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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 I don't think I'm telling you anything new when I say that there have been a lot of hard things happening in our country and in our world recently. It seems like bad news hits us. And before we can even take a breath or process what just happened, it hits us again.

And if I'm honest, this has been weighing really, really, really heavily on my mind and on my heart lately. It's something my family and my friends and I have been talking about a lot. We've all just been feeling heavy and tired and at times even a little bit hopeless about the state of things.

So I know you may be wondering what I'm referring to. I want to say I don't have a specific event in mind from this week's headlines. I'm actually recording this two weeks in advance. So I have no clue what's happening in the news on the day that this comes out. But it's just that so much has happened in the last few months and the last few years, I've been feeling just the weight of it overall.

And I figure that if I'm feeling this way, and if my friends and family are feeling this way, that you might be feeling this way too. And that's why I'm really excited about today's episode.

When I'm trying to process the bad news in the world, I always find myself thinking back to one of our Girls Night episodes. It's the conversation I had with Danielle Coke back in Season 13 of the podcast. Dani has a way of taking really important and really complex issues and making them more digestible and helping us figure out what to do with them.

So today, I'm going to be actually re-sharing the conversation I had with her because I have a feeling we could all use these reminders today. Here are just a few of the things I asked Dani in this episode.

I asked her: when the whole world feels like one big ball of bad news, how do we process this? How do we care about the people who are hurting in the world without getting so overwhelmed by the hurt in the world that we just shut down?

I asked her, how do we identify the cause or the mission that's our thing? How do we figure out where and how we can help and actually make a difference?

And then once we figure out what our mission is, what do we do with everything else? When something crazy or hard or heartbreaking happens in the world, how do we process it? How do we both care and help without getting ourselves so spread out that we lose focus on the thing that we can actually do something about?

And then I asked her, how do you figure out what to say when you should speak out in how to do it? And then I asked her how to get through the fear that you're going to say the wrong thing? Because I don't know about anyone else, but I majorly have that fear.

Friends, if you're feeling discouraged by all the bad news and tragic events happening in our world, I'm right there with you. But there is hope. This episode is seriously life-giving and has practical advice on how we can process our feelings and make a difference in our world and our community today. I can't wait to share it with you.

But before we dive in, another thing that has made a huge difference for me when processing the big things happening in our world is talking with my counselor. If you're interested in finding a counselor yourself, I have a resource that 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 is truly the easiest and most affordable way I've ever found to find a faith-based counselor.

You may have heard me talk about people counseling before. But just in case you haven't, I wanted to tell you four quick reasons why I love them so much.

The first is that it's easy to get started. All you have to do is go to their website, fill out a quick 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 schedule. Once you're connected to a therapist, you can start communicating with them in less than 24

hours. You can also log into your account at any time and send a message to your therapist. And you'll get timely and thoughtful responses back.

You can also schedule weekly video or phone sessions. And the best part is you can do it all virtually. No commute, no awkward waiting room time, or less time away from work. You can even do your sessions in your PJs.

The third reason 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 really connect with. And oftentimes we don't find the right person on our first try. So then we're stuck going through the whole process of breaking up with our counselor, which is awkward and then starting from scratch to find a new one.

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 make it super easy to find the best fit possible.

And then the fourth reason is that it's easier to fit into your budget. While I love traditional in-person counseling, it can cost more than \$100 per session, which just makes it a total no go for so many of us. But Faithful Counseling is significantly less expensive, and they have financial aid available. And if you sign up through this special Girls Night link they gave me, you can get 10% off your first month.

If therapy is something you've been considering or something you think might be helpful for you right now, head over to Stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling for all the info, and for 10% off your first month. Again, that's Stephaniemaywilson.com/counseling and all the information is there. You can also get 10% off your first month of counseling there too.

Okay, without any further ado, here is my conversation with Dani.

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Stephanie: All right, friends, I am seriously so excited about who we have on the show today. I'm sitting here with my new friend Danielle Coke, who we called Dani—I asked, she said we can call her Dani—of Oh Happy Dani. I feel like you guys probably already follow her. I hope you do. If not, you're going to be the end of this. And that's the end of that.

Dani, thanks for being on Girls Night.

Danielle: I'm so excited to be here and talk with you. I was just telling you, everyone didn't get to hear, but I've been a longtime Girls Nights fan, everyone. So I'm where I'm supposed to be right now.

Stephanie: This was supposed to happen. Okay, this is amazing. Dani, for girls who don't know you yet, can you tell us who you are, what you do, and a fun fact.

Danielle: Yes. So my name is Danielle Coke, Coke like the drink. Yeah, I go by Dani. I'm from Atlanta, Georgia. I was originally from Brooklyn, New York, and moved to Georgia when I was very young. But I've always been into art and creativity and graphic design.

Going through school, I took an art class, but my art teacher was kind of discouraging, so I didn't really think I could pursue it as a career. So I was like, "Oh, what sounds just as fun or just close to it?" And then I thought, "Oh, event planning. Like I couldn't plan parties for my whole life. I'll do that."

I went to college and majored in hospitality and event planning, and got a job in a planning agency. It was there that my passion for justice really ramped up because of, you know, a series of situations that I found myself into where being the only black person in a predominantly white space, that was the norm for me, but also, just having a lot of instances where I felt as though me as a whole person wasn't always accepted and issues related to race, related to justice even in the workplace.

There was a moment where I sat down with my boss, and I was like, "Hey, I think we should value this a lot more." And he was like, "You know, this is not what I'm passionate about. So I don't see us talking about diversity, equity, inclusion, any of those things. I'm just not passionate about it."

That was really the jumping-off point for me to say, "You know what, this is a space that I don't thrive in. I'm going to do my own thing. I'm going to quit my job. I'm going to start my own design agency. And I'm going to partner alongside justice oriented organizations who might need the additional social media help."

All that happened late 2019. I always have this design hobby, as you know, so I got an iPad for Christmas that year, and I was like, "Oh, I'm gonna learn illustration, it's gonna be so fun." So I would digitally illustrate so many things.

And in 2020, that's when I started to use illustration to talk about the harder justice, race-related issues and topics. And I started posting those on Instagram. During that year, I gained a platform of almost half a million people. And it's still very odd and overwhelming, but it's been super cool to see how God used all of that, all the experiences that I went through that led up to that moment of, "Hey, you can use

what you're given and the talents I've given you to combine it with your passions and live a life that's pursuing what's on your heart." And so yeah.

Stephanie: That is wild to me that that was so recent because the impacts that you've had in the last, I guess, year and a half then or you know, almost two years. For women who don't... I mean, you said half a million people on Instagram, which is very true. I'm gonna put you on the spot for a second. Just brag a little bit. Where has your work been featured? What are some of the cool things that have happened in the last... I just want girls to understand how big this has gotten.

Danielle: Oh, yeah. So, definitely wild. I was on the Today show for a moment. I partnered with Instagram to do a couple of fundraising initiatives.

Stephanie: Like actual Instagram. Not her Instagram. Actual Instagram. Yeah, okay.

Danielle: Yeah, actual Instagram. I also got to do some awesome collaboration with Adobe who literally like make all the software that I do my art on. So that was wild. Jenna Fischer from The Office, we've done an Instagram Live together just talking about justice.

Stephanie: Oh my gosh.

Danielle: This is wild. How do you explain it? I don't know.

Stephanie: I feel like I would pee my pants if I got to talk to Jenna Fischer.

Danielle: Listen, I was like, "Girl, are you sure? All I do is draw?"

Stephanie: And she's like, "Yes, the work you're doing is really, really important." Oh my gosh. What are some of the things that you've made that have been the most popular? Like, what are some of your words or phrases or images? It's kind of hard to show on a podcast, but just give us an idea of couple of the things you've made.

Danielle: Yes. So I have a lot of pieces that are my personal favorite, but it's so cool to see which ones ended up getting the most attention. It's definitely the ones that I felt like were the most simple.

I have one that says, "Until you fix it in your heart and address it in your home, nothing changes in the world." A very simple illustration. That one went massively viral, which was very shocking to me, but I appreciated it.

Another piece, I call it worthy. It's an illustration of just arms from people, bunch of different ethnicities all on a pink background, and just as "worthy" on each arm.

Again, very, very simple, but was very easy to grasp and resonated with a lot of people, which I thought was great.

And then the last couple of the other ones, "It shouldn't have to happen to you for it to matter to you." I guess these punchy phrases that people feel like they can take and adapt in their everyday lives are the ones that resonate the most, which is super cool. I think that's great. So those are just a couple.

Stephanie: I totally didn't tell you I was gonna ask about this. But what was last summer like for you? Doing the work that you do with your art, my guess is that a lot of these pieces went viral during all of the protests and... I felt like last summer was such an important time in race relations in the US like after George Floyd was murdered. What did last summer look like for you on the back end?

Danielle: Yeah, definitely. It was one of the hardest seasons of my life. And I think the name Oh Happy Dani can probably fool people. A lot of times they think like maybe I just approached this work with just joy all the time. And while I do draw from joy, it's not something that always manifests while I'm doing this work.

So I actually started doing this art way before summer happened. So like January of that year. And so once we got to summer, I had an audience of about 10k. To me, that was massively still quite overwhelming, especially once those tragedies started happening: George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor. Again, nothing new to us, but something that took center stage because the magnitude of it can no longer be pushed aside.

Stephanie: Right.

Danielle: It was a very weird thing trying to balance because there's the grief of witnessing this stuff happening and affecting my own community very directly, and me trying to process through that. And then trying to take that information and translate it in a digestible and easy-to-understand illustration, they seem simple. But the funnel, the process of getting all that information, picking out what thought I want to communicate that I feel like is speaking to the heart of the moment as much as possible, and then disseminating that information into a graphic while not trying to take away from the weight and importance of the conversation is hard. Man!

I remember I even did three days in a row of Instagram lives just talking about the impact of race as it relates to God, each other in our own internal work. And I remember day three, like after I finished the last Instagram Live, I hung up, my best friend and her husband immediately called me, both of whom are white. They both called me and I broke down in tears. I was sobbing. I was like, "Y'all, that's the hardest thing I've ever done in my life."

Because, you know, this isn't just an educational moment. This isn't a "let's pop in and talk about this real quick. It's life." And to be able to figure out that balance... Even today I do not get it perfect, but yeah, it was definitely a challenge. And I had a lot of burnout. I had a lot of moments where I was like, "Take it all away."

When people pray and beg for platforms, I'm like, "Y'all don't know what you're asking for." And I know Stephanie you can relate. It is not all sunshine and rainbows and popularity like people seem to think.

Stephanie: Yeah, yeah. When everyone's listening to you all of a sudden, there's just the pressure. I mean, I don't feel any... Like it's not even on the same planet to where I feel like you are.

Danielle: I know you get it.

Stephanie: Yeah. Especially, you know, you started... You were so new at this. You had just started to kind of, you know, own this identity of like, "I'm an artist. I'm an advocate for justice and I'm an artist and I'm putting these things together."

And you start putting them out into the world and then, you know, the world falls apart, or actually the world notices that the world had already fallen apart. And everyone's listening to you and looking to you to say, like, "What do we do about this?" or "What do you have to say about this?" And that is just... And then all of your own personal feelings and grief and dealing... the whole thing is just... it's a lot.

Danielle: It's a lot. You described it.

Stephanie: There's so many questions I want to ask you, and they all feel really personal to me. I feel pretty confident speaking for our Girls Night community, too. So I just want to hear how you process some of these things. So I have a whole list of questions. I want to make sure I read it so that I don't miss anything if that's okay.

Danielle: Yeah, of course.

Stephanie: So, there is so much going on in the world right now, surprise, and I have a feeling I'm not alone in feeling totally overwhelmed by it. I feel like I should care about all of it, and I do care about all of it, but it's always so much sometimes that I feel like I want to hide from all of it. But then I feel so guilty for hiding because the people who are directly impacted by whatever the thing is can't hide.

But then also, if we take in all of the information there is to take in about every single heartbreaking thing that happens on any given day in the world, at some point we find ourselves with empathy—empathy fatigue. Dani, does this happen to you? How do you navigate this in your own life just as Dani but also with the weight of all the work you do as well?

Danielle: The question of the year, honestly, in my opinion, is how in the world am I supposed to care about all of this at the same time? You know, I don't think that caring about it is actually the problem. And that's not what you said, but I like to lead with this because I think most of us, if not all of us, care automatically to a certain extent. We're human beings, we're all living on the planet, and no one wants to see someone else going through anything.

So like you communicated, the difficulty becomes, okay, how do I balance it all? How am I supposed to do all of this? As I still every single day try to figure this out, I have landed, for my own sanity and for the way that I process through all this, is to say, "You know, I'm not supposed to hold it all. I'm not supposed to be able to hold it all."

I did a graphic, where it had somebody's hand that was stretched out, and then there were leaves falling. And the person was able to catch some of the leaves but some of the leaves were also like falling off their hands slipping through their fingers.

And I think that's a really good example of, hey, there are so many issues of the day, it's literally impossible to hold them all in your hand. Some will inevitably slip through your grasp. But there are things that can be held. And I think that that's the most important thing to remember.

For example, we can start up very basic. Like your family, your neighbor, the issues that you are able to care about, and that you're already automatically passionate about, those are things you can hold in your own hand, right?

And so, when you don't know what else to do, I think that's super important to remember, like, "Man, there's a lot going on in the world. But first and foremost, I have a responsibility to take care of myself, my mental and emotional health, assessing my capacity and seeing, okay, before I try to get all hands on deck and see all the things that can do, what do I have space for? Do I have room in my hand for everything or do I need to decide what I have room in my hand for?" So that's a personal assessment.

And then looking at your relationships, who are the people that are immediately around you? Whether it's your family. Like, how can I love on my family more in

this season when I'm seeing all that's going on? I know myself, it's hard for me, it must be hard for them? How can I lean on community in this time, right?

And then the issues that you yourself are passionate about might not always directly correlate with the issue that's on the forefront or the issue of the day. But I think it's super neat to take what you are already passionate about and look at that and say, "Okay, this is the way I'm choosing to give back. This is the way I'm choosing to use my talents and gifts to pour into this. But also, what in the larger picture can I latch on to if it's only just one thing?"

So let's say in one day you hear about an earthquake in this country, civil unrest in this country, and then something going on in your own backyard, right? If what's going on in your own backyard is lining up with what you feel like serving, you can find a way to really dive in and say, "I'm going to focus and direct as much of my attention as I can to helping here."

But if you do have the capacity to donate \$10 to this relief or to read an article about this civil unrest and at least try to wrap your mind around a little bit more, I believe that you're taking steps in the right direction too and you're saying, "I can't solve everything, but I do have a responsibility to do what I can with what I have, and to stay alert and aware to as much as I'm able." And so I hope that that serves as a good, helping like starting place.

Stephanie: Yes. I just took a deep breath. I was in counseling the other day and I was asking about this. Boundaries is something that I've been learning a lot about for the last, I don't know, like decade. And trying to figure out like what's mine to hold and what's not mine? That's something that I have a hard time with.

I want to be a helper, I want to support people. And it's hard when my needs kind of rise to the surface at the same time as someone in my family's needs, and then a friend and then, you know, I get an email from someone who could really use some help right now and then also my neighbor. And it's like, I don't know what to do in that situation.

I was feeling particularly heavy, you know, reading the ne... There's so... I love that you said issue of the day. There really is. Something really brutal is happening like every single day in different corners of the world, and to different communities and in our backyards, and in our front yards. And it's just happening everywhere. And I was feeling particularly like just worn down by all of it.

And I asked my counselor, like what am I supposed to do about this? You know, what am I supposed to do about these people who are, you know, suffering the aftermath of an earthquake, or truly whatever it is that day? And I felt like this

personal burden to be able to fix it, even though whatever the thing was, was happening all the way across the world.

And she told me something that, honestly, was news to me. She was like, "Stephanie, you may not be able to fix what's happened in this country by yourself?" And I'm like, "Okay, obvious, yes." But it wasn't obvious to me. Truly, I didn't... I don't know.

I think all these things are coming into our heads. You know, you talked about a funnel earlier. It's like, there's so much going in the top of the funnel and it's really hard to know what to do about it.

And I think that, you know, we don't know what's ours and what's not and what we actually can do something about and what we can't. So it honestly was news to me that it's not my job to fix the whole world. Thank God it's not my job because I'd be doing a horrible job of it, and I'm totally not equipped to do it. And one person can't do everything. I know that in my head, but I don't know that I totally knew that in my heart.

So what she did was she drew a pyramid for me. And she said, "You know, the top of your pyramid is like your family, it's your kids, it's your husband. This is the top of your pyramid." And then it trickles down a little bit from there. But she's like, "These are the things you're actually responsible for."

And she said something really similar. She's like, "If you can do something to help things that are outside of your pyramid, do. But this pyramid is your responsibility. And not everything can be your responsibility." And I don't know if maybe I'm the only person that was feeling that way, but I really needed to hear that. And so I don't know, I feel like that's kind of been the message of the day for me.

Danielle: And that's a good reminder to, you know, remember and focus on you only can carry but so much, right? And I think also what the challenge was of 2020 was saying, maybe there's a couple things that need to be added to our own personal pyramids. Not something that's outside of our capacity, but stuff we know we got a little wiggle room in there for a couple other things. That's a challenge too.

Is it part of my responsibility to say, Okay, I can add a category right here for community outreach in my own community, like mutual aid. You know, those things where communities come together and just help each other? Like there's an organization here in Atlanta where literally they put free fridges up around the city, and a business partners with that fridge to keep it running, to keep it clean, and the community just brings food. And if you need food, you come take it.

Stephanie: That is so cool.

