm excited.

**Blake:** There's so many things. We can name the patriarchy first and foremost, but I won't get into that because it's just so broad. We won't go quite that broad strokes. So I'll bring it into the minutiae. People-pleasing is this way of being... a lot of times it's unconscious. And what unconscious means is we don't know that we're doing it. It's just like right out of mind. It's like, "Yeah, I do this thing to do this thing."

But it's essentially a way of staying attached and connected in relationships. And it's something that we learned really early on. So when you were a little baby or toddler per se, if your parents don't love you, and I'm gonna make broad strokes, if your parents don't love you or they're not supporting your survival needs, like you will die. So it's pretty dire and intense.

So a lot of times what happens is kids are so perceptible and can perceive so much that it's this sense of like I would rather choose to stay connected to my caregiver or attached to my caregiver than risk saying what I want or what I need or even having an outburst to keep that connection and keep that love.

Like I was listening to something this morning and the woman was talking about how she disciplined her children. And she says, "I really made clear to them that when they did something wrong there was a consequence, but they were not in trouble."

And I was like, "Yeah, that's like zero people's experience." Like most people when they did something wrong, they felt like they were in trouble and there was a sense like delight and love. Like the parent removed their delight and love from them. They were disappointed. They were like, "I don't like that."

So we just learned over time to adapt and to shape shift of how can I do what you need me to do, because that means that I get attachment and connection and care. Like, how wise! That's like the starting place of so much of this work is not like to shame any part of this. But all of our coping skills are rooted in wisdom.

Like how wise that some part of you knew I need to get rid of my messy parts and my needy parts and be really compliant to keep in good graces with your caregivers?

**Stephanie:** And then that kind of just evolves into your friends and your teachers and your significant others and everybody else in your life because it's become a pattern at that point, right?



**Blake:** Yeah. And then it's like people wake up at 20... I see a lot of women, it's like they wake up at 27, 28, 30s, whenever and they're like, "I don't know who I am. I don't even know what I like" because it's always been about the other person. So then the work becomes, how do we get you back in your own body and get curious about who you are?

**Stephanie:** Oh my gosh, I might cry saying this because I'm like, this is so important and so good and so needed. And we also spent a really long time talking through all these things. So it's really interesting you say that because removing delight and connection... I mean, my kids are just starting to do things. Period. Like do good things, do bad things, do things I don't want them to do, do things I do want them to do. As of this week truly.

And it's things like digging things out of the trash. I don't love that. Or sharing with their sister—that's a good thing. But it would never be my intention ever to make them feel like I don't delight in them or I don't love them or I don't want to be connected to them when they're digging through the trash. But that's a really natural way of reacting is like, "I'm not delighting in you right now. I'm asking you to stop digging in the trash." Anyway, I'm like, "Okay, I need to just keep thinking about this." That's so good.

Well, that's a wise thing for us to do as kids. That's a survival technique. But where's the good and the bad in that? Because there's a degree of, you know, throwing temper tantrums is not something that we should continue doing into our adulthood. But also where's the line between it being important that we're messy and that we're honest? And also-

**Blake:** Like, how do we take responsibility too? Like we can just-

**Stephanie:** Yeah. Is it really a bad thing for us to adapt to being more easier to connect with or something? Like where's that good and where's that bad?

**Blake:** I think I've noticed lately, like... I mean, you go on social media, there's so much talk about like "No is a full sentence. Just have boundaries." And they're very harsh. They're not connected boundary. I mean, even I think about if a friend was just to look at me and be like, "No," it would be like my body bagged up. It would be really alarming and that would not feel good.

Versus kind of friends look at me and say, "Hey, I know that this is really important and thank you so much for inviting me. Just with everything that I have going on, I just don't have the margin to come and I can't. Like I love you. I'm sorry. This sucks. We can both have feelings about it." Ah, like, yes. Okay, I get it. So much better.

So I think it was... Gosh, it was like this old clip. I remember Kristen Bell saying, she was like, "My therapist always said honesty without tactfulness is cruelty." And I really appreciated that.

**Stephanie:** I like that.

**Blake:** We can give compassionate nos and have compassionate mess and also take responsibility. Even this idea of asking our friend, "Hey, I am struggling with something so much and it's like I just want to vent. Do you have space for that?" Just even asking the question before just going straight at it is really kind and I think ways that we can be responsible and conscientious of others.

**Stephanie:** So I want to get into the kind of these different... There's so many things I want to dig into. So let's pick one.

**Blake:** Yes.

**Stephanie:** One of the ways that I saw this coming up in my life a lot, like people-pleasing, was that I had a hard time seeing what I wanted and what I needed and what I didn't want. I mean, it came up in really big ways, but then also small ways.

I think I've talked about this on the show before but Carl and I were at a food truck and I wanted a milkshake. And I got the milkshake. And the milkshake was like 15 bucks or something like that. Like I ordered it and they gave me the bill and I was like, "That is not worth it. That is insane. Why did I get this?" But it was like too late.

But then the guy was like, "Well, I don't normally work here. So let me know if the milk shake is bad. I'm just subbing in for our friend. Here's your milkshake." And it was basically like weird milk with a dash of ice cream. Like it was really bad. It was terrible. And I just spent 15 bucks on it.

And this is when I was seeing you. So I was like, "Carl, will you see if he'll add a little more ice cream?" And Carl goes, "Nope, you need to do it." So I had to decide like, Did I want this stranger that I don't know... And he even opened the door for feedback but it was like I had to decide if I wanted to give it or not. Or if I was going to just drink or throw away a gross \$15 milkshake. So I think I did end up asking for more ice cream.

But saying what you want and what you need and what you don't want is really hard. And I think that to start out with a lot of times it's because we don't know. Like you said, we can get to our late 20s, 30s, I mean, really, however old and

realize that we have no idea. Why is it important that we know I guess? And how do we start to figure out what we want and need and don't want?

**Blake:** I think it's important to know what you want so you can know... Like if you know who you are, you know what you need and you know what you want, and you know what you don't want. It's a slow process. So I say that line altogether, but it's a slow process

And I think there's a lot of importance about knowing those things just so that we can be... I mean, everywhere talks about being your true self, being your full self. You are not made to just be a blend of whatever.

Even I use this great example in this great metaphor of this idea of like a fruit smoothie versus a fruit salad. So a lot of us know how to be a fruit smoothie. Meaning like, I'm blueberries, your strawberries. And basically we get in relationship with each other and something happens and the blend button gets pushed. So before you know it, like I don't know where I end and you begin because we're all the same.

That's not true. Like there's so much beauty in our uniqueness and in our differences. And we need to have some edges so that we can know where we end and where we begin. So it's like can we become more of a fruit salad where it's like I get to be a blueberry, you get to be strawberries, and we get to exist together in the same place, but we get to be different.

I know that I always harp back on childhood, but usually that's really scary. Like that was not supported. That was not something that was really like, "I love when you're different. I love when you have your own opinions." I think it is now but it wasn't so much.

And I would also say, knowing who we are, knowing what we want keeps us out of resentment. So if you're someone who feels a ton of resentment and a ton of bitterness and jealousy and envy lay data for you that you might need to do some work to learn about yourself, because clearly some boundaries are getting crossed.

[00:26:36] <music>

**Sponsor:** Our sponsor for today's episode is a company I love called Green Chef. Now, if you guys aren't familiar with them, [Green Chef](#) is the number one meal kit for eating well with plans to fit every lifestyle. If you guys have been around our Girls Nights for a while, you know two things about me.

The first, my schedule is busy. I know yours is too. And the second thing is that I'm just not a great cook. Truly, I'm pretty bad at it and I don't enjoy it either. Don't get me wrong, I love food and I love eating great food. I'm just not the best at making for myself. And that's why I love Green Chef.

Each week Green Chef sends out meals with fresh produce, premium proteins, and organic ingredients that you can feel good about eating. Everything is handpicked and delivered right to your door. The ingredients are pre-measured, perfectly portioned, and mostly prepped. And because of that, when you use Green Chef you're reducing your food waste by at least 25% versus buying food at the grocery store.

Not long ago Carl and I made their roasted crepe pork chops and they were amazing. They had this creamy coconut yogurt sauce that was drizzled on top and it was incredible. The best part is it was super easy to make. You guys I love what Green Chef is doing because they take over the meal planning, the grocery shopping, and most of the prep for us week after week.

Also, Green Chef is now owned by HelloFresh 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.

With that said, Go to [greenchef.com/girlsnight135](https://greenchef.com/girlsnight135) and use code GIRLSNIGHT135 to get \$135 off across five boxes plus free shipping on your first box. I want to see that again just to make sure you have all of the info. If you go to [greenchef.com/girlsnight135](https://greenchef.com/girlsnight135), and use the code GIRLSNIGHT135, you can get \$135 off across five boxes, plus free shipping on your first box.

Thank you so much to Green Chef for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

[00:28:35] <music>

**Sponsor:** Hey friends! I'm so excited to get to tell you about today's sponsor. This is a company I've loved for years and I'm honored to get to partner with them. Our sponsor for today is an amazing app called [Calm](#).

Calm is the number one mental wellness app with tools to reduce anxiety, improve focus, and help you quiet your thoughts so you can drift off to sleep. It was the middle of the night and my mind was racing. Anyone else experienced this?

I saw that they have these things called sleep stories and I figured I'd give one a try, and I fell in love. Honestly, I've never looked back. Friends when I tell you that

Calm was a mainstay in my life, that is truly an understatement. I listen to their sleep stories almost every single night. Side note, my favorites are always travel-related. These days I'm drifting off to sleep thinking about wandering through the streets of Dublin or trekking across Spain.

With two toddlers running around my house also tends to be a bit noisy these days. And so when I need some peace and quiet in the middle of the chaos or when I need to get some work done, I listen to Calm's soundscapes. They're like white noise, but better.

My favorite is called Rain on Window and they also have this one that sounds like you're in a museum. It's like a little bit of noise but not too much. It's great for workday.

Calm has been this incredible tool for me in the past few years, helping me fall asleep at night, helping me quiet my mind, and tune out my toddlers on occasion during the day. There's over 100 million people around the world who use Calm to take care of their minds, and I'm so happy to be one of them.

I also love Calm even more because they have a gift for our Girls Night community. For listeners of the show, Calm is offering an exclusive offer of 40% off of a Calm premium subscription at [calm.com/girlsnights](https://calm.com/girlsnights). If you go to [calm.com/girlsnight](https://calm.com/girlsnight), you can get 40% off of unlimited access to Calm's entire library. In case you need to hear that again, that's [calm.com/girlsnight](https://calm.com/girlsnight).

Thank you Calm for being an amazing sponsor and for all the extra hours of sleep you've helped me get over the last few years. We just love having you.

[00:30:46] <music>

**Stephanie:** I'm glad that you said that because I think that Brené Brown talks about this. Sound that like you just are able to love other people better and be loved by them when there's some boundaries involved. And normally I think boundaries make it seem like we're separate from each other or there's a big gap between us. But it's just that like, yeah, there's not resentment of like getting your toes stepped on constantly.

You're able to just like... I can't remember which book it's in but she was speaking someplace and she didn't want to be perceived as like a diva. So she just kind of went along with it when they said that they were going to have her share a hotel room with someone else.

And she's like, "Normally, my sleep the night before I speak is really important. I usually am in my hotel room practicing. It's just a really important thing that I have

some time alone." But she just didn't want to seem like a diva and so she didn't say anything.

And the roommate that they gave her was a disaster. The only thing I can remember, she was eating a chocolate doughnut and wiped her chocolatey hands all over the hotel couch or something like... It was just like a crazy you can't make this stuff up situation.

But I think her point was like, "If I could have been friends with that lady, I could have been kind to her. I could have whatever but I just needed sleep from my own bed." And I think that that's a good picture of that. You just need enough space to get a good night's rest, and then you're a lot better with everybody else.

**Blake:** Can we be courageous enough to say, like, "I need my own room. I need a new milkshake. This one actually doesn't..." Like I remember I was somewhere and they're like, "How was your drink?" And I was like, "Yeah, it was not good." And he was caught off guard. It was almost he expected me to say, like, "Oh, it was great," and I was like, "Yeah, I think something was bad in it. It didn't taste how it should." And he's like, "Oh, yeah. So sorry. So sorry."

**Stephanie:** But we are worth \$15 smoothie or milkshake that tastes like a milkshake or your \$20, however much it cost your drink is worth not bad ingredients.

**Blake:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Stephanie:** I think that's kind of one of the things that is really hard is like believing that our comfort, our desires like trumps making someone else uncomfortable. But I think really the other person... like that guy really wanted to make me a good milkshake. And I gave him 15 bucks for it. It's like the tradeoff is there. I don't think most people would want us to just suffer in silence.

**Blake:** No. And especially as women we have a contorted relationship with pleasure. Can we have it? We shouldn't have it. It's indulgent. Even this idea of coming to therapy every week is like, I don't know about this. This costs a lot of money. It's all about me, dah, dah, dah. It's like, "Gosh, that tells such a bigger story of what it means to take care of ourselves and how hard it is and how convoluted it's been to do these things.

**Stephanie:** The other thing that I was thinking is like when it comes to saying what we want and need, the more we can practice in little ways, the easier it is to speak up in big ways. Have you seen that to be true?

**Blake:** Yeah. So the psychological term or kind of what we're working with is something called frustration tolerance. So a lot of times when I think about frustration, so say people-pleasing, it's like you're actually always going to feel frustrated. So frustration is a normal part of life. Like welcome.

It is frustrating to start sipping a really bad \$15 milkshake. That kind of frustration leaves you stuck and it leaves you the same especially if you keep frustrating yourself in the same way. Versus there's this other kind of frustration that you had to frustrate yourself and even Carl frustrated you when he was like, "No, you got to do your work." And you said, "Actually, can you add some more?" Like you had to frustrate yourself to do that. But it also led to something new. So we have to increase our frustration tolerance.

So yes, starting with strangers, obviously, we want to be nice and kind to the incredible, you know, service industry. That's not what we're talking about. But even as simple as you get to a restaurant—here's a great example—and they sit you at a table that's right where everyone's walking by, can you have the courage and frustrate yourself enough to say, "Hey, can I actually have the table by the window over there? Can I have the booth actually? That would be better."

Start so small. You do not have to do the big leaps. Just very, very small. And I think the beautiful thing is these things... Once we start doing the work, the world will present opportunities for us to be like, "Actually, no, I don't want to share my fries."

**Stephanie:** I know. I don't want to share my fries. So it's like you're going to be frustrated either way or you're going to be uncomfortable either way. Like you're gonna be uncomfortable either way. You're either going to be sitting in a seat in the restaurant that you really don't want to sit in, or you're going to have to be uncomfortable and ask the person to reseal you. Like just sitting in the seat you don't want doesn't actually accomplish anything. And also you haven't really done the person who served you a favor. I mean, it's like a little bit more work for them, but not that much. Whereas if you practice saying what you need, you'll be able to do it again next time. That discomfort actually helps you grow. Is that you're saying?

**Blake:** Yeah, absolutely. It's helpful because it helps you do the bigger thing and the bigger thing over time where it becomes... It's going to be uncomfortable to say tell your friends like, "Hey, actually, when you ask me that or when you share that, that really hurts my feelings."

That's not always the place where we have to start. We can start really small. Like, "Hey," with a stranger. Because sometimes it's easier to deal with the stranger's perceived disappointment in us, which again, they're not thinking about us, but

that's a lot of our people-pleasing stuff is like, "Oh my gosh, they're so mad at me. I'm the worst person in the world. I just need to get it together and clean this stuff up and be easier." But it's not the case.

**Stephanie:** One of the other things that's disappointing people, and I think one of the hardest things for me was yeses versus nos. And I think in some ways, we've had a little bit of a reprieve from this as we've all been kind of stuck in our house. Like we haven't been able to really make many plans anyway.

But as the world has been changing again lately, I feel like so many people I talked to were like, "I had nothing on my calendar forever and now I have so much." And it's really hard to figure out what you want to commit to, what you want to say yes to, what you want to say no to.

And I think a lot of times, especially as we were working together and kind of working through this, I'd say yes to something but then feel really resentful because of it. I'd feel really overdrawn and really frustrated. And I'd be mad at this person even though they had every right to ask me. And I could have just said no but I didn't feel like I had the freedom to say no. Or we say no but then we feel really guilty about it. How do we navigate our yeses and our nos? How do we figure out what the right answer is to give?

**Blake:** I don't think there's always a right answer. So I think that's the first thing is there is no this idea of this very bifurcated like the stars will align or won't align if you say yes or if you say no. Just to even take some of the pressure off. And I love what you said because a lot of it's just experimenting.

Like, "Oh, I said yes to this thing at 8:30 on a weeknight and I found myself super resentful about it." Like, "Oh, maybe I need to be more conscientious of my time. I have to get up early on Thursdays. I have to get things done. Like it's not good for me to be out until 10:30. I'm not a kind person the next day without great sleep."

So that helps me know when I say yes to things I try... Even for me personally, I don't say yes a lot during the weeknights just because I want to be really clear and get a good night sleep. Like that's more important to me than connection sometimes.

And I like this idea that to be able to say yes we have to have our nos to say yes. It was really helpful. Someone shared this story once where they were wanting to be friends with someone, they were working together. And so this person was like, "Oh my gosh, I want to be your friend. Let's hang out. I just really enjoyed getting to know you."



And this other person said, "You know, I would love to be your friend but I've never seen you say no. And I don't know if I can trust you, that when I asked you to hang out or when we do something that you'll tell me no if you can't. And so work on that. And when you can say no, we'll hang out."

**Stephanie:** Oh, my gosh. What a bold person to be able to say something like that.

**Blake:** Yes. Yes. So bold. I'm not that bold but I love the idea. It's a good metaphor, right?

**Stephanie:** Yeah, yeah. So like experimenting. You know, like if you're paying attention to how you feel after hanging out late on a Thursday or something like that, that's kind of how you figure out your rules for yourself, I guess?

**Blake:** Yeah. And I listen to my body. Like I notice what my body does before hanging out. I notice what my body does when I'm hanging out. And even I notice what I feel like afterwards. If I've spent time with a friend, I want to feel like I've just received a medicine in a way. I feel so filled up and I feel good. And I'm like, "Uh, I love this human. I love being with them. I feel better. I have more energy."

Versus... I mean, it was even helpful when I would come home after hanging out with certain friends and my husband would be like, "Oh, you're like a little more negative than usual. What happened?" And that was really helpful to see, Oh, I don't love the stuff we talk about. I don't love who I am when I'm with this person. I don't love that we connect over these things and that it's talked about this way. I think I'm gonna take some steps back. So there's no right or wrong. Like we have time to figure this out.

**Stephanie:** So paying attention to the result after is really what's lingering. One of the things that I had to start, I'm still not very good at it, but I'm working on it is when anyone asks me to do something I'm really too quick to say yes because I'm excited about the idea and I like them, and I want to make them happy. And so I'll say, like, "Yeah, absolutely." And then I'll find myself like I've double booked myself or I've committed both me and Carl to something that is going to really drain him.

I've been trying to practice pausing and saying, "Let me look at my calendar. I'll get back to you." Or "That sounds fun. I would love to do that, but yeah, let me check my calendar and I'll get back to you." So that that way regardless of whether I'm gonna say yes or no, I have a minute to think about it because I feel like I make much better decisions when I have a minute to think about it."

**Blake:** Great. I'm someone who struggles with anxiety, and so I'm not going to be your most spontaneous friend. You are never going to get a text from me that's like, "Want to hang out right now? Let's go to the beach right now." What will happen is

I'm going to be like, "Next Saturday at 12pm, would you like to go to the beach?" Or someone ask. Like now my friends know. So that's more how I vibe.

So then I even have like a week to know, Okay, I'm gonna have this social outing. I also know that I'm gonna have time alone. So it's just I know that there's space for me to breathe and not get lost in like the social worlds because I'm deeply introverted. So that's something that's helpful for me. But I know some people are spontaneous and we love our spontaneous friends. I'm just not one of them.

**Stephanie:** This is not me. One of the things that I have had to do, and I did it this year, and so far, I mean, we're halfway through the year right now, and it's been serving me really, really well is at the end of last year, I ended up committing me and my whole family to way too much.

And it was all people and things that were really important. It was like a family trip with Carl's family. And then my parents were coming into town to visit us like three days later. And then my best friend was coming into town. And then it was Thanksgiving. And it was just like thing after thing after thing.

And I realized that I'm not my best self under those circumstances, Carl's not his best self. And like, that's a lot to do to the babies. So as I was feeling really resentful and really stressed out at the end of last year, I sat down and ahead of time made some rules for us for the next year.

And I'll have to look at exactly what they are. I haven't kept them to the day but really pretty close. It's like three weeks between trips or something like that. Two weeks between in town guests. I think that's basically it.

So as I was looking at the year coming, it was like, Okay, I can't do that weekend, not because that weekend is busy, it's not, but because it's too close to something else. And I really think like... I mean, we're booked because of that for the rest of the year. Like there's not room for anything else. But it's been serving us really, really well. Like we have enough downtime in between things.

I can't say no in the moment to things but I can ahead of time, say, "This is a rule I made for myself for this year," and inform people of it when the opportunity comes.

**Blake:** So wise. So kind. And I'd say like those weekends where y'all are in town, like you're busy doing nothing.

**Stephanie:** I have a hard time with that. I'm like, "I'm not technically busy. But yeah, okay, that makes sense." What do we do if our no make someone mad or upset or hurt?

**Blake:** It might. Like they get to be upset and hurt and sad. That's where it's the sense... Our immediate reaction is like, How do I fix? How do we fix? Especially when we're talking about people-pleasing? So this is like the most Tendon Achilles heel is like you work up the courage to be really brave and to say no, and then your friend or someone is like, "What? What the heck? That's not okay. You don't care about me, dah, dah, dah." So scary.

Of course, the emphasis is to be like, "Oh my gosh, just kidding. Just kidding. I'm actually not busy, we're home. I can hang out." Also, if we can slow ourselves down, know that it is really scary to be told no, we're going to need some time with ourselves.

But to realize, like, Wow, they gave us so much clarity on what it means to be in relationship with them. Especially for coming out of people-pleasing or even codependent patterns, people that have benefited from us not having boundaries, and us always saying yes are going to have the... they're actually the ones that are going to be the most upset when we start saying no. That's when the system is really going to shake and ruffle, and it's going to be really scary. Which is why we start small with milkshakes and different tables, and no with people that we know well.

This is why it's so helpful to be in therapy and to have safe friends to talk about it just because you do need support during that. Because it's like your nervous system just wants to abort the mission and like, "I'll make it better, I'll make it better." But that frustration thing we talked about, actually committing to your no, and letting them have their feelings about it is a really kind way to frustrate your system that lets you grow and lets you be a person that can have a full range of like, "Yes, I want to do this. No, I don't want to do this. If you're upset, I hear you. And it's not my responsibility."

**Stephanie:** Okay, that's the next thing I wanted to ask you about. Because this is just one of the hardest things.

**Blake:** So hard.

**Stephanie:** I think a lot of times that we have a hard time saying no because we do feel like we're letting down people who need us. And I'm a two on the Enneagram if that means anything to anybody. And I'm like as two as two can be. I love being needed. I love being there for people. It's my best way of showing love. It's my best thing.

So the idea that I can't be there for everybody is really, really challenging for me. And I think that that's what we bump up against when we say no is like, I feel like

I'm not taking care of someone I love or maybe they feel like we're not taking care of them.

So a couple questions about this. First of all, how do we figure out who we are responsible for and who we are not responsible for? And then I want to know what it actually looks like to be responsible for someone. Like who's in our sphere of influence? Who's in our circle? Who's on our like...?

**Blake:** This is why even in a lot of the friendship work I do, I like to spend a lot of time just even naming like you can't be friends with everyone. So this researcher Dunbar... I forget... that's his last name. But he said we can only be in about five deep, meaningful relationships at one time. That's not saying we can't have more, but really our psyche can really tolerate that many close connections. So that's not a lot.

So that's probably like a partner, a therapist, maybe a parent if you're close to them, and that's something that's true, and two or three friends. So it's not a lot of people.

And it's a sense, this idea of who am I responsible for you're in relationship with them. So it takes two to tango. So I think you are responsible for if there is a problem, if there is something that is disturbing the connection, it is your responsibility to bring it up. Like it is your responsibility to name that.

And it's certainly a lot easier to do with the people we live with because we live with them. So you can feel the tension. It's harder to do with, say, our friends, because we don't live with them. There can be a few weeks in between. So we can forget... I'm saying quote-unquote, "forget" to talk about it. But the same thing will end up happening, and the resentments will get built. So I would say, Yeah, we're responsible.

We can't control how other people show up. But I think we can be conscientious about our tone when we're talking to people. Like if we are generous in our assumptions—I love this language like, hey, the story of making up when this happens is this—is going to create an entirely different response and the other person and create like, "Oh, I'm not being told I'm bad."

Versus if I was to tell like, "Hey, that sucks when you do that. Why would you ever think to do that? Why would you think that I want that?" That just makes someone lean right away. So I think that there are ways that we can... Yeah. And how we communicate what we need or don't need from the person can really change how they show up to us. Does that feel clear-ish?

**Stephanie:** Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. But I hesitate saying no to people because I feel like I need to take care of them. Like I need to be there for all the friends who need me or I need to answer the phone every single time it rings. So I need to have a really long time to like talk through something with someone.

So if I say no to someone, I'm leaving a need in them unmet. So, I guess, how do we decide... Or if we have someone who has kind of an unhealthy need for us, how do we decide who we're there for? And then what does it look like? What's a realistic healthy expectation of what that looks like?

**Blake:** I love this question. I think you even named some great data earlier. Say someone says... you tell them no, and they get really upset. That can often be a good indicator. Not always. You don't want to cancel people right away. But if that happens time and time again, that's a great indicator on what it's going to be like to be in relationship with them. That they don't really care about your needs.

I remember I got a message or an email once that's like, "Hey, I have this friend. They don't care about my preferences. They only want to do what they want to do, and they never asked me any questions." And it's like, "What's your question?" There it is. And sometimes it's not so clear of like, this isn't a person that cares about you.

Good friendships, good relationships go both ways and they have space. And good relationships can also hold and tolerate that sometimes we're not able to. Even this idea... This is why I love therapy and healing. These parts of ourselves is to really begin learning that me saying no and me leaving doesn't mean that I've left and I'm going to be gone forever. I will be back. I just can't show up right now. But that doesn't mean that the whole relationship is completely severed.

Like more often than not with our friends or with relationships when we say no, it's really a "not yet" or "not this time." It's not a no forever. But it's like, Right now no. Right now I can't." But I'm sure that there are other times where you can.

**Stephanie:** And so it's like if someone reacts poorly to that consistently, that's kind of a sign that they're maybe not someone that we want to be in his close relationship with.

**Blake:** Yeah. Like we don't have to end the relationship, but we can know and hold like, Oh, I probably won't be as close to this person because they're not going to be safe. They're not really going to champion me coming more into my authentic self and knowing more about myself. Like, oh, I actually don't like when we do this. I don't like going to the movies. It's not fun. I can watch movies at home. I want to talk to you.

But that might be all your other friend wants to do. And that's okay. But can we be kind to say, I don't want to do this, and also hope that they can find a friend that really loves, say, going to the movies with them.

**Stephanie:** We kind of talked about this at the beginning, but it is really scary the idea that we could say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing. I think I spent a long time trying to be the exact right shape of human to offend the least amount of people and please the most amount of people because I felt like, you know, if I did something wrong, or if I said the wrong thing, or did the wrong thing, then I would lose this relationship.

How do we start to break free from that fear? You know, it is really scary to just be our own... Like, I don't know if this will resonate with you, but there was a time in my life, like a long time ago, where I watched a lot of *America's Next Top Model*. And a lot of the poses that they are in are like the most wildly uncomfortable shapes for a human to be in. They're wearing uncomfortable clothes, but they're just contorted in this weird high fashion way where like bodies aren't... that's not how bodies are shaped.

But I feel like I did that a lot to try to make sure that I was safe with the most amount of people. And it's way easier and better and more true to ourselves to just stand up right and just be our own shape. But it is really scary that we might lose some relationships in the process. How do we work through some of that fear?

**Blake:** You might. That's a very real reality you might lose some relationships. That's something I really highlight is when you start doing healing work, if you're coming in for a change, some changes, like, you know, we get really excited about like, "Oh, my gosh, I have less anxiety. This is amazing." And there are also some other changes in places we don't like where it's like, "Oh, this friendship, this relationship that used to fit so seamlessly does not anymore."

So fear of people-pleasing, yeah, you might lose relationships. And that has to be... I love this idea of when the cost of staying this... Like we're ready to change usually when the cost of staying the same is greater than the cost of changing.

And so grief has to be a part of this work. Like even grieving our former younger selves that had to try so hard and contort our bodies so intensely to make people love us. It's like, I wish I could go back and tell my younger self like, "Hey, take a breath. Like notice the people who you don't have to contort with, who you can just relax and be weird and dance with." Because that's so much better. It's so much more fun.

And I think that's like the gift of growing older is there's less.. And I don't know if you've experienced it, but there's so much less pressure to get a seat at the popular kids' table. And it's like, "No, I want to be at a table that feels good where I can wear my soft clothes and we can laugh."

**Stephanie:** Yes. 100%. "Let me sit in the back with just a couple of friends. And yeah, let me wear my soft clothes."

**Blake:** Yes. So much better.

**Stephanie:** It's so much better. It's so much better. But yeah, that makes sense that as we become more ourselves, and as we get better at knowing who we are and what we want and saying those things, and when we stop truly sacrificing ourselves to a bad extent to make other people happy, we might lose some of the people who used to be making happy, but those aren't necessarily the people that we want to be sitting at the table with anyway.

**Blake:** Because it doesn't feel that good to be in relation. Like if you're honest, it doesn't... And that's the thing that's so helpful to come to like it doesn't feel good to people please. Like your body doesn't feel good, the relationship doesn't feel good, you don't feel good after. And so it's like, Where are the people where it tastes good, it feels good, where you're not anxious? Notice those relationships and spend more time there.

**Stephanie:** I really like that. You know, as we are figuring out what we want and saying what we want and actually setting some boundaries, like we've talked about sometimes people aren't going to take it well and that it's really important to have people in our corner that can kind of talk us through it.

But do you have any words that we can borrow for someone asks something of us and we say no? And we say it tactfully, we don't just say no. But if someone comes back to us and is there's a guilt trip that comes back to us or they're angry or something, do you have any words we can borrow for a moment like that?

**Blake:** I really like talking about things. There's the saying in therapy "strike when the iron is cold." So-

**Stephanie:** Tell me more about this.

**Blake:** It's a lot of times in fights we are fighting about the dishes and it's never about the dishes, it's easy to like, say, "We got to talk through this like blah, blah, blah, which is why I'm really against this bad marriage advice. Like, don't go to bed angry. It's like, sometimes please do.

**Stephanie:** Same. Same. Don't talk about it at 9:30 at night or midnight or something like that. It's just gonna get worse. Go to bed mad, fix it in the morning.

**Blake:** When you've had a good night's sleep, then you wake up, that's when the iron is cold. I'm a big fan of not having conversations when people are hot and heavy and in the heat of it. So if there's a sense of like, "How dare you?" It's like, "Hey, I totally get you're angry right now. I don't think it's going to be helpful for us to talk right now. I think when you've cooled down... I really want to work through this and talk to you about this. But when you're coming at me, I can't have a conversation."

So it's kind of like when you're back in your window of tolerance, which is like nerdy nervous system work, meaning you're grounded and rested, then we can have a conversation about it. But even if they're saying, like, "I can't believe that you did this," you can say, like, "I totally get it. And it was really important for me to say this. It's not a sense of me not loving you or not caring about you but I have to say no for me." And if this is the first time, then it's like, "I'm learning how to say no. This is actually something I haven't done a lot."

And even just explaining, like, "I've been in therapy. I've been learning how to do this. I people-please a lot. So it's actually a really big deal for me to have said no to you. And I get that you have hurt feelings. And believe me, it's so cringy that I hurt your feelings. We're just going to have to be in this space where we're both going to have to stretch. That I'm not going to be there for you in the same ways that I have been there for you. It's going to be different. I love you, and it's going to be a little different."

**Stephanie:** I really like that. One of other things that I think has been... You know, we kind of talked about this with schedule, but when we were working together, there was a table in your office. It might still be there. But for some reason, I feel like anytime we talk about what was in my life, or what was on my mind, or what was on my plate, or kind of where I ended and other people began, we'd reference the table. So I picture that.

And so it's like, you know, what's on your plate or something. But the more I think about that ahead of time when it comes to my schedule, when it comes to who matters the most in my life, that's honestly been one of the biggest things that set me free is to... Like the crass way of saying it is like rick my people.

And just by that, I mean it has to be more important to me to take care of my very best friend than taking care of someone I've talked to two times, but wants me to go do this thing or something.



**Blake:** [inaudible 01:03:24] the internet.

**Stephanie:** Like, I need to care more about my parents than I do about my second cousin once removed once that time that I was gonna give to my mom. Just thinking through that. And really kind of weighing it that way that it's like I have a finite amount of time and energy in my day and in my life. And if I give this to you, I can't give it to my mom, or to my daughter or to my sister or something like that.

But just thinking about that ahead of time. And it's changed in different seasons, like what I have space for. But I think the more I can think about it ahead of time, the better I react in moments like that. And it used to be really, really hard for me.

**Blake:** So hard. I'm thinking about Aminatou Sow and Friedman wrote this book, *Big Friendship*, and they talk about this idea of friendship stretching. And even I think about like if your friends are really in relationship with anyone long enough, you're gonna have to stretch in different ways. I'm sure even becoming a mom, your time is different. And so friendships have had to stretch. So I think about that a lot.

And then too I also think about the quality of my presence. Like if I am overworked and I have said yes to too many things, I come home to my husband and he gets a deflated, shallow, shell of a human. And that's not fair to him because he is first on my list. I want to give him the best energy, my best presence, all of that.

That's even something that I think about that is even helpful in this people-pleasing is the reality is like, Who do I want to give my best energy to? Who do I want to give my most wakeful, present, curious self to? Am I giving it to all these people that I'm not actually that close with? Or my giving it to my best friend, to my kids, to my partner, etc., to my parents?

**Stephanie:** I love that. Like for women who are just kind of working through this right now, do you have any last things to think about or practical takeaways or anything else that we can just have in our back pocket as we're trying to, I don't know, figure out who we are and break free from some of this people-pleasing?

**Blake:** I would say you can experiment and find two or three things to say no to this week. Like, if you're listening to this, here's your next challenge. Say no to a few things this week and just experiment with it. You're not going to do it perfectly. It's gonna be real awkward. And just see what it feels like.

Again, I love this idea of experiment because it's not to do it perfectly. You're not going to do it perfectly. But it's just to notice, like, what was that like for me? Did I

make up a big story that it was going to be impossible and it was actually not that bad? Or was it that bad? Yeah, start small. Just start small.

Even just journaling. That's a great way to learn about ourselves. There's often a fear of like, what the heck do I write on the page? And it's like, Excellent question. Go write about it.

**Stephanie:** Write about what to write on a page?

**Blake:** Yes. Start anywhere. Yes, go. Again. It's this idea, this compulsive, like, "Tells me who I'm supposed to be. Tell me who I'm supposed to be? One of the greatest questions I was ever asked even by a therapist was like, "Who are you? Who are you?" Ah, so scared to be asked that, but so great.

**Stephanie:** Yeah. I love that. I love that. I feel like I want to go journal about that. Who are you?

**Blake:** Just some existential journaling.

**Stephanie:** I know. Seriously. Thank you so much for being on today. I am just so grateful for all of your work in my life and for the, I don't know, 100 hours or something like that we spent together, walking through all of this. I'm so glad that you're doing the work that you're doing. We'll link to all of your stuff in the show notes. But really just thank you.

**Blake:** Thank you for having me. And thanks for everybody listening. Just sending so much love and kindness and compassion to our people-pleaser hearts.

**Stephanie:** You're not alone.

**Blake:** No, not at all.

[01:07:58] <music>

**Outro:** Friends, thank you so much for listening to this episode. I cannot tell you how much it means to me to have you here at Girls Night. Don't forget, if you want to hear my mental health story next week and take part in our mental health check-in week, make sure you're on my email list. You can sign up at [Stephaniemaywilson.com](http://Stephaniemaywilson.com).

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The other thing is that it would mean so much to me if you would take a quick second to leave a rating and a review for the podcast. The way that iTunes knows to suggest the podcast to new people is by the ratings and reviews. That's how we invite new friends to our Girls Night.

So would you do me a huge favor and take just a quick second to leave a rating and a quick comment about how you liked the podcast so far? It would help us out so much. And thank you to all of you who have left those beautiful five-star reviews already. It means the world to me.

All right, friends, that's all we have for today, but we'll be back next week with another episode of Girls Night. And this next one is such a good one. I can't wait for you to hear it. I'll see you then.