

[00:00:00] <music>

Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to a very special episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F. Downs, coming out to you in the middle of our Advent series with a very special Christmas Party episode. I'm really happy to be here with you today. We have got a great show in store.

Before we dive into today's conversation, I want to share about one of our amazing sponsors, [BetterHelp](#). During this week in our Advent series, we're talking about living our lives with joy. And one of the ways we can do that is by telling ourselves the truth, right? We talked about that on Tuesday.

While we may feel like we need an owner's manual to navigate our way through life, what's true is that picking up the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love along with community and prayer and asking for help, these are the ways to walk through the seasons of feeling stuck.

A relationship challenge, a work situation that went sideways, a conversation that has you feeling bigger feelings than you expected and you want to figure out why, these things are just part of life, but it's normal to wish you could get a little guidance in those moments.

Good news is that therapists are trained to help you figure out a cause of challenging emotions and learn productive coping skills to walk through them. They can step in as guides when we need them sometimes. My therapist has been such a helpful voice in my life for a lot of years, so I know firsthand the power of having a safe, qualified person to process with. BetterHelp can help you find that too.

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Learn more and save 10% off your first month at betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun. That's betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun.

Intro: Today on the show, I get stuck with our buddy Zach Williams. Y'all remember when he was on Episode 191 and we became fast friends all of us. Well, if you haven't listened to that one, be sure to go back and check it out. But you'll probably

also recognize him from his Grammy Award winning songs *Chain Breaker* and *There Was Jesus*, his duet with the queen of our hearts, Dolly Parton.

Well, I'm so glad to have him back to hear about his latest project, *A Hundred Highways*, full of his signature country rock gospel sound, with songs absolutely drenched in faith. I think it might just climb to the top of your list and fast.

I just think the world of this guy and I couldn't think of a better way to continue our Christmas Party than talking about Jesus with Zach. So here's my conversation with our friend Zach Williams.

[00:02:55] <music>

Annie: Zach Williams, welcome back to That Sounds Fun.

Zach: Thanks for having me.

Annie: I'm so glad you're here.

Zach: I am, too.

Annie: It always feels like a friend that I don't see enough. But as soon as we're in the same place, it's like, "Here we go. Let's go." I'm so glad. Okay, how's your voice feeling?

Zach: It actually feels really good. I had a little scare. I guess it was just common cold is what it ended up being. I went out, started a run, we had like four shows, and I wasn't feeling great whenever I started, and I just tried to push through. And I ended up losing my voice and getting laryngitis and-

Annie: So did you finish that run?

Zach: I finished that run, powered through, but I thought I'd hurt something because I woke up and it was like squeaky, you know?

Annie: Yeah.

Zach: Couldn't talk. I ended up going straight to the doctor, got a steroid shot. And by that afternoon, I felt my voice was back. But I went to Vanderbilt and saw my voice doctor and she was-

Annie: Dr. V? Do we see the same person?

Zach: What's her name? Kimberly.

Annie: Yeah.

Zach: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Annie: Same office.

Zach: So she said, "I don't even have to look at your voice to tell you you need a break." She's like, "I'm just watching you talk." So she advised me to cancel the next run, which was seven shows in nine days. And she was like-

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Zach: She said, "You can't do that." So I canceled that. I thought I was feeling better and then my wife, daughter, and son all came down with something, and I ended up getting that as well on top of what I already had and we ended up having to cancel another. So all together I had 11 shows on this tour that I had to, you know, postponed to next year.

Annie: Wow.

Zach: It was scary. But you know, once I took the break, and I came back, I finished out seven shows in 10 days and voice felt stronger than it's been in a long time.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Zach: So we have 11 shows left this year and we'll have a long break.

Annie: You're doing Christmas songs while you're out there doing your stuff too?

Zach: I'm doing a Christmas tour, yes. So we'll play some singles that we've had in the past and then go in and do a little outfit change and then come back and play some Christmas songs.

Annie: I was thinking about when I was watching on Insta story, you saying that you were canceling some shows. Tell me what happens. What's the difference in what you were feeling between 2020 when we're all home and nobody's touring and this time you're watching all your friends and peers out there still getting to sing and you're having to sit at home?

Zach: It was rough, because, you know, kind of as a business owner I guess you look at it through that kind of lens and you're thinking about, you know, all the people that you employ, and all the people that depend on those shows and travel and tour.

It was one of those where it was like, "Can I just push through and do this?" But then everybody was going, "You know, what if you do and you mess your voice up? You may be out for a year. So would you rather cancel a few shows or postpone a few shows, and finish the year or not get to play anymore?" And I was like, "That's so smart." It's not the decision that anybody ever wants to make but I think it was the best decision at the time. But it was tough. It was not an easy decision to make those.

Annie: What did you do sitting at home?

Zach: Not a lot of nothing. Honestly-

Annie: And you were sick so...

Zach: I got to rest a lot. I think it was a God thing, honestly. Because my son started school this year. He's been homeschooled ever since we moved to Tennessee. And he decided, you know, "I want to go to school this year. I want to play on the basketball team and grow up with some of the same kids." So I got to see his first four basketball games of the season. I got to go to my daughter's cheer competition." The tough part was sitting there and not yelling like the rest of the parents.

Annie: Not hollering. Yeah.

Zach: So it was like just sitting there, you know, and like-

Annie: Popping your face.

Zach: But I think it was time well spent. I think God knew that I needed a break and He just said, "You know what? I'm gonna give you a break."

Annie: I mean, one of the things my therapist tells me a lot is "Your body don't lie."

Zach: Yeah.

Annie: So I can lie to myself about my strength, my body does not lie. And so when my voice goes out, you're like, "Okay, we got to really listen to this."

Zach: And you talk a lot. I mean, what you do all the time. I'm starting vocal therapy in January basically just for my speaking voice. Because she was like, "You can have all the technique in the world singing but if your speaking voice you're not using the right technique, you're already out before the show starts." And I do so much of

that eat and greet stuff every night and I talk to fans and we spend a lot of time before every show talking. So we're gonna learn how to talk.

Annie: Yeah. She got you blowing bubbles through a straw.

Zach: I haven't done it yet. I start in January.

Annie: Oh, get ready.

Zach: We'll see. I have no idea what I'm in for.

Annie: Oh, man, the list we have when... Mostly when I'm on tour only because, like you, it is every single night. Where you have to go, "Oh, I have to blow bubbles into a cup of water." There's just a massaging and stretching and-

Zach: I've got all the vocal, you know, exercises for songs and shows but not for doing this.

Annie: I'll tell you, it is surprisingly similar because they still find the note on a keyboard for me.

Zach: Wow.

Annie: And they're like, "Annie, when you're exciting, here's the note you hit. When you're being serious, here's the note you hit." And so I still do warmups based on notes, but it's my talking notes, not singing notes.

Zach: Oh, that's crazy.

Annie: It's wow.

Zach: Yeah. I didn't know anything about that.

Annie: I didn't either. And I think people forget we watch athletes take care of their muscles all the time. And I didn't realize that I had two or three muscles that were keeping this whole ship afloat.

Zach: Yeah, exactly.

Annie: And for even one of them to go out is a problem for us.

[00:08:37] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation real quick to share about one of our amazing partners, [Prose](#). Most of you have probably heard me shout from the rooftops about Prose, the world's most personalized haircare. And for those that haven't, I want to tell you about the incredible results I'm seeing since using my customized Prose products.

I've been using Prose shampoo and conditioner and I love that I get to speak to the fragrance profile so it smells amazing to me, but also that my hair is stronger and shinier, and more manageable since Prose came into my life. Prose knows there is more to your hair than just straight or curly.

Prose has given over a million consultations with their in-depth hair quiz, which is how I got started. Y'all know we love a quiz. Things like where you live and your health habits, your concerns about your hair. By analyzing over 85 personal factors, Prose determines a unique blend of ingredients to treat your exact concerns.

And they have a "review and refine" feature. It lets me tweak my formulas for any reason, like when the seasons change or getting my hair colored, or wanting to see different results. I've used that feature and thought, "How cool that they will just keep working to provide the best results?"

As a carbon-neutral certified B Corp, Prose is an industry leader in clean and responsible beauty. All their ingredients are sustainably sourced, ethically gathered, and cruelty-free. They're also the first custom beauty brand to go carbon neutral. Well done, Prose.

If you're not 100% positive Prose is the best haircare you've had, they'll take the products back, no questions asked. Prose is the healthy hair regimen with your name all over it.

So take your free in-depth hair consultation and get 15% off your first order today. So go to prose.com/thatsoundsfun. That's prose.com/thatsoundsfun for your free in-depth hair consultation and 15% off.

Sponsor: I want to tell you about another one of our incredible partners, [Rothy's](#). With all the fun that December holds, I'll be honest that figuring out what I'm gonna wear to which events is not my favorite part of it. You know what makes it less daunting? Knowing that Rothy's is going to make my shoe choice easy. For real I'm wearing them right now.

For chic and comfortable flats that can easily be dressed up and dressed down for any kind of seasonal gathering, you got to shop Rothy's. Seriously versatile and comfortable. And Rothy's just released the coziest merino wool slippers for when

your day is done. Slippers, y'all, they are so cute. It's time to update my office slippers because you know we have office robes and so I'm gonna get me some of these merino wool slippers.

When you give the gift of Rothy's shoes, you show you care about comfort, durability and of course style. And you know that is my favorite part. All of Rothy's products are designed with the planet in mind. So they're sustainably made with their signature thread repurposed from originally used plastic bottles.

And if you don't know someone's shoe size, Rothy's makes versatile bags and accessories that run from pocket size to tote size. For all the travel I've got coming up in 2023, shoes that are comfortable and they go with everything are a must. So enter my black Rothy's Points that are on my feet right now. They are also forever on my packing list.

Rothy's are so durable. And all their products are machine washable, which means they'll keep looking great through the New Year and well beyond. So get stylish shoes versatile and durable enough to wear all the time with Rothy's. Get \$20 off your first purchase at Rothys.com/soundsfun. That's Rothys.com/soundsfun.

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Fallon: Hey, it's Fallon from The Snack Show with Jami Fallon. And one thing that sounds fun to me this Christmas is the Leipers Fork Christmas parade. So there's a small town near Nashville called Leipers Fork, and every year they do a Christmas parade. They bring out all the folks that live nearby, tons of people show up, they throw candy out of their floats, they have Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer show up, Frosty the Snowman. And at the very end, of course, Santa Claus shows up. And it's so fun. Both sides of my family come every year and it's just a blast. So I'm really looking forward to that.

Jami: Hi, this is Jami from The Snack Show with Jami Fallon. And this Christmas what sounds fun to me is snow. I grew up in the northwest and it probably has only snowed maybe five or six times on Christmas Day. But there's just something so magical about how quiet everything gets, and how still everything gets on Christmas. So I can't wait for snow.

Annie: And now back to our conversation with Zach.

[00:12:44] <music>

Annie: Okay, Walker Hayes was just on the show a couple of weeks ago. Love him.

Zach: He's awesome.

Annie: Laney came on too. Tell me about *Jesus' Fault*.

Zach: I mean, it was one of those once-in-a-lifetime kind of songs that just kind of come out of nowhere.

Annie: How does that happen? Will you explain to our friends who aren't in this world? I'm not in the world.

Zach: I didn't write it. I didn't have anything to do with writing of that song. I didn't know anything about it. But about a year and a half ago, we were on the road and I got a text from Michael Ferran, who's one of the writers. And me and Michael have written songs in the past. He just sends me a text and is like, "Hey, I wrote this song today with Walker Hayes and your name came up."

Annie: Were you and Walker already bros?

Zach: No. I didn't know Walker at all. I'd never met him.

Annie: Man, because y'all's stories are so similar.

Zach: Very similar.

Annie: Wow.

Zach: I didn't know him, didn't know he lived about five miles down the road from me.

Annie: No!

Zach: I had no idea. I liked his music and I knew his story. So when Michael sent me the song, it was like a voice memo that just said "*Jesus' Fault*." It was just an acoustic version. And man, when I started listening to song, I was like, "Man, he's saying everything that I wanted to say when I got saved."

Like I had all these guys that I ran around with and got in trouble with, I was rowdy with, and all this stuff. And then when me and my wife started going to church, we just kind of... we stopped all that. I didn't have an explanation to any my friends other than "Well, if you don't like it, blame Jesus. I don't know what to tell you."

So when I heard *Jesus' Fault*, I was like, "I'm interested." But then when I got to the hook, I was like, "Oh, that's the biggest compliment you could ever give Him." It's like, "If you miss the old me, it's *Jesus' fault*."

So I hear the song and I was like, "I love that song." And so for like six months I thought about it. And we were working on my record. So when we were finishing up my record, I had played it for my producer a few times and I said, Man... We were kind of looking for a song to finish out the record, and I said, "What about *Jesus' Fault*?" I said, "I don't have anything like that on my record."

So I called Michael back, I said, "Hey, did Walker record this?" He was like, "No." So I called Walker and I was like, "Hey, I want to record your song, but," I said, "The second verse, if there's a rewrite, I would love to rewrite that lyric because the relationship I have with my dad wasn't what that lyric says?"

Annie: Wow.

Zach: And I said, "I don't want to write something that's offensive. I don't want to put something out that my dad gets his feelings hurt by."

Annie: Right.

Zach: So we talked and he was like, "Man, my dad passed away this past year, and if you wouldn't mind, I'd love to just leave that lyric." And I was like, "I can totally respect that." I said, "Why don't I go just get the song finished and send it to you. And if you like it, you sing that second verse." Because he was kind of like, "I don't know if I can right now. I don't know what's going on. I don't know when the song comes out."

Annie: Right. Right.

Zach: Well, when I send it to him, he told me he was in Total Fitness or Planet Fitness or something working out. And he was like, "I'm standing here crying listening to song." He was like, "You nailed it." And he was like, "I absolutely want to be a part of this." And so we sent him the tracks and he worked on it in his little home studio and sent it back to us. And we loved it. And then first time we ever met was when we recorded the video for the song.

Annie: No. Really?

Zach: I never met him in person. So that day him showing up is like the first time we met and it was a lot of fun.

Annie: It is interesting knowing both of y'all's stories. I mean, our friends listening know both of y'all stories, that a song like that can exist, for two men... I mean, for so many of us. I've listened to it and cry, and you know, I don't relate to some of those

things. I'm not a dude at all. But man, I thought, yeah, how many things in my life can I say, "Well, that's... Even to myself, hey, Annie, that pain you're experiencing, that's *Jesus' fault*." And that's okay. Right?

Zach: Yeah.

Annie: So why did that attach to you in a way that made you go, "I need to sing this for everybody"?

Zach: I think because, for one, I knew my fan base, I know, my audience and the people that are coming to my concerts, I feel like I can look out and see the men and the women every night that are gonna go, "Man." You know, it's like a lot of bulb goes off. If they've never heard it, as soon as that hook hits on that chord, I mean, people stand up and start cheering and clapping. They love it.

Annie: Are they just crying every night?

Zach: It's kinda rowdy. It's funny because it feels like an old bar song. You know, kind of friends in low places, old kind of 90s country. But we're talking about Jesus and what He can do in your life. And I think that's why so many people that are coming to my concerts can relate because they're coming out of a lot of the same seasons of life that I lived through. So for me to be able to have a song like that and just seeing that every night and watch the smiles on the face and people light up, it's awesome.

Annie: You're still leading the pack in a genre that I want to be like eight times bigger. Because I love country music and I love Jesus. And I think a lot of country artists do too.

Zach: Oh, absolutely.

Annie: But I'm so interested. Who do you see... Are you listening to anybody? Is anybody coming up in our CCM world that's doing old-school rock country feeling that you're loving right now?

Zach: Other than Ann Wilson, I don't really see anybody that's really doing that. You know?

Annie: Yeah.

Zach: I think she's done really well kind of curving her lane. And I think she writes from a much more mature... I mean, she's not very-

Annie: How in the world is she not 20?

Zach: She's not very old, you know.

Annie: I know.

Zach: So I think the things that she's writing, she's very talented. You know, I had her on tour with me, and she was great. But I think she's kind of the, I would say, the country female of a Christian genre.

Annie: Yeah. So your album that came out in September, *A Hundred Highways*. Are you writing those songs over COVID?

Annie: Last time you were here was December of '19 and we had no idea what the earth was about to hand us. So are you writing these songs over that or did happen after that?

Zach: I think we started writing this record in January of '21.

Annie: Okay.

Zach: I worked on a Christmas record in the summer of COVID, finished the Christmas record the summer of '21, but I started writing those songs in January of 2021. I might have had some ideas for songs. But to be honest, during COVID, I stayed at the lake and hung out with my family. And then we hit the road and we did those drive-in movie theaters.

Annie: Brilliant. CAIN was out with you?

Zach: Yeah. I did two with Big Daddy Weave and then I ended up doing one with Matt Powell and CAIN. So between September of 20 and May of '21, we played 70 drive-in movie theaters. It was like a godsend to us. But yeah.

So I started working on that record in '21 and wrote all the January and February as much as I could through March to May, just kind of filling in the gaps whenever I was home and then through the summer. And we started tracking that record at the top of '22 and just kind of finishing everything and trying to button it all up, you know. I had those songs for like a year and a half that I've been listening to, and I cannot wait to get them out.

Annie: Oh, I'm sure.

Zach: You know, heart to God, we wrote... This is like the third song we wrote for the record and it became the first single on this record. And I'd listened to it for a year

and a half. And I thought, "Man, are people going to feel the same way I felt about it the first time I heard it?" Because first time I heard it, I was like, "Man, this song is one of my favorites." And then you listen to it for a year and a half, two years, and you're like, the noose worn off. But everybody loved it. It felt good that everybody responded the same way that I did.

Annie: Do you ever get tired of singing your songs? Do you get tired of singing *Chain Breaker*? Do you get tired of singing *Heart of God*?

Zach: Not really. I have not gotten tired of seeing *Chain Breaker*. I mean, *Heart of God* is hard to sing, I'll say that. It's up there.

Annie: It's good though.

Zach: You know, I love doing what I do. I love the opportunity and the platform that I've been given and the season and the life that I've walked through to get to where I'm at. That's really what this new record was about. I feel like *A Hundred Highways*, kind of, for me, encompasses the journey that it's taken me to get to where I am today.

Honestly, this is the record I wanted to make for a really long time. It feels like Zach Williams. I've had people ask me so many times, "Who do you sound like? What kind of genre are you?" And I've said everything from, you know, old Christian artists that I grew up on, to Southern rock bands that I've loved. But this record I feel like I can say it sounds like Zach Williams.

Annie: Yeah. You're like, "This one! Go listen to this."

Zach: And I love it. I'm like, "Finally the record sounds like me."

Annie: I've listened through it on my porch and it just is a... it feels like that.

Zach: There's a little bit of everything. I felt like I've tried to tap into all of the music I grew up on as a kid from, you know, gospel to country to bluegrass, to rock. So there's a little bit of everything, blues... I mean, it's a fun record.

Annie: Yeah. The difference between your job and my job is when someone... If you and I are playing and speaking at the same thing, they want you to sound just like everything they already know and they want me to say something they never heard me say. Right?

Zach: Exactly.

Annie: So I'm always so curious if you get tired of singing these songs that we love... because my challenge is always I gotta be brand new everywhere-

Zach: Exactly.

Annie: ...and you've gotta be the same.

Zach: I think for me, you know, people want to come hear the songs that they've gotten used to hearing, the way that they've heard them on the radio or on the record. And for me, you know, I guess it can be a challenge to try to feel like you have to do something different or be creative every night.

But the songs, you know, they hit different every night. You know, you see people that connect with a certain song every night. So there's a different spirit in the room every night when you sing a certain song. You know, you can see God move in different ways on different songs. And it happens to me.

So I'm like, "Oh, that song didn't affect me at all," and then the next night I'm bawling to get through. I can't sing it. And it's like, "Man, did something just clicks?" And you're thinking, "How did I get here? How did I have this opportunity?" So the song is hard to sing. But then some nights, it's like you're just so happy that you're singing it, but you see somebody else going through the same thing. That's the difference.

Annie: Now that there are multiple albums, when you're setting up a tour, how do you decide which of these songs from *A Hundred Highways* we get to hear?

Zach: That's the hard one. So right now we're only playing five new songs on the small tour. But the spring we're gonna play the whole record.

Annie: Okay, great.

Zach: And so the problem was gonna be how do I figure out which past singles I'm gonna pull out every night. Because there's 15 new songs on this record. 15 songs is usually about an hour and a half. So that's the tough part. I think we do about 16 or 17 songs a night right now on the tour.

Annie: Gosh!

Zach: But yeah, people have to come out and check it out.

Annie: I mean, *A Hundred Highways* also could be your life, currently. Because you were on the road about as much as any of my friends. I mean-

Zach: I'm out there quite a bit.

Annie: Yeah. You still love it?

Zach: I love it. I mean, I feel like God prepared me for it. I feel like He prepared my family. My wife, you know, she's the backbone. She makes it all click. But yeah, I do love it. I love what I get to do and you know, just... Yeah, I feel blessed.

Annie: Tell me what you know, if you can, tell me what you know about God today that you maybe didn't know last time you're sitting in here with me. We've been through COVID, you've put out another album. You've had two albums, Christmas and this one. What do you know about God that you didn't know?

Zach: Man, I would say I think, you know, you always hear people talk about how faithful God is and trust God and put your faith in Him. It's easy thing to say until you have to actually do that. So I think for me, just seeing how He continue to bless me and my family and the people that travel with me and tour with me from COVID pp until now, you know.

Because I know for a lot of people... that year caused a lot of people to just kind of, like, take two steps back. And it was like, if they didn't stay busy and active, they kind of got lost in the shuffle. That was a big thing I was worried about, it was like, "You know, I've worked so hard to get to this place. Am I going to have to start all over with the touring and all this?" But I just saw Him show up and do things in my life with songs and opportunities that I would have never thought possible.

There Was Jesus came out during COVID. That was such a tough season for me to have a song that was doing so well but to not be out to perform it, to not see what the song was doing physically in people's lives and get to hear the stories, but to see just the radio chart or whatever that you're getting the email for. And it's like, "I don't care about that. I want to go out and play the song."

Annie: "I want to see their faces." Yeah.

Zach: But it was one of those things that it's kind of been the gift that keeps giving, you know, to be able to have an opportunity to do that song with Dolly and then have this opportunity now to be on the Christmas movie that's coming out.

Annie: As of this recording, you haven't even seen it yet.

Zach: I know people are gonna be like, "Oh, you didn't know God was faithful." But no, that's what I'm saying. Like, I know, God is faithful. But when you see Him do that

and you know, it's like you trusted, it's a different thing to say it than to walk through that season.

I walk through it now and see it. And I pinch myself all the time because I'm like, "Why me?" Why are you so good to me?" Because I'm still a work in progress, and I will be forever. But I think that's the beauty of it is He knows that about me.

Annie: Man, I say that about myself all the time. I have perfect attendance to my sins. So I know exactly who I am.

Zach: Yeah, exactly.

Annie: I haven't missed one of them. I feel like you're co-hosting here for me because let's talk about Dolly Parton.

Zach: Sorry.

Annie: No, no, I love it. I'm saying let's go. You're teeing me up to tee you up!

Zach: Okay.

[00:27:22] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just taking a quick break from this conversation to tell you about one of our amazing partners, [Nutrafol](#). Okay, so based on my bathroom floor when I'm finished drying my hair, I ought to have a lot less hair on my head. Is that you too?

Here's the thing. 30 million women are impacted by weakened or thinning hair. So you are not alone. I am not alone. And there is a solution we can trust to deliver results. Millions of Americans experience thinning hair. It's more than common, it is normal, but we don't talk about it super openly right, especially women. Going through it can feel lonely and frustrating. It's time to change the conversation and join the thousands of women who are standing up for their strands with Nutrafol.

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Sponsor: And I want to tell you about one last incredible partner, [Shopify](https://shopify.com). Okay, can we talk about notifications for a second? Do you leave any of those sounds on anymore? I have to confess that I keep everything silent except two: my Slack for office communication with my team. It sounds like Tigger and I love it so much. And this is the other one. You know what it is? That's another sale on Shopify, the all-in-one commerce platform to start, run and grow your business.

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When I started writing books, and even when we started the podcast, I had no idea that I, one day, would be able to sell things like our new Yes, And journal or the Let's Read the Gospels PDF. So I'm incredibly grateful for how Shopify helps us do those things.

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[00:31:04] <music>

Dr. Cook: Hey, this is Dr. Alison Cook from The Best of You podcast. And what sounds fun to me this Christmas is having our whole family together and cutting down a giant Christmas tree at my uncle's ranch, which is one of our favorite things to do. Number two is Christmas Eve with some of my best friends from childhood. I grew up with them and I only get to see them about once a year. So it's one of my favorite things, favorite times of the year.

And then finally, Christmas dinner at my aunt's house, which I don't have to cook, which is one of my favorite things. And then lastly, I would say going cross country skiing the week after Christmas. We get to go up to the mountains. It's beautiful. It's all white. We take all the family, the dogs and just a fun way to spend the holidays together.

Annie: And now back to finish up our conversation with Zach.

[00:31:55] <music>

Annie: Dolly Parton. I mean are y'all like friend friends now? It's her phone number right there in that telephone?

Zach: I think we are. I got poinsettias from her yesterday.

Annie: Because of the movie coming out.

Zach: I guess so.

Annie: She's canny, right?

Zach: She's one of the sweetest people I've ever met. You know, we got to spend a lot of time together the day that we worked on the movie.

Annie: Was it at Dollywood?

Zach: It was at Dollywood. Basically, it was in the chapel at Dollywood. And it was her childhood church that she had moved log by log and put them into Dollywood. And so we filmed *There Was Jesus*. I play a wise mountain man-

Annie: Do you?

Zach: ...with Willie Nelson and Billy Ray Cyrus, the other wisemen.

Annie: Oh, my gosh!

Zach: I'm the third one to visit. So it was really cool, but we spent... It was middle of summer, it was in August, it was hot and I'm wearing this Johnny Cash trench coat, this wool is burning up and we'd go in there and shoot for like 30 minutes. And then they would take us out and put us in this little like general store on Dollywood in kind of the upstairs and we could see the set.

And we get to hang out and talk. I played her some of these songs. It was funny. I was playing her song called *Lookin' for You*. And she kind of got choked up. I could see her kind of like working on parts. And she said, "Why wasn't I on that one? She was like, "You need to send me another one of these songs." And I was like, "Are you serious?"

And then the next time we come back, we're hanging out and we've gotten a bunch of pork rinds from somewhere there in Dollywood. She's like, "Y'all, you gotta try this with this blue cheese dip that I made." So she went and had blue cheese dip made. And we're all sitting there eating pork rinds, I'm like, "I'm hanging out with Dolly Parton."

Annie: Yeah, at Dollywood.

Zach: "You know, right here in Hollywood." She's super sweet. She's been really kind to me. And I mean, she's kind of everybody that she meets. That's the one thing I can say about her. I've seen hundreds of people trying to get her attention, and when she's talking to you, she's talking to you. Like nobody else around.

Annie: Next week on the podcast, we have Santa Claus.

Zach: Oh, yeah?

Annie: Santa Claus talk to us about how Dolly Parton has never left the good list, never left her nice list. So everybody can look forward to hearing that next week. He literally talked about Dolly. Talk about the movie. So did you get to meet Jimmy Fallon? Had you already met Jimmy Fallon?

- Zach:** No, I hadn't met Jimmy Fallon. I would love to go on his show.
- Annie:** I know.
- Zach:** ...and listen, play some music about Jesus. No, I haven't met him. So the way they did it, they brought everybody in on separate weekends to shoot their scenes.
- Annie:** Okay, got it.
- Zach:** So I was the last. She told me I was the last one to come in and do mine to finish it up.
- Annie:** Got it. Okay.
- Zach:** So I didn't get to meet him. But the movie, from what I hear... I haven't seen it, I haven't seen it at all.
- Annie:** Oh, I can't wait.
- Zach:** I did a couple of interviews this morning with like a Movieguide and they are like, "Tell us about the movie. Have you seen it?" And I'm like, "I don't know if I can say I have or haven't because..." But I said, "No, I haven't seen it." And they were like, "Oh, we got a chance to watch it this morning." Apparently, I mean it turned out very faith-based which is awesome.
- Annie:** Yes! That's amazing.
- Zach:** They were like, "Faith is on display." Dolly's like roots shining through on this. And so I'm excited to see it.
- Annie:** I cannot fathom recording a Christmas movie in August. The heat.
- Zach:** It was hot. I'm not gonna lie. And I'm bad about sweating. When you put makeup on me, I sweat even more. And I told them that. I was like, "You're gonna pile this stuff on my face and I'm gonna be just melting." And that's what it was like.
- Annie:** And y'all deal with it.
- Zach:** We had a blast. Like I said, I can't wait to see it. We've got a show tomorrow night, but we're gonna-
- Annie:** So you bus out tonight?

Zach: We're gonna DVR. And then I'm getting on the bus and watch it.

Annie: Me too. I've got it set to record. I was thrilled you're on it. I mean I'm not surprised at all. But I was so happy.

Zach: I was stressed because I've never, you know... Other than being in some music videos, I don't act. So this was like I had an acting role and scenes. You had to have some script. But she made it so easy. And she was like, "Hey, you're a natural." And I was like, "Well, my wife said I should play in some of these Hallmark movies and be a cowboy." She's like, "I could get you connected."

Annie: Let's get you on Yellowstone.

Zach: And I was like, "Oh, I'd love that."

Annie: Can you imagine a Jesus-loving cowboy on Yellowstone?

Zach: Well, that would be... Maybe I show up and we could save the whole family.

Annie: Let's get Rip saved. If you get Rip saved, you're getting everybody.

Zach: Or Beth.

Annie: Lord have mercy.

Zach: Oh, my goodness.

Annie: Listen, yeah, miracle upon miracle if you can get Beth Dutton to be a believer.

Zach: Ooh.

Annie: Since this is coming out around Christmas, can we talk about Christmas for just a minute and we'll be done?

Zach: Sure.

Annie: I want to know what's your family up to for Christmas this year. So you're out for some shows.

Zach: I am. My last Christmas show is here in Nashville. We're playing at the Fisher Center.

Annie: Yeah, that's beautiful.

Zach: I haven't been in here yet, but-

Annie: I went to a show last week. It is beautiful.

Zach: We play there on the 17th. And my mom and dad are coming in. And then I'm hoping, I don't know for sure yet, but I'm hoping my sister and her husband, kids are going to come in a few days later and spend some time here. And then they'll go back and we'll do Christmas together with just me and Crystal and our kids here in town. Our oldest will come back in to visit. But that's it.

We'll have our annual gingerbread competition that we did. Me and our kids and my wife, we all go to Gingerbread House every year and so you can do the best decoration.

Annie: So do you get one of the kits?

Zach: Yeah, we do the kit. We'll get two that are the same and two different ways and share all of the stuff that comes with it and see who can come up with the coolest.

Annie: Brilliant.

Zach: We used to go out and buy extra icings and things and try to really do it out. So every year, you know, we'll have four of them.

Annie: Who judges?

Zach: We judge. Nobody wins except for me. I always say-

Annie: That's right. You're like, "This is the best one."

Zach: We did it this year for Halloween. We did the houses and mine was a disaster. I typically do really well but I decided I was going to try and paint my house before I put my icing on.

Annie: Oh. With what?

Zach: I got my daughter's acrylic paints.

Annie: Oh, like real deal.

Zach: So I painted it, which made my roof super slick. So when I put my icing on, everything just slid. So you couldn't see anything. They laughed and joked about my Gingerbread House the whole time.

Annie: But what they didn't know is you were just prepping for Christmas.

Zach: So I'm gonna do that this year.

Annie: You're like, "I tried. I learned."

Zach: "I was just seeing if it works."

Annie: Our family also does a competition. And this year we're doing butter boards. Have you seen better boards on the internet?

Zach: I'm intrigued and a little grossed out by them.

Annie: Yeah.

Zach: I don't know. I've seen them doing that with a little bit of everything. But yeah, I mean, they look good.

Annie: Our rules are it's butter. So you can't do buttercream or whatever. We're providing the butter, the bread, and the board. And you can bring three ingredients. And then the grandparent age, my parents' age are the judges.

Zach: Nice. I've been seeing that on my Instagram like butter boards, peanut butter boards, form cheese. Like they're doing it with all kinds of stuff.

Annie: Which means is that the end of the trend?

Zach: Yeah.

Annie: When it start spreading beyond the original, it's the end of the trend.

Zach: I like to eat and I love to cook. So who knows? I might be making butter boards this year.

Annie: I mean, speaking to that spring tour that's coming up in March, are you going to have your eat and greets keep going?

Zach: I am.

Annie: I think that's brilliant. We talk about that. If someone could score how many times I've brought that up with other artists on this podcast-

Zach: It's turned into kind of a monster. It'd be up for Christmas this year. We're doing like a Christmas... Like he's got a really nice menu.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Zach: So this year, this past tour was the first tour that we've actually... we just decided, You know what? If you're gonna do eat and greet every night for 50 people, why don't you just cater the whole tour? So we ended up hiring like four other chefs to travel with us and another truck and another kitchen. And so on top of cooking dinner for eat and greet every night, he cooked meals for 48 people three times a day breakfast, lunch, and dinner on top of that.

Annie: Oh, my gosh.

Zach: I will say that it's a little bit of a plus if you want to go out and do a tour with me. You're getting some really good food on top of it.

Annie: Okay, so let's talk about 2023 for a second. Who is going out with you?

Zach: Blessing Offor.

Annie: That's awesome.

Zach: I'm excited.

Annie: That tour will be... Is it the Hundred Highway's group?

Zach: Yeah, it's gonna be The Hundred Highways tour. It starts in March, it runs through right up to Mother's Day and then-

Annie: Right. I can't wait. We're gonna make... everybody knows. But then they can go to your website and grab tickets and all that jazz.

Zach: Yeah.

Annie: You know, you're always welcome around here. So come on back anytime.

Zach: Thanks for having me.

Annie: The last question we always ask. Because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Zach: Ooh. Mm. My kids want to go to London.

Annie: Just for funsies?

Zach: A few years ago, me and my wife for our 10th wedding anniversary just decided to do a European vacation. And we went all over the place. We went for like 17 days, just went on this big trip. And London was one of the funnest... I mean, one of the... for me, like, just, I think, because I like food. And there's this place called the Borough Market under the bridge, under the London Bridge. And it's, I mean, any kind of food you could ever imagine.

There's like little stands and all kinds of shopping and stuff. It was funny, my daughter just the other day I was talking to a friend of mine on the phone, and they had just been in London for the holidays. And Delilah was like, "I want to go to London." And I was like, "We've been to London." She was like, "You guys went to London?" She's like, "We want to go." And so me and my wife are talking about that'd be fun to go back to.

Annie: I love it over there too. That's a great answer. It is fun here. And it's one of my favorite parts of this, is every day someone tells me something different. I'm like, "You're right. I want to do that."

Zach: Have you been?

Annie: Yeah.

Zach: Oh, it's awesome.

Annie: It's awesome. And I'm a big soccer fan, so all things UK make me happy with soccer.

Zach: It was a lot of fun. That, or my kids want to go to New York. So we've talked about the summer. We could probably make it to New York quicker than we can London.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. A little less water to fly over.

Zach: We may take them, let them see the Empire State Building and the World Trade Center site and do something like that.

Annie: That sounds such fun. Merry Christmas, friend.

Zach: You too.

Annie: Thanks for joining us. I'm grateful for you.

Zach: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[00:41:51] <music>

Outro: Oh, you guys, isn't he the best? I just love being with that dude. Be sure you're streaming *A Hundred Highways* wherever you love to listen to music and get to one of Zach's tour dates if he is coming your way. Also, don't forget his Christmas album. It's so good.

And if you have not gotten to watch the special of Dolly Parton's, the Christmas special that he's in, I'm sure you can find it recorded somewhere online all the things. You gotta go watch it. It's so good.

Remember that it is not too late to get in on our Advent series. Just jump in with us and finish out our joy and love weeks, so we can all welcome Christmas together with a few gifts to take with us into the new year. All the details are at Anniefdowns.com/advent. And I really hope you'll join us. It is not too late. It is not too late.

And just a reminder to check out the show notes for a whole bunch of helpful links, links to our sponsors, the transcript of the show, our weekly email newsletter, the AFD Week in Review, our Advent series, the link to subscribe to Let's Read the Gospel. Listen, listen, it's just all there. It is all there for you.

If you need anything else for me besides all those links, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. And today what sounds fun to me is adding a little more decoration to my house. I got a little more. I got one bucket left to pull out to decorate for Christmas. So it's not too late. It's not too late for you to join Advent. It is not too late for me to keep decorating.

So y'all have a great day. We'll see you back here tomorrow as we finish out our Advent series week on joy. See y'all then.