Danielle: I added that to my pyramid so quick. I was like, "Ah, yes!"

Stephanie: Yes.

Danielle: Hunger and malnutrition is still a leading cause of death in the world. Look at me being able to, once a week, however often I can, put some meals together. And I hit up a fridge down the street. That's something that can be added. And that's something that can, you know, relate to your capacity in a way. So I just love that. I love that idea.

Stephanie: That's so good. I love that. And yeah, I think you're exactly right. Like 2020 was a time to reevaluate our pyramids and be like, "I think in some ways we've been a little like... Yeah, there's some wiggle room here that needs to go to some things that like haven't been on here before."

Danielle: Right. Yeah.

Stephanie: So knowing that, apparently, we can't be all things to all people, and if you're a jack of all trades, you're a master of none, how did you identify...? And you talked about it a little bit. But I just love to hear like anything else that you feel comfortable sharing. Like how did you identify this is my thing, this is what I care about, and this is where I'm going to pour my time and my heart and my money and my effort and my talents, this is my thing? How did you get there?

Danielle: I love that we're able to circle back to this topic because I briefly mentioned it, but I really wanted to dive in. I love to talk about the idea of purpose-fueled progress. It's something that's helped me identify what I should be doing right now. And it also helps me to alleviate the pressure of feeling like I have to have my whole life's purpose figured out right now as well.

So I hope in sharing it that it's helpful for other people who struggle with this. So there is a Japanese ideology that talks about how your true purpose in life is at the intersection of all of these things, right? So I learned about it in college. And looking at it, I felt as though I wanted to simplify it a bit, to adapt to my own life, and to help me find what my center was.

So I thought about, you know, my faith, what I'm passionate about, the skills I have, and I said, "You know what? I am going to think about what my present purpose is?" I just took the big scary purpose word and put the word present in front of it, and said, "If I can't figure out what I'm supposed to devote the rest of my life to, I can say, okay, my present purpose is in the middle at the intersection of a passion

that I have, whether it's a cause or people group, my skills, what I'm good at naturally, plus what I'm able to pick up and learn and get my gifts, and then the third circle was a perceived need that I see in the world.

So I said, my present purpose will be at the intersection of my passions, my skills, and a perceived need I see in the world. And I said, "Okay, I can identify this today." This isn't some big, scary ideology that I have to spend the rest of my life trying to figure out. Present purpose, I can analyze now.

So for me, I thought about, "Okay, this is so much more approachable, these three little circles." So I'm passionate about justice 100%, racial reconciliation, equity, inclusion. And I'm also passionate about my faith. So those things lived in that circle.

And the second circle is my skills. I said, "I am skilled at art and graphic design, and that's also what I love to do." So I put that in that circle.

And then the third one, a perceived need in the world. In 2020, I realized that there was a need for information related to race injustice to be disseminated in a way that was approachable for people who otherwise wouldn't have known how to engage with the conversation, you know? And so I was like, "Oh, okay, that helps."

So in the middle of that, I was like, "Okay, so what can I do today that taps on all of these things?" So for me it was like, "Okay, I can use illustration to talk about justice and race and things that I'm passionate about and fill that need for digestible information related to it."

That's how I decided. And the freedom and that is that next year it can look different. My passions can grow. I mean, my skills can also sharpen. I can find a new skill. I like talking now. Like getting to speak in front of group, that's a fun thing for me now.

So in the season of my life that whole thing can shift. But what I think is cool is, after a while of doing this, you start to realize and see that you have been living your purpose all along. And it's no longer this big, scary thing, you have to try to investigate and uncover and unpack, but it's just something that in living according to what you have today, you're already accomplishing and living out your purpose. And I just thought that that was so freeing for me. So that's how I found what I want to do right now.

Stephanie: I feel like, everyone just sit for a second, take a deep breath. It's so good. It's so good. I love that you call it present purpose instead of like... I don't know, who created the idea of like a five-year plan or something? Because I think that there's

like four people in the world that's helpful for and everyone else is like I'm dying under this pressure. And then add ideas of like legacy or impact or something to it and you're like, "I have no idea."

But I love that. It's like what cause in the world or what... Lots of people are struggling right now. What group of people are you like, "I got to do something about that?" And then what are they struggling with? And then what do you have to give?

I would be a horrible doctor or nurse. I'm kind of freaked out by body stuff. So never in a million years is that going to be a thing where I'm like, "Well, I'm going to..." Or I'm a terrible scientist. So helping, you know, develop medical treatments or vaccines or something... you don't want me to do that. But there are other things that I can be good at. I don't know if that's super helpful.

Danielle: It helps me to think also like putting myself in the shoes of someone else who might not be an artist. You can literally apply this to anything. I like to give the example of if you're a writer. I know there's a lot of talented writers that are probably listening to this right now.

And it's like, okay, let's say you're passionate about ending human trafficking and you have the skill of writing and you see a need, maybe you follow an organization who was looking for contributing writers to volunteer their time to write articles to, you know, raise awareness about a certain thing, or direct funds to a certain organization. Look at you. You have found a way to fulfill your present purpose just in that moment of connecting all those dots. So I want to give an example to show it don't have to look like me, you know?

Stephanie: Yeah. Yeah.

Danielle: It could be anything you've got and anything you're passionate about. So I will always want to give that example, so people can be like, "Oh, okay," you know?

Stephanie: Handful years ago, I did a yearlong mission trip. And one of the countries I ended up in was the country of Moldova. And it's this tiny little country that most people hadn't heard of, or haven't heard of, I hadn't heard of it. It's in Eastern Europe.

I had this really clear idea of what I thought I was going to be doing as I was traveling around the world, and what I thought would be helpful. And then I arrived at this organization that was actually fighting human trafficking. There's a lot of human trafficking that happens out of Moldova.

I don't know what I thought I was gonna be doing that it was going to be helpful, but what I ended up doing was making a fundraising video for them. That's what I studied in college. I studied broadcast journalism. And the last thing in the world I thought I was going to do was do the thing I'd been doing at home, you know, in Eastern Europe. But that was the thing that they needed because they didn't have those skills, and I did. Like that's what I went to school for.

And really that's a place where they were getting stuck. They needed help fundraising, and I could help them do it by putting together a video for them. So I love that example. There are lots of organizations around the world that could do more great work if they had your skill to help spread the word, whatever that looks like.

Danielle: Exactly, yes.

Stephanie: Okay. So we've talked about how to figure out what your thing is, or what your thing is today. But we know that there's always something happening in a different part of the world, or to a different group of people or different person that doesn't necessarily fit in that category that you can do something about or that you know that you should do something about.

So how do you personally process that? Like when something crazy or hard or heartbreaking happens in the world, how do you engage with that thing without taking it on to the point where you're like, I don't know, paralyzed by it-

Danielle: Oh, yeah.

Stephanie: ...or without losing focus on the other thing that is your thing? Does that make sense?

Danielle: Right, yes. Okay. So that's a great question. So normally when things are... they're out of your reach, for me personally, I always have noticed that when these things are happening, they're usually asking for a couple of the same things. They're asking for donations, awareness, or just engaging with the content in some way that they're putting out.

So, for me, I'm like, "Okay, let me assess what's going on." I can't pick every issue to post about, but what can I share to my story that I've vetted, that I've looked at, that I've seen and said, "Okay, I don't exactly know if I have the capacity to take this on fully, but maybe there's someone in my audience who does. Let me share this to my story."

Or, honestly, if I can track down a donation or organization that is accepting donations that I know is on the ground doing that work in that community, and I have the capacity to donate, I can do that, too. Normally, they're asking for donations and to spread awareness, because those are the two things that they need the most. It's not just to say, like, "Hey, do this."

So I think that could take some pressure off as well because some of us feel like we got to march on over, fly to the country, and spend two years on the ground. And it's like if I'm not doing that, what I'm doing doesn't matter. And it's like, Well, what are they actually asking for? Because truth be told, did they ask you to come? Or did they ask for \$10? You know what I mean? You know what I mean? I'm just being honest. I'm being honest. You know, I think it helps.

Stephanie: It helps so much. It helps so much. I don't know. You guys are gonna have to send me like... I don't know. Let me know if I'm the only person who feels like, "I should get on the plane and I should go and help." But it's like I don't speak your language, I'm not like... That is a really, really needed reminder. I have \$10. I really do. I can totally give \$10.

Danielle: Yeah, yeah, exactly. And that's what they're asking for. And truth be told, all jokes aside, what you're saying is a real thing. People get analysis paralysis because they're like, "I want to do all these things and I end up doing nothing."

I made a piece the other day that was talking about bridging the gap between good intentions and good work. It's like I had good intentions as this one area over here and then good work on the other, and there was a bridge. And I talked about how each step in the bridge was a different thing you should consider when trying to get unstuck.

One thing that I had said was, remember that you're not perfect and you're not a superhero either. Because not remembering that can get you stuck, and you might not end up actually doing something because you feel like you can't fly in and save the whole day. You know what I mean?

So remembering that. Remembering that you can only make commitments that are relative to your capacity. And not to let comparison, or fear, or analysis paralysis hold you back from doing what you actually can do. Because at the end of the day, you can let all that get you stuck and never do anything or you can march across that bridge and put \$10 on a donation website and you have accomplished so much, you know?

And that resource, to be honest, is one of the most important. Money, like we need it, they need it. So whatever that looks like for you, whether it's that, whether it's

spreading awareness or just becoming more knowledgeable about what's going on, that speaks volumes as well to the communities in need for sure.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. I think this has become more of a... I don't know. I think this has been a thing for several years now. When something happens, we feel like we're supposed to say something publicly. And I think that's all of us. It's like if you are on social media, when something happens, everyone posts and everyone has something really deep and thoughtful and brilliant to say. And it's like, "Where's your post? Because if you don't post it means you don't care."

So as someone who is a warrior for justice, honestly, and someone who has a big platform, how do you process things externally? So it's like you have, you know, everything that is in your wheelhouse, but then everything else that isn't... I actually saw you repost something from Austin Channing Brown recently about people's expectations of advocates, and what people expect you to say or do when a piece of the world falls down. So when another piece falls down, how do you respond externally?

Danielle: An amazing, amazing question. That has been one of the biggest struggles for me on this platform. I had to come to the realization of a couple things. One thing being... I think Austin Channing Brown mentioned this in the post that I shared. But we're literally a team. Can we back up and start there?

The human race, all of us, we are a team. We are actually doing this thing together. We cannot expect even people who dedicate their whole lives to this, which is another point that I'm gonna put to the side because people really be trying me as if I don't dedicate my whole life to this? It's like, y'all, please, please. But I'm putting that aside.

We cannot expect to be able to take in, process, and disseminate information related to everything that is happening around the world. Me personally, the reason that I have clung to racial justice in amplifying black voices and the voices of people of color is because I'm a black woman living in America, a society that is really affected by that. And it's in my wheelhouse because I'm a black woman.

So I'm able to bring my life experience, the things that I've studied, you know, what I'm equipped to discuss, and bring my full self. And that's where the content comes from. That's where the thoughts and the deep opinions come from.

But this country in another continent that is war-torn and people are dying and there's just so much going on, yes, you can acknowledge that is horrible, that is absolutely horrible. But what I cannot do is try to take on that information that I have no context for, disseminate it into an infographic that could be just riddled

with incorrect information and cause harm, and then have that information be widely spread. I've actually done a disservice to that movement, because I didn't know what in the world I was talking about. The weight of that is much heavier to bear than the weight of a few people criticizing me for not caring enough. You know what I mean?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Danielle: So I'm willing to take that L of not creating this post on your timeline and rest in the fact that, one, I'm doing what I can either raising awareness or making donations to people on the ground providing relief. As I said, that's normally a behind-the-scenes thing that I'm not going to post about that I'm doing.

But then secondly, I know that I'm taking the responsibility to learn about this myself as much as I'm able while still carrying what's mine to carry. And if that means that I don't have the capacity to learn at all years worth of conflict and all of that and disseminate it for something easy for you to share, I hope that means that the team that I'm a part of, the global pursuit of justice, someone else on this team has that capacity, has that clarity, can disseminate that information, and you can learn from them. But know that we're all working together.

And if we all knew everything and could talk about everything and explain everything, we would not need each other. I'm simply a puzzle piece in the broader puzzle, and I can't bend and try to fit into other pieces in spaces because you want me to, you know?

Stephanie: Yes! Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Danielle: Listen, and it's not to say that we don't have to do the uncomfortable thing sometimes of speaking up about something. But it's my hope that we don't let the pressure of people wanting that from us, push us into performative activism and end up doing more hurt than good. You know what I mean?

I'd much rather we say like, You know what? They're right. I wonder... Maybe they're right, I should say, because they're not always right. Maybe they're right in that, mm, why am I not posting anything about this particular thing? Should I do some internal assessment and see if I have any, you know, work I need to do here? "Cool, I'll do the work," or "Cool, that's not mine to carry right now with the platform that I have and the voice that I have because I am using that time to put towards this passionate thing that I am doing."

And so if you don't have that thing, that part of the world that you're trying to help, and you post about nothing related to anything in humanity and justice, I would say

that might be a call to take a personal assessment and say like, What am I carrying? You know?

Stephanie: Yeah, yes.

Danielle: There's a balance for sure.

Stephanie: Yeah. Do you ever worry about saying the wrong thing?

Danielle: Yes, absolutely. One thing that we talked about, especially in 2020, was like, "Don't let the fear of getting it wrong hold you back because you will get it wrong." And it's like, "Yeah, but that doesn't mean I want to get it wrong." You know what I mean?

I have this quote where I was always saying "perfection is not a prerequisite to participation." Like you don't have to have it all together to be a part of working towards the greater good. But again, with a platform, you have to be careful, you have to be clear, and you have to be calculated. Oh, that sounds like I just made up a whole three-step.

Stephanie: Yeah, that's lucky you alliteration.

Danielle: I love alliteration.

Stephanie: That's so good.

Danielle: But yeah, I can't afford to put something out there that's wrong. So I will sit with information, whatever I'm going to say, and I will comb it over. I'll make sure that if I research anything, I can legitimize that source. I can make sure that what I'm saying is either bounce founded on like a biblical truth, or a factual, justice-related truth, that I have other people who have done the work before me whose work that I can reference who have gone before me and have already had these conversations.

Like I do my absolute best to vet it before it goes out to the public, because trying to reverse that harm caused can take so much more time. So much more time. And you can look around and see how people who got it wrong who were simply careless, you know, or who simply didn't take the time to consider to weigh your words.

And that might mean that you don't move according to other people's timelines. Listen after the insurrection at the United States Capitol in January, I had a minute where I was trying to get myself together. And everyone was talking about it, and I'm like, "I'm gonna call my mom."

So we've got to know how to take that time to assess how to be careful and clear with our content or whatever we're posting or saying, just so we know, like, when the blowback comes, if it comes, you know that it's not because you were wrong or inaccurate, but it's just there may be people who disagree with you. And that's something different that we have to be able to and be ready to engage with. But at the end of the day, I might get it wrong, but I'm going to try my absolute best to not do that, because I'm going to be careful and clear.

Stephanie: I love everything you just said. I don't know if you guys know this. I don't know if I've shared this on the show before. But I think one of my deep fears in life is like saying the wrong thing. I mean, I've spent a lot of time working to be this way less, but I try to weigh my words really carefully. I don't want to say the wrong thing.

So in a time where like... I don't know, I think that fear in me has been turned up to like an 11 in the last year and, you know, posting on social media. This is something that I have totally struggled with. But I think that's how I feel whenever something happens in the world is like I just want to call my mom or take a nap or journal about it or pray about it or something. Like, I'm not ready to post online about it, because I'm still taking in this massive thing. I don't digest that quickly.

Anyway, I love that you said that. There's this huge thing that's happening right now. I just need to process for a second. I'm not ready to talk yet.

Danielle: And that's a really great point too because it reminded me of the idea that there's two other options, even considering like... Let's say you're not ready to post yet and you're still trying to figure it out. That is great. You may end up not posting.

But there's also the possibility that maybe this is a season where you amplify a trusted voice. Like this topic, I don't know, but this person I trust wholeheartedly, this platform is vetted, and this person's heart is just pure. So I know that their viewpoint on this may be more worth listening to than my own. I can amplify that if I feel so inclined. That's always an option.

And then there's also the option of sharing your process. I have a friend who posted recently, and she was like, "I see that this thing is happening and I literally don't know what to say or do about it. I just want you guys to know that I am doing my best to learn. I hope that you all are trying to do the same, because I just don't know.

If you feel comfortable enough or transparent enough for your audience to do that, that's also an option. Like, "Hey, y'all, I don't know, but I want you to know that I care about it. I don't know." You know?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Danielle: So I think yeah, just remembering, at the end of the day, their opinion will be their opinion regardless of what you say or do not say do or do not do. What you have to have is the peace within to say, "I know that offline I'm doing the work," or I know that what's mine to carry, this does not fall under right now. But that doesn't mean I don't care. And I know that I'm doing what I can with what I have." And I owe that to myself, and I don't owe anything else to anyone beyond what I have the capacity to do myself. That's really, really important. Because we'd be crippling ourselves with that, like, for real.

Stephanie: I know we're talking about this from the perspective of of people who share on Instagram as part of their job. But I know that everyone is feeling this. Everyone is feeling this because we all have this platform to speak from now. Like if you have social media, you're standing on a platform, you have a megaphone. And it is yeah, really powerful and beautiful and there's so much good that can happen. But it's also like, "what do I do with this?" is I feel like something we're all asking. And so anyway, I really appreciate everything. I really love getting to hear some of the thoughts that you work through behind the scenes.

One of the things that you say that I love that you say is, "It shouldn't have to happen to you to matter to you." Can you talk us through what a cycle of inaction looks like and what a cycle of action looks like? I'm like referencing some of your art. I'm like drawing it in the air. So we can link to that. But it'll make sense when you explain it.

Danielle: Yes, definitely. "It shouldn't have to happen to you for it to matter to you" came after a season where we were all so invested in trying to listen to this discussion about race and trying to understand different perspectives and viewpoints. And then at the same time, again, like we've been talking about this whole time, other things were happening outside of us.

And I think what I wanted to move people away from was the idea that you simply don't care when it's not happening in your own backyard. So that's the message I wanted to communicate with that. But with the cycle of inaction... It's funny we talked about the insurrection earlier. That was the piece that I made following that after I had some time to be like, "What is happening. Let me call my mother."

One thing that I was observing is that after every tragedy or huge thing that went down that was just hard, it seemed as though people would just be so shocked and so confused. Like, "how in the world?" because this happened.

And part of me was always like, Well, we know that we live in a fallen and broken world, and we also know that we live in a country that's still trying to work on what it looks like to be equitable and to be just. So we know that's going to happen. It's going to be shocking every time.

And then I noticed that that shock would lead to a very emotional response. Like people will be like, "Oh, I can't believe it. I'm so upset." And they post these super dramatic, or they'd have these conversations amongst themselves and it would just be so charged with emotion, which is fine and important, unless it leads to performative activism, unless it causes you to do things without really doing anything.

And when it comes to performative activism, I always like to say like, it's not the act itself, it's the intent behind it. I feel like what I could do can be labeled as performative activism. You know, anything can be. But I think what makes it performative is the intent behind it.

Am I posting this because I really believe that I'm making a difference? Or am I doing this action because I really believe I'm making a difference or is it going to make me look like I'm making a difference to everyone who sees me? And so I think that's the determining factor, for sure, is intent.

But anyway, yeah, performative activism starts happening, and then that burns us out because it's not sustainable, it's not being driven by an actual desire to make a change, it's being driven by performance and how you look like to other people.

So that causes you to feel guilty and feel fatigued, and you're like, "Oh, I'm not doing anything. I just can't get it right." So it's like, "Well, if I can't do this, then I just won't do anything." And so you become inactive, right? And you're passive now. And that can lead to apathy and then you're helping no one, and you actually have no desire to help anyone because it just exhausted and burnt you out so much.

That is the cycle that I saw happening, because after every tragic thing, it felt like we were back to apathy, and people just no longer cared or talked about it. Not everyone, but some.

Stephanie: Yeah.

Danielle: So I said, if I could rewrite this cycle, I would say, you know, when injustice happens, it would be my desire that we're not overtaken by shock and confusion as if the fruit of oppression and the fruit of injustice is surprising. Because it's not.

Rather, our emotional response should be marked by empathy and compassion. Instead of shock, can we lead with, okay, who's the affected community and how can we cover them in love and compassion? You know what I mean?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Danielle: And then, when we do that, we're not being performative. We're actually rejecting performative activism and now we're leaning into the real and vigorous work of holding space for each other, and really leaning in and being connected.

That doesn't mean that guilt and fatigue, like I mentioned before, won't try to creep in. But what will happen is, instead of leaning into that emotion we'll recenter the needs of the people who are in need. Again, we're centering the community that needs our help and we're remembering that I can't afford to be inactive, I can't afford to be passive, and that apathy is the opposite of love. And love is what we all need.

So I basically took that same cycle and rewrote it to point people towards action, and what true action looks like, the centering of those in need: love, empathy, and compassion. And even when it gets difficult, we're not driven by performative activism, we're driven by the need to love one another and do that real work. And so, yeah, that is how I would describe that.

Stephanie: That's so helpful. It's so helpful. And the performative thing, it really... I don't know. That's really good.

Danielle: Most people who end up falling into performative activists are not trying to perform. That's the thing that I want to remind people of. It happens by people with good intentions often, and just doesn't always follow through. We're guided more by the fear of not looking like we're doing something than we are by the desire to do something meaningful.

Stephanie: Yes, yes, yes. And so if we just swap that and go, like, "Who's being affected right now? Who's hurting right now? And what can I offer them?" That just bypasses the whole... It shoves everything else away and just gets to the actual point of what just makes the main thing the main thing, I guess.

Danielle: And you're able to hear what that community need is and you're no longer guessing. You're plugged in. And so they're like, Hey, will you support in this way? And you're like, "I can do that."

Stephanie: Yeah, yeah.

Danielle: There it is.

Stephanie: Dani, a few years ago, one of my really, really good friends had a miscarriage. She ended up coming on the show and sharing what responses were helpful, like how people responded in ways that were helpful and which responses weren't. She shared what people said and did that truly carried her through that season. And she shared some of the things that while well-intentioned, were either irritating at best or harmful at worst.

So from the work that you've done, what are a few of the things that we can actually say or do that are actually helpful in the wake of an injustice or tragedy? And we've kind of talked about this a little bit, but I really just want to hear you.

Danielle: I think this has opened up a very important conversation because I think I did this series about surface-level sympathy the other day. I think it was during Mental Health Awareness Month. And I was basically talking about that exact same thing.

Like when someone we know is going through a personal tragedy or is experiencing a broader injustice, we're tempted to say things like, "This too shall pass," or "You've got this. Everything happens for a reason." And we can go down the list of phrases that are unhelpful.

But what I quickly realized was that, one, that's subjective. Different people find different things to be helpful. So while I thought I was entering into the series that I was going to find this list of awesome phrases that everyone should use, I quickly found out that that probably wasn't the best solution. Because again, people respond to different things.

So I said, "You know what? Maybe it's not the specific language that we use that we should focus on the most, but maybe it's, you know, customizing that language to fit the needs of the person that you're trying to help.

So for example, on their own, some well-meaning statements, sadly, can do more harm than good, because we throw them out as platitude sometimes when we don't know what else to say, but we want to say something. And I think when you lean into your personal relationships, you can use your proximity to the person that you're trying to help to inform your language. And you're able to adjust what you say to fit their circumstance in relation to your personal relationship.

For example, I had someone submit to me that the phrase "you're so strong" was not helpful for them when they were going through something hard. And as a black woman, that's something that I'm told a lot, especially during these moments of

injustice. It's like, "Ah, you're just so strong to be able to deal with these kinds of things."

And for me personally, I don't necessarily get personally offended when someone says that, but there are black women who absolutely do because it's just a stereotype—the strong black woman—and it just should be avoided at all costs.

Anyway, on the other hand, there was somebody who said that that phrase was helpful to them. So I explained it by saying, it's one thing to say to that person, "Ah, you're so strong" and it's another thing to say, "I am so glad that I've been able to be your friend over the years, and I've seen the way you've navigated this situation and situations like this with such grace and with such resilience.

And because of what I've seen in you and what I see that you're able to fight through and work through, I know that you are a strong person, but you don't have to carry this on your own. I'm here for you as often as I can be and as much as I'm able to be. Just know that I see you. I see what you're going through. And just because you're strong, it doesn't mean you have to carry this alone. So I'm with you."

And it's just like you're using your personal relationship, the history you have with this person and knowing like this injustice or this tragedy, you can't really say anything that will make it better. But you can say like, "I'm not going to throw this platitude your way. But I'm going to use our relationship to inform my language and help and guide me through saying what I feel like would be encouraging for you based on what I know about you and how much I love you," you know?

Stephanie: That makes sense. That makes a lot of sense. Because I think things like "this too shall pass," in some-

Danielle: We're just gonna not say that actually. We're not using it.

Stephanie: And it was like, yeah, different things I think would be encouraging in some seasons, but deeply hurtful in others. They're not one size fits all. But I like the idea of what do you know about this person? Speaks to them like you know them because you do, and you should.

Danielle: And instead of looking for a specific word or phrase, I like to give the framework of like, Okay, can you make sure that you are solidifying your presence with this person? Like, "Hey, I'm here for you no matter what." Make sure that you're validating their emotions. Like, "What you feel right now is valid. Are you acknowledging the difficulty of the situation? I know this is really hard."

And if you want to take it a step further and give inspirational encouragement, or biblical encouragement, are you making sure that that's where they are to receive that in that moment? You know, just make sure that you're acknowledging and approaching that with that framework of "I am going to provide support by thinking through these things. Make sure you know that I'm here. I'm going to hold space for you. I'm going to validate your motion. I'm going to acknowledge the difficulty of the situation."

And then with that framework in mind, You can pick your language knowing, Okay, I'm gonna make sure that I'm centering them and myself.

Stephanie: This I feel like is a total episode for a whole other day. But a lot of us can be like fixers at different times. So when someone in our life is struggling with something, we hate that they're struggling with it. And so it's really easy to want to go in and say, "Have you tried this?" or "Can I try this or do this or whatever?"

And something that I've realized in my life from being on the receiving end of that sum has been, when you're suggesting something to me, it feels like you're telling me that you're assuming I haven't already thought of that or I haven't already tried. Or the fact that you're skipping over "this is really hard. I see you. I'm acknowledging what you're going through. I'm acknowledging that it's hard," and you're just skipping to the fix, it kind of feels like maybe if I just worked a little harder, this wouldn't be as hard for me, you know?

Danielle: Yeah.

Stephanie: And I didn't realize that that's how it can feel. But it's like, "Well, oh, have you tried this?" And just giving all of those other steps and getting to that point can make the other person feel like they got themselves into this mess, or if they just tried a little harder, they wouldn't feel this way.

So stopping at "I see you and I see what you're going through. This is really hard. I validate your feelings. I'm here for you. I'm in this with you." And then if you need to say something encouraging or if you have a suggestion, give it then. But you need to do all those other things first, otherwise, it just [inaudible 01:00:51].

Danielle: Absolutely. Yes.

Stephanie: Dani, I love this. If there's just one last thing you want the women to hear just one last piece of encouragement, I'd love it.

Danielle: Yes. I know I've said it already, but you don't have to be perfect to participate in this, in any instance of speaking up about injustice or using skills and gifts that you

might not feel 100% confident in. But know that that's like something that's been put on your heart to do.

You don't have to be perfect to participate. And don't be afraid to start it and realize that you want to do something else. Like your present purpose, that's the beauty about it. It can change, it can evolve. And you have the skills that you have and that combination of skills and passions for a reason. Because no one can do what needs to be done quite like you can do it. So I would just like to remind people that.

It might not result in this huge platform of this following, but it truthfully could result in you making someone else's life better because you chose to say yes. And I think that that is more valuable than a platform any day, honestly.

Stephanie: You guys, I just feel like I can speak for all of us when I say that Dani is our favorite person. Seriously, thank you so much. Thank you so much for letting us, I don't know, pick your brain.

This is hard. This is hard. Our world right now is hard. And knowing how to deal with it, knowing how to navigate it and what to say and what not to say and how to help but how to help the right way and how to care but not be crushed by it, it's just the whole thing is really really hard. And you're leading the way in such a beautiful way and you're helping us all participate. And I really love that.

You guys, you need to be following Dani. You need to shop her shop. You have so many things in your shop. You have apparel, you have stickers, you have... You have a million things.

Danielle: I've got like prints and greeting cards and pennant flags and stickers. And I have this new notepad called Do Get Daily that just helps people who don't know how to take small steps every day to do that. It's like a little daily planner thing. It's so cute. Anyway, a lot of things.

Stephanie: I love it. Okay, well, we're gonna link to Dani in the show notes. You guys go follow along with her. Go cheer her on. And you guys just need to be friends. Dani, thank you so, so much for coming on Girls Night.

Danielle: Oh my gosh, an honor and a pleasure. I'm so happy we got to do this. Thank you.

[01:03:32] <music>

Outro: Friends, thank you so much for listening to today's episode. I can't tell you how much it means to me to have you here at Girls Night.

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And thank you to all of you who have left all of 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. I'll see you then.