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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun, our last episode before Christmas. I am your host Annie F. Downs. I'm so happy to be here with you today.

Before we dive into this conversation that you are going to love, I want to tell you about one of our incredible sponsors. This show is sponsored by [BetterHelp](#). While you're hopefully cozy at home the week between Christmas and New Year's when no one knows what day of the week it is, start thinking about what's impacted you in 2024 and where you want to go in 2025. You may love that kind of self-reflection or it may be a little more challenging, but it will serve you. And therapy could be the exact right next step. I have an appointment with my counselor during that week for sure.

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Intro: Today on the show, this is exactly who I wanted to talk with before we go into our Christmas break. One of your favorites is back. My friend Matthew West is here. I love this conversation. We catch up about work and life and syndicates to college. And then we get to talk about his new book, *Come Home for Christmas*.

I love that we get to continue our Advent conversations with friends we trust like Matthew. And I'm grateful we get to walk into Christmas with the help of his pastoring voice. So here's my conversation with one of your favorite musicians and one of my favorites too, Matthew West.

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Matthew: Your close friend who plays Elphaba?

Annie: Yeah, Mary Kate.

Matthew: Oh my gosh, her... So I went down the rabbit hole. It was either on her TikTok or Instagram, like you had posted about her. But then she did this video that talked about her... like follow her for a day of vocal preparation for her show.

Annie: What do you think?

Matthew: I was blown away by what she does to get ready. It made me feel like I was like amateur hour because like-

Annie: And you're a literal professional singer.

Matthew: She starts warming up at like 8 or 9 a.m. or whatever. I mean-

Annie: And drinks three water bottles.

Matthew: Her intentionality, I was inspired by it. I sent it to Ann Wilson, who we manage. I sent it to her, I was like, "Look at the level of vocal preparation."

Annie: It's wild, right?

Matthew: Yeah, it's another level. I was just inspired.

Annie: When I'm on tour, I'm doing three shows a weekend. You're doing four probably every run.

Matthew: Yeah. We just got done with five in a row, which is usually my limit.

Annie: That is so many five nights in a row. And that's what they have to do is they do eight in a week.

Matthew: Yeah. I don't know how she does.

Annie: How?

Matthew: And it's not easy songs to sing.

Annie: Right.

Matthew: I mean, none of those Broadway songs are... They're all challenging. They are all-

Annie: Would you do Broadway?

Matthew: I don't think.

Annie: Would you ever be the whiz, like the wizard?

Matthew: And you know what's funny? I was the whiz in high school.

Annie: Really?

Matthew: But I got in a fight the day before the show... True story. My buddy was making fun of me in the library first period before the launch of the whiz. He was making fun of me for being in the musical. And I hadn't slept any the night before because I was still working on my lines. And I got mad at him. His name was Pat. I was like, "But Pat, you better shut it. Pat, you better shut it." He's like, "Ooh, what are you gonna do?" I mean, he kept and I was like, Pat, "Pat, you better stop." And finally, I totally lost my temper. And Pat went into one of the bookshelves and all of our clothes... like we were ripping our shirts. I got suspended.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Matthew: ...and kicked out of the musical. My parents thought I was on drugs.

Annie: You were the whiz.

Matthew: And I was the whiz.

Annie: What grade is this?

Matthew: This was my senior year of high school. And I've never been in trouble.

Annie: You're senior, you got kicked out of the play.

Matthew: I was like the *All-American Kid*. Like I was that year... I was homecoming King. I was good kid. And then my parents are in the principal's office, they're like, "What's wrong with our son?"

Annie: Were they crying?

Matthew: They were crying. They're like, "Are you on drugs?" I'm like, "No, Pat just wouldn't shut up." But half the school was mad at me, because I ruined the musical. And the other half was proud of me because Pat had it coming. That's my prodigal story.

Annie: How many days until you felt normal at school again? Did it take like two weeks? Or was it like you were back and it was no biggie?

Matthew: No, it was several weeks. The one thing that made me feel normal was my high school baseball coach called me to check on me because I was missing baseball.

Annie: How much were you suspended? How many days?

Matthew: I was suspended for a week.

Annie: You must have laid it on Pat.

Matthew: Yes. Pat got to the brunt of it. And I'm not like a UFC brawler. I don't know what happened. I just lost my temper. Anyways. But my coach called me, he's like, "Hey, I just got one question for you." And I was like, "What's that coach?" Thinking like I let my whole team go. He goes, "Did you win?" I don't know why but that was the one thing that made me smile. I was like, "Yeah, coach. I think I did." He's like, "All right, we'll see you in a week."

Annie: And for everybody listening, he called your house phone.

Matthew: He called my house phone.

Annie: He called your house phone and your mom had to hand it over to you.

Matthew: Yes. Anyways

Annie: Matthew!

Matthew: So I think that was my retirement from Broadway.

Annie: I cannot believe you got suspended for a week. I'm thinking back on my worst days of high school.

Matthew: Did you ever get in trouble?

Annie: Yes. I got in trouble... I did not get suspended. I did go to the principal's office one time.

Matthew: I mean, you're a disruptor in terms of industry. Like you start a podcast network, you do all these things. But like, you wonder... Okay, so the origin story is not that you were like shaking it up in school.

Annie: No, no, no, no, no. I was like you. I was a youth group kid start to finish.

Matthew: You never even had that one moment where everybody-

Annie: I bullied somebody in eighth grade. That's probably the time I felt the worst is when youth group kids were mad at me, I had hurt her feelings.

Matthew: Oh, wow.

Annie: I had not totally meant to, but looking back, I recognize that it was not kind. I mean, I wasn't innocent. I wasn't like, What? But I was like, I didn't quite realize... But it's funny, because when you tell the story now, you go, yeah, it was a couple of weeks, I lost a week of school, I ruined the play. But in the moment as a senior in high school, you had to be like, This is-

Matthew: Oh, the world was ending.

Annie: Yeah.

Matthew: It's funny how many moments we have where we think the world is ending and then 48 hours later, you're like, Okay. You know, it's examples of what God's grace like... not to spiritualize it, but it is. It's like, okay, the sun came up today. I didn't think it was gonna come up when I was in the middle of my midnight last night.

Annie: That's right.

Matthew: But yeah, I'll never forget the drive home from the school when my parents were... my mom's crying. My dad's so mad. And mom's like, "Are you on drugs?" And I was like, "Mom, I'm not on drugs." And my dad's like, "Don't yell at your mom." For some reason that conversation I remember because it was like, she's crying, asking me if I'm on drugs, I'm yelling to tell her because that's the dumbest thing I ever heard, Dad's telling me not to talk to her.

Annie: And you're still tired. You're in trouble. And you still didn't sleep the night before and you just lost a week of baseball in the musical.

Matthew: It was not my...

Annie: And now they're both such vital parts of your ministry.

Matthew: Exactly.

Annie: That is wild.

Matthew: And I don't think I've gotten in a fight since.

Annie: One and done.

Matthew: I haven't thrown fists since high school.

Annie: You gave it to Pat. Poor Pat, we wish you well wherever you are.

Matthew: All that to say though, when I was in high school I used to do like Godspell. I love taking my family to Broadway play. So whenever I see you post on Instagram that you're at a play or something, the girls and I are jealous.

Annie: I'm telling you, y'all need to go up and see *The Outsiders*. That's the other one-

Matthew: Is it amazing?

Annie: Oh, my gosh. There is a-

Matthew: Like from the movie?

Annie: Yeah.

Matthew: Like the old school?

Annie: Yeah, that's right. And there is like, I'm guessing at the timing, eight minutes probably, an eight-minute fight scene between every... everyone is in it. It's raining. And it goes from slow mo to normal speed to slow-mo to normal speed. There's blood everywhere because they're punching each other. It's the most-

Matthew: The choreography?

Annie: ...choreographed thing you've ever seen. I mean, afterwards, they drop the lights, and the room gasps.

Matthew: It's just like they can't even believe what they saw.

Annie: It's unbelievable, dude.

Matthew: Now, the choreography is what would keep me out of Broadway in a hurry. That's so fast.

Annie: I don't know if you wanna be the outsider. I think you could be the wizard. He doesn't dance. Oh, he does the tada tada tada ta da da. The one hit song he has. I am a sentimental man.

Matthew: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Annie: Spin a couple of times. Maybe.

Matthew: I like the guy in... What was it? The king in Hamilton. That song *You'll Be Back*, I love that. You know what I'm talking about?

Annie: Yes. Your sunset career in 20 years is Broadway.

Matthew: Maybe. That would be kinda fun.

Annie: I told Natalie Grant the same thing. I was like, Why are you not Madame Morrible in *Wicked* after that...?

Matthew: Oh, she's such a good singer.

Annie: She'd be incredible. It'd be awesome.

Matthew: It feels like different types of vocal strength, though. Like your friend who...

Annie: Mary Kate?

Matthew: Mary Kate. Sorry. It's a different type of singing. Even listening to her warm-ups, I was like, You have to be trained in a certain it... I don't know that the same skill sets translate as easily as we might think. It's like a NASCAR driver that thinks he can go drive a Formula One car or something. Some of the skills may apply, but they'd have to undergo like... or like the big Mike Tyson fight the other night.

Annie: Tell me what you thought.

Matthew: I think it was rigged.

Annie: You think-

Matthew: Did you watch it?

Annie: Yeah. I mean, we went to the Franklin Ravenwood football game, and then went back to a friend's house and-

Matthew: And watched the fight?

Annie: We're all like, What's happening?

Matthew: Mike Tyson looked... all of a sudden... like in all of his warm-up videos that they showed leading up to the fight, he looked like a stone cold. And then he got out there and looked kind of geriatric a little bit.

Annie: It was so weird.

Matthew: There's a lot of theories on Instagram and stuff. People are like, "See, he could have thrown a hook here."

Annie: And also, I think Jake Paul could have flattened him a couple of times and he chose not to.

Matthew: Yeah.

Annie: That's the other thing is once we got toward the back half rounds 5, 6, 7, 8, it was kind of like Jake Paul is choosing not to just ruin this guy's history.

Matthew: But did you see the fight before that? The two women fight.

Annie: That woman's face opened up above her eye.

Matthew: I couldn't watch. Picture my band and I on a tour bus after the show.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Matthew: We're waiting for the Mike Tyson fight and these two women are on and they... that was bloody.

Annie: That did not feel as staged. I thought they were going for-

Matthew: No, that was real.

Annie: Yeah. And I saw Jake Paul talk about one of his favorite parts was how they showed those two women fighting. He's like, "One of my favorite parts of this night was watching the... was getting to expose the audience to these two women fight."

Matthew: Because he was the promoter of the whole event or something.

Annie: That's right.

Matthew: I mean, that was I was... we were standing ovation for those. I mean, I don't understand that.

Annie: What did you guys say after... I mean, paint us a picture. Is the bus already rolling? Are you also still sitting?

Matthew: We're still sitting probably till 12. I mean, you know, the bus life with all your tours. You know, pizza in hand.

Annie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Still sitting.

Matthew: And we go hard on our bus. We drink a lot of bubbly sparkling water. So I'm about three bubbly-

Annie: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. You're feeling real bloated. You're having a great time.

Matthew: And some pizza. But yeah, we're all amped up from the show. It's actually was like a fun group activity to watch that. But we just couldn't believe the ladies fight.

Annie: I know.

Matthew: That was just brutal.

Annie: I just thought, man, her face is that.. her eyebrow is opened up for life.

Matthew: I kept sitting there going, You couldn't pay me to do that. And then when they said what they were getting paid, I was like, "Oh, maybe you can pay me."

Annie: That's literally what you can pay me to do.

Matthew: I was like, 20 million? Oh, okay. Punch my face.

Annie: Knock me out cold. It was during the fight one of the announcers said, the reason people get knocked out is their brain shifts in your skull.

Matthew: Oh geez.

Annie: That's how you get knocked out. Like that's what makes you go unconscious. And I was like, I mean, for 20 million, you can shake my brain up one time.

Matthew: I mean, what could it... I was gonna say, what could hurt-

Annie: What could we do with \$20 million? What could we do?

Matthew: I mean, I got in a car accident last summer and the only thing I think I had was a concussion. But I didn't go to the hospital for it but like my wife thinks that I'm often in a concussed state. I mean, she would say, That's just kind of how you are every day. Like I literally told you the same thing 30 times. So I'm like, I don't know that getting... you know, my brain moving around a little bit, it's probably not gonna...

Annie: May help.

Matthew: It might put it back in place. Like the kid with the... in Christmas vacation, where he gets... his eyes go crossed. He falls in a well, his eyes go across. He gets kicked by a mule and his eyes go across.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. One fight, \$20 million and suddenly my memory is better.

Matthew: Maybe that's what it takes.

Annie: That's exactly it. Okay, speaking of your wife, Emily, you've... this is your fourth time on the show.

Matthew: Is that right?

Annie: Yeah. Which when you get to five, you join the Hall of Fun.

Matthew: What do I get? Oh, I get a name on?

Annie: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Matthew: Who else has made it?

Annie: Santa, She Reads Truth. John Mark Comer.

Matthew: I was gonna say is Dave Barnes on it?

Annie: Yeah, Barnes is on there. Yeah.

Matthew: Santa Claus is on, of course.

Annie: You're getting really close. But give us an update. How are Emily and the girls? I mean, Lulu went to college.

Matthew: Yeah, Lulu's at college right now.

Annie: What is that like?

Matthew: It's been very sad. For me, at first it was very sad, and then like... I don't know if it's just however schedules landed, we wound up... I feel like I've been able to see her a little more than I thought I would. I will say, to her credit, she's been very communicative. Like I'll get to check in with her a lot. And that's been really good.

So we took it really hard at the beginning. Since I get to decide which cities I go to on my tour, I booked a show in the town where she goes to school.

Annie: And she got up and sang with you.

Matthew: She came and sang with me.

Annie: It was beautiful.

Matthew: She brought a bunch of college friends and stuff. And then-

Annie: Did you bring them on the bus?

Matthew: Oh, yeah. I brought them to say hey. But they don't like-

Annie: Tour bus is cool. Whether dad's job is cool.

Matthew: Oh, but here's the best part. It was Halloween weekend and I was like, hey, you guys can leave. You don't feel like you have to stay the whole time. And she's like, "Well, yeah, there's this party, this thing we're gonna go to." And I'm like, "Well, don't feel like you have to stay the whole time." But I was saying that but not meaning it but she totally left early. I was like, Dude, she left her dad's show. She sang with me and then bailed. But everybody's good.

I don't know if she's gonna stay at the school she's at right now. I think she's an adventure seeker. And I think she wants to be in New York or she wants to just go experiment, go explore stuff. So I think she might come back and reassess. She's not sure yet.

Annie: Do y'all do life 360?

Matthew: Oh, yeah.

Annie: I'm thinking about our friends that have seniors that are listening right now. When your kid goes to college, they stay on life 360. Like do you still know where she has all time? Or when does that switch? That went around when I was a student.

Matthew: We've kept her on life 360. And I think she knows it. It's just kind of we don't really speak of it.

Annie: But talk to her. Lulu if you're listening.

Matthew: But there's been a couple times where Emily will call me and she's like, "You know, she was out till like 3 a.m. two nights in a row." And we're like, Okay, should we know that? Should we call her on it or whatever? I don't know. I will say, she's a good kid. She's surrounded by really good people down there. It's like, hey, you're in college. If you're gonna stay up till 3 a.m., you've got to figure out how to get up for your 8 o'clock class.

Annie: You gotta go to class. That's exactly right.

Matthew: So we're keeping an eye on it. But we're trying not to like... my wife probably looks at it more than I do.

Annie: What grade is Delaney in this year?

Matthew: She's a sophomore in high school.

Annie: Okay, so you got two more years with her.

Matthew: She'll be 16 and she's dreaming of getting her driver's license. But she's scared to drive. I'm like, how about you drive us to Chick-fil-A or whatever? She's like, "No, Dad, I don't want to drive." I'm like, "How are you gonna get your license?" Did you ever watch the show *The Middle* with Sue Heck?

Annie: Yes, yes, I can see it in my head.

Matthew: We used to love that show. But that girl failed her driver's license test like six times.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Matthew: And then finally Mercy like gave it to her. But I keep joking with Delaney, I'm like, "You're gonna Sue Heck this."

Annie: Maybe you have to practice. Oh, bless her heart.

Matthew: Everybody's doing really well considering... it's a different season for our family and, you know, I think it's made me have a greater appreciation. I'm anticipating the holidays even more. Because it's like, hey, we're all gonna be together.

Annie: They'll be in the home. I mean, Lulu will be there for the whole break. And college breaks are so long.

Matthew: Yes, it is long. I'm like, how's school going? She's like, I'm kind of bored. I'm like, what do you mean you're bored? She's like, "Oh, I just take a class and then I wait around for the next one." And I'm like, "Well, that's college." But she's like, "I don't know." I was like, "Are you being challenged?" You know what I mean?

Annie: Yeah.

Matthew: I think she's leaning more towards the music industry than she ever has. And now she's starting to reassess.

Annie: I have a friend who goes to Samford and she was telling me that she's coming home the week after Thanksgiving. She comes up for Thanksgiving, she goes back for one week, and then they're done. She's like, "And then I'm in Nashville for the rest of December in the first three weeks."

Matthew: Yeah, that's exactly-

Annie: Wild!

Matthew: It is wild. I don't remember it being like that.

Annie: I don't think we were done. I don't think I was done the first week in December.

Matthew: Where did you go to school?

Annie: Georgia?

Matthew: Oh.

Annie: Yeah.

Matthew: Duh. I knew that. I knew that.

Annie: I know. I know you know.

Matthew: Do you go see games every year?

Annie: I've been to a couple games the last couple years. I don't go back to Athens for them. It is hard to get tickets when they're as good as they are. And I actually enjoy

the game more being able to watch it on TV and hear Kirk Herbstreit and the guys talking about it. I think it's just as fun. So in New York, there's a bar that is like the Georgia Alumni Association. So you go there and you're like, everyone here went to school with me.

Matthew: Oh, that's gotta be fun.

Annie: So you can do the same thing that you do in the stands of like, what year did you graduate? Oh, my gosh, I bet we both know this. I mean, I've met mutual friends every time I've gone and being like, "Oh, I bet you we both know Candace. I bet we both know Karen." And it's been right every time.

Matthew: Because we have mutual friends who are the [partos?] are Georgia fans.

Annie: Yeah.

Matthew: You know who I had on my podcast recently?

Annie: Who?

Matthew: In fact, I think it's out this week is David Pollack, who was like a Georgia football star.

Annie: You had David Pollack?

Matthew: Have you had him on your show?

Annie: No. We were-

Matthew: Are you a fan?

Annie: Yes. We were two grades apart. I'm two grades older than him. He was an unbelievable football player and then broke his neck. Did you talk about it on your show?

Matthew: Now he has a children's book that's inspired by what he went through. It's about not quitting, like overcoming adversity.

Annie: For starters, we're going to link to your episode so that everybody go listen to it now. And then I'm going to call his phone number.

Matthew: You need to have him. He's awesome. Plus, when you talk to guys like that, it's like... if you had Tebow on your show, you know how like by the end of that interview, you're like ready to run a marathon. It's like-

Annie: Once an athlete, always an athlete with those guys. Yeah.

Matthew: But they're born motivational speakers. They kind of talk-

Annie: That's exactly right.

Matthew: All of a sudden it feels like you have a life coach for 30 minutes.

Annie: So you enjoyed talking to him?

Matthew: Oh, yeah. It was great. He lives in Georgia still.

Annie: And love the Lord is what I've heard from mutual friends.

Matthew: Oh, yeah. And he's incredibly bold about his faith. He was on ESPN for years. But now he does this YouTube thing.

Annie: Oh, cool.

Matthew: He was talking. I was like, "I don't know you could make money on YouTube." So he's shifted. And he's like, that way I can still get my kids games and it's less demanding than ESPN.

Annie: Wow.

Matthew: Anyways, that's my only Georgia football connection.

Annie: I love that. David Pollack. That's a big deal. That's not a small deal to someone in the early 2000s Georgia fan.

Matthew: He could have been an NFL great and then suffered a career. So when you hear somebody like... when you talk to people who faced... I mean, we all face adversity in our lives. But like when it's like dream-altering adversity, too, right?

Annie: Yeah.

Matthew: I don't know. I feel like there's a depth of perspective that comes or uniqueness of perspective that comes from that. You get back on your feet and like, okay, I was going to be the football star.

Annie: Speaking of Jeff Pardo, another Georgia fan, one of my favorite episodes we have ever done is we had him the day before the Doves and then the day after the Doves when he won producer of the year.

Matthew: I remember that.

Annie: We didn't know if he had won yet. So he didn't tell me until he sat down. I just sobbed. I couldn't believe it. It was amazing.

Matthew: I was so proud of him.

Annie: I know. It's unreal.

Matthew: You know, he and I work together-

Annie: All the time.

Matthew: All the time.

Annie: Y'all write so many songs together for so many people, Matthew. I don't know how you do it all.

Matthew: The funniest part is we are so mean to each other.

Annie: I believe that.

Matthew: That's our love language is sarcasm.

Annie: Y'all also been friends for 20 years or something.

Matthew: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We were in a band together and then now we write together. But we're both from Illinois and we kind of have the Chicago kind of bite to our sarcasm. So sometimes people are writing with us and they don't even know.

Annie: Awkward.

Matthew: They're like, Dude, what you just like... because he'll have an idea and I'll be like, You know that was my idea first and you just stole that. And then the other person's like, "What are like... We'll say something that has a little extra bite to it and then the other people are like, Oh, my gosh. We're like, No, we're just messing around.

Annie: Did he write *Don't Stop Praying* with you?

Matthew: Yes, he did.

Annie: I mean, I want us to talk about the Christmas book that just came out, but I have got to talk about *Don't Stop Praying*. I mean, the response to that song, Matthew. Could you have ever?

Matthew: So cool.

Annie: I mean, I guess you hope it every time. But could you ever predicted? It is like everywhere.

Matthew: This was one time where the minute the song was written, and I'm not being dramatic, I had put out another record not long before. And we were supposed to go with another radio single from that record. It was called *My Story Your Glory*. It was a double album, 22 songs. So we were going to like really kind of... basically, you release a record, and then you kind of have a record cycle of two years before you release something else.

But when I wrote *Don't Stop Praying*, I immediately thought, I think it's time to turn the page sooner. Because I felt I knew what we were going into in 2024. And there was something like... I literally felt like the Lord was saying, this is a message for right now.

Annie: An Esther kind of song.

Matthew: Yes. Yes. And so I sent it to the label, I said, "Here's what I'm thinking. Instead of going one more song on this record, I feel strongly that this could be a song for right now." And unanimously, they were like, we totally agree.

Annie: Oh, the minute you listen to it, you feel that. Matt Maher sat there a year ago, maybe now, and I quote him about this all the time. But he said, the supernatural thing about music and art is whatever is going on with the songwriter when they write it, the Holy Spirit puts that in the song, and you experience it on the other side. What was prayer doing in your life when you wrote it that made it do this when that song came out?

Matthew: So two things. One part of my story that I can't speak about the names yet because the redemption hasn't been seen yet, and it wouldn't be right. But someone very close to me, struggling for a long time in a really bad way, to the point where it was hitting what we thought was a rock bottom. I had gotten to the point in that relationship where I had sort of stopped praying for them to get clean, for them... I

just... I don't know if you've ever had a relationship where you're just like, You know what, maybe it's just not God's will. So I'm not going to pray.

But meanwhile, I was watching some other people who were close to me and close to this person that just had this relentless pursuit. They just wouldn't quit on this person, right? It was very much like the prodigal story. And I was challenged because I was... so I was in the middle of this crisis with this person and being humbled that I had sort of thrown up the white flag and these other people were still wearing out the floor, just going like, God, we're going to keep interceding for this person.

And I brought that in to the day that I was writing with Jeff because I was in the middle of this. I mean, it was 911 kind of situation. Right? And so feeling convicted about prayer and challenged as I'm watching somebody else continue to storm heaven's gates, like, Oh Lord, we're not going to quit. That was the big inspiration for the song.

And then in my own personal journey, and I don't know if this resonates with you at all, because you're someone in the public spotlight a lot, but I honestly had been feeling the Lord like putting it in my heart in the form of a question like, Matthew, have you gotten better at talking about Jesus than talking to Him?

Annie: Ooh, boy!

Matthew: That question still rocks me, even as I ask it in front of you. But that's what led me to write a whole album about the topic of prayer. Not just that song. But it was like, okay, what does it look like for me to... I feel like I write a lot about like, okay, God, help me not to be so focused on the outward appearance. Annie's podcast has taught me about my Enneagram, like I know... But just from a spiritual perspective of like, man, I'm writing all these books and it's all about spinning creativity and what's God teaching me and how quickly can I teach it to somebody else? And it's like, am I mining my Bible just for a song idea? God help me, God forgive me. Am I... right?

Annie: Yeah. Dude, I'm right with you.

Matthew: It was that. I don't want that to be the story of my life. I don't want to be somebody who did a good job of talking about him but didn't preserve the time talking with him.

Annie: The whole album came from that.

Matthew: The whole album. So every song is about the different types of prayers that we pray throughout our lives. My favorite moment is the song that'll never be a hit or anything. It's called *The Place Only We Know*. And it's all about just preserving that. It's remembering that invitation to go to the quiet place, to go to the closet.

Annie: And the album is titled *Don't Stop Praying*.

Matthew: Yeah. So every song on the record is just like... in its own way. Like there's a song about Lula going off to college. Song called *18 Summers*, but it's like-

Annie: I love that song.

Matthew: It's a prayer for family. You know what I mean? So I don't know. So there you go.

[00:27:30] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our incredible partners, [Our Place](#). As you plan out your Christmas Eve meal or Christmas morning breakfast, make sure you leave Forever Chemicals out of it. Our Place's cookware can help make that possible.

Our Place is a mission-driven and female-founded brand that makes beautiful kitchen products that are healthy and sustainable. Most cookware brands continue to use PFAS and Teflon due to their low cost. But leading the change, Our Place has always been free of Forever Chemicals and offers the most durable, toxin-free ceramic coatings, ensuring a healthy, safe cooking experience. Plus their pants are so cute too. They have so many fun colors to choose from.

In addition to cookware, forever chemicals are also frequently used in appliances, especially air fryers, pressure cookers, crockpots, and even the rim of blenders. That's why Our Place came out with non-toxic appliances too that are changing the game.

Go to [fromourplace.com](#) and enter the code TSF at checkout. And our friends are going to get 10% off sitewide. That's [fromourplace.com](#) and the code is TSF. Like That Sounds Fun. Our Place offers 100 trial with free shipping and returns.

Sponsor: And I just got to tell you about one more incredible partner, [Lumen](#). Lumen is the world's first handheld metabolic coach. And I love mine. It's a device that measures your metabolism through your breath. And on the app, it lets you know if you're burning fat or carbs. It gives you tailored guidance to improve your nutrition, your workouts, your sleep, and even stress management. Y'all, it is so interesting. Being your own science experiment is so fun.

Your metabolism is your body's engine. It's how your body turns the food you eat into fuel that keeps you going. So Lumen gives you recommendations to improve your metabolic health. Once you breathe into it, it gives you a personalized nutrition plan for that day based on your measurements. But you can also breathe into it before and after workouts — that's my favorite time — and meals so you know exactly what's going on in real time.

So if you want to stay on track with your health this holiday season, go to Lumen.me/TSF to get 15% off your Lumen. That's Lumen.me/TSF. And my friends are going to get 15% off your purchase. Lumen makes a great gift too. Thank you Lumen for sponsoring this episode and telling me about my metabolism. I'm so thankful.

That link and pretty much every other link you could ever hope for remember are in the show notes below wherever you're listening, or we'll send them straight to you in Friday's AFD Week in Review. So you will have the links and the deal that they're offering my friends right there. Make sure you're signed up for that email. We hope it's the best email of your week. You can sign up for that in the show notes below as well.

Sponsor: Okay, friends, I have to tell you about something that has seriously changed my hair game, [Prose](#). If you've been following along, you know I recently went a little darker in my hair color for fall and winter. But the real magic, the health of my hair, I don't have to stress about it because Prose has this custom care system that has totally transformed my routine.

Since 2017, Prose has been taking hair and skincare to a whole new level with custom formulas created just for you. We're talking about real personalization here. Prose uses smart AI and a team of cosmetic chemists to craft products that are based on over 80 unique factors specifically for you.

Plus Prose is so confident you'll love their products that they offer the Prose promise. If you're not totally in love with your first order, they've got you covered. It's on Prose. Prose is so confident that they'll bring out your best hair that they're offering an exclusive trial offer of 50% off your first hair care subscription order at Prose.com/ThatSoundsFun. So get your free consultation, get your one-of-a-kind formula and see the difference custom hair care can make with 50% off at Prose.com/ThatSoundsFun.

Okay, now back to our conversation with Matthew.

[00:31:36] <music>

Annie: I spoke this morning at Ramsey Solutions and did their devo.

Matthew: Oh, nice.

Annie: I love being down there and doing their Devo for them.

Matthew: That's cool. Do they pay you in like stock options?

Annie: And getting every dollar access to the app?

Matthew: I think that'd be pretty cool.

Annie: One of the things I said to them that is, I have felt the Lord so pushing me on is that scripture in Philippians that says, "I want to know Christ." And I just thought if the only thing I pursue next year in my mornings with the Lord is I want to know Christ. Because I am so good at talking about him, but do I know Him? Right?

Matthew: Annie, here's where I find grace in that is, the fact that you're asking that question and I'm asking that question in a weird way reminds me that the answer is yes. And reminds me who my heart belongs to. Like the fact that-

Annie: That we care.

Matthew: Yeah. Conviction gets a bad rap. Conviction is necessary. And we need that. I'm totally with you because I think that's one of the negative side effects. Like side effects might include uncontrollable vomiting. But when you live your life like there's microphones in front of you and you're on stage, you and me both, it's like... and I think our intentions are good. But I think it's the equivalent of like, I can't keep pouring this water out and then expect for it to still be full when I've finished pouring it out.

I'd be the first one to confess that I've neglected the filling-up part all too often. So I want that to be a mission of mine moving forward.

Annie: We love talking about prayer on the podcast. And when *Don't Stop Praying...* The first time I heard it was last year at the Kloves when we all got to hold up signs while you sang it. And the whole time I'm holding up a sign and I'm like, Wait, hold on. I need to actually listen to my friend, Matthew. I need to put this down. I can't keep holding this sign because I need to hear what this song says. The response at every show has to be insane.

Matthew: But do you know why? Because everybody's praying for something. And everybody needs to be reminded about the perseverance of prayer. So here's what we've been doing at our show. I've never done something like this before. In the second half of our show, we come out, we play *Don't Stop Praying* and then I tell the crowd, Hey, I'm going to invite you to join me in a little bit of a journey for our final few minutes. And I tell them, if you're anything like me, maybe you want to pray, but you get busy, you get sidetracked, whatever it is, but tonight we're going to do what we just sang about doing.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Matthew: So what we do is we play a song and then we have a moment of prayer based on the theme of whatever that song was.

Annie: Wow.

Matthew: It's been so awesome. Like I had an old high school friend came to my show the other night in Illinois. She's like, "You know I haven't been going to church much." And she's like, I prayed more tonight than I've prayed in years and I needed it. So we have these moments of like prayers.

There's one moment where we just pray a listening prayer after my song *Truth Be Told*, which is just about like, what does it look like to know that we can go to God with honest prayer? And I say, Lord, search me and know me. And then we all just be still. And you can hear a pin drop in the room.

And at the end of the night, last thing I'll tell you, so we bring a prayer wall out with us and it's in the lobby and people can fill out these tags just to let us know what they're praying for. And then we take the tags home to Nashville and we pray for people. But we bring the wall on stage at the end of the night. And you want to talk about perspective of like... I read some of the tags out and we all just spend time praying for each other.

But I'm telling you, I mean like when you get perspective of like... it's like if you asked all of your listeners, you have so many people listening to your podcast, if they all filled out a prayer tag, right? Like the perspective of what somebody... you're speaking into their story today and someone's battling cancer. Somebody's marriage is in trouble. Somebody's having... needs financial breakthrough, whatever it is.

So every night we just spend time reading what's going on. And it's a mom going, "I'm praying for my son who's turned away from the Lord." It's a wife going, "I'm

praying for my husband to accept Christ." I mean, you name it. It's like, Oh, pretty powerful.

Annie: And you'll bring them home and then pray. I bet your dad gets on it when he sees those little tags.

Matthew: My mom makes these like scrapbooks with all the prayer tags. I'll show you next time you come to my house. For all the times I think I've probably missed God's leading, that's one moment where I'm like, "I heard him. I was obedient and writing the song that needed to be written, even though it was coming from a place of "I don't do this well. Like I'm struggling with this. I need..." But then it was like for such a time.

And so to see that happen is like, Okay, Lord, help me to pay attention even more. You know what I mean?

Annie: Yeah. It's been beautiful to watch. I mean, just to see the way people respond to the song.

Matthew: Oh, it's cool. I mean, we started buying these mobile billboards across the country. We bought one in Las Vegas for like a week straight every night on the Vegas Strip. This truck would drive down the Vegas Strip and it would just say, Don't stop praying.

Annie: Wow.

Matthew: And like we partnered with some radio stations in different markets, Washington DC, like Pennsylvania Avenue leading up to the election. So that was pretty sweet.

Annie: Thank you for writing it.

Matthew: Oh man.

Annie: That's a special song.

Matthew: It's been a sweet season for me and a challenging one too, you know? I think what I've realized, Annie, is whether it's a song or a book, what I'm writing is not what I have currently achieved, but who I aspire to be.

Annie: That's right. Me too.

Matthew: Do you know what I'm saying? That eliminates the... Like the word "Title" will never be applied as a title for me.

Annie: That's right. I just finished a first draft of a book that didn't come out until '26. You know how that goes, having to write books way ahead of time. And like chapter 11 or something, I was like, Oh no. And now I have to do it. I was like, I wasn't writing this to change my life.

Matthew: No. This is for somebody else.

Annie: I was like, oh, no. I mean, I remember sitting at my computer and pausing and being like, Crap.

Matthew: But that's the best part because it's like when I'm reading something you wrote or somebody else wrote, like when I know it's coming from their own...

Annie: The middle?

Matthew: Yeah. When it's coming from the core, then it means more to me too. So I...

Annie: Which do you like more? Writing books or songs?

Matthew: Oh, songs. Hands down. Songs are like... you know, it's like, anything's possible. You're in this room and it's like this bouncy ball all around the room. You're saying, Oh, this could... you know? It feels like a... I always say the songwriting room is where no dream crushers are allowed. The song could be anything in that day. And then when it leaves the room, everybody else gets to put their opinions on it. Books can be that way too. But writing a book is a little more isolating.

Annie: Yeah. I mean, it's a long time till anybody else sees what you're working on.

Matthew: Yeah. For me, you know what I've started doing is a buddy of mine is an incredible writer and he's way more skilled at the craft. He's put in the 10,000 hours of the book writing the way I have on the song. And I'm like, "I want to get better at writing books, not just further." And so I was like, what if I treated my book writing like a songwriting session?

Annie: Oh, and y'all just sit in it together.

Matthew: Yeah. Just like this. You and me, like we should do something together like that.

Annie: Uh-huh.

Matthew: Because it was like, we're hanging and it's like, okay. Because when I'm by myself, it's going to take me four years to write a book because I'll sit down and then I get

angsty with the silence and I get up and leave. But when I'm with my buddy and we're like co-writing a song, there's no music, it's like, oh, that feels good.

Annie: So did you do that with *Come Home For Christmas*?

Matthew: Yeah. I put his name on there.

Annie: Oh yeah.

Matthew: Matt Linton.

Annie: Oh my gosh. I love Matt Linton. I didn't even see that.

Matthew: So we've done a couple of things together and it like-

Annie: He's so gifted. You're right. Talk about 10,000 hours of being a good writer.

Matthew: No, he knows the arc of it. And yet for me it's like, I never wanted to have books where like... I know there's some people that have a ghostwriter. And that never felt right to me because I was like, I'm a writer and I want to write books, but I want to write it in a way that is going to-

Annie: That works for you.

Matthew: ...that feel creative.

Annie: Dude, that is so brilliant. So you and Matt would just like powwow together and like, okay, what do you think about this and this? The problem with cute books like this that are deep on the inside is you bamboozle everyone. You think you're getting a cute book-

Matthew: It looks like a sweet little stocking stuffer.

Annie: And it is not, dude. It is like a devotional. I mean, it's a deep well.

Matthew: That cover is cute though, isn't it?

Annie: That's the problem. It's so cute.

Matthew: That was my work. When they sent me that design... hey, do you often like the first draft of the designs they send you?

Annie: No, no.

Matthew: Okay.

Annie: Never. I don't know that we've ever picked a first draft cover for a book.

Matthew: That was the first time that... when they sent me that, I was like-

Annie: Yeah, there it is.

Matthew: ...That's very cute.

Annie: Wow. It is so cute.

Matthew: And I was like, I never thought of me having a cute book cover.

Annie: I know. And then you get on the inside and you and Matt have written this like very important-

Matthew: It goes a little deeper than you'd think.

Annie: Yeah. What is it about this? Why'd you want to do that?

Matthew: Because coming home for Christmas for me has been... Here's why. I don't like how Christmas feels the older I get.

Annie: Interesting.

Matthew: I don't like the feeling of like... I wish I could go back to the Christmases of my childhood, like the wonder of that. And I find myself just settling into, well, Christmas is just different now because of this or Christmas is just different now, whatever, that. We could all fill in that blank. Well, Christmas is different now because the kids are out of the house or Christmas is different now because my parents are gone or this, whatever.

And it's like, I wanted to explore Luke 2 with fresh eyes. And I wanted to ask God to help me see, is it possible to experience the wonder of Christmas and not just... Again, not on what we were just saying about talking about Jesus, but not to Him. It's like, okay, here I am. Like my family calls me Mr. Christmas. I'm always on Christmas tour. I'm doing these things. But then Christmas comes and goes and I've spent the whole season entertaining other people, but like not really entertaining, you know, making room in my own heart.

Annie: Wow.

Matthew: So this book, again, it was like a first person, like, I want to see the story of Jesus' birth through new eyes. I want to go through my own story and realize what really matters at Christmas time. That's kind of the why.

Annie: So everybody's hearing this the week before Christmas. So we are at that point there... This is the 19th. Thursday the 19th. So we're at that point where people... like our team, this is our last work day tomorrow and then we're off for a couple of weeks.

Matthew: I make my team go through Christmas.

Annie: Yeah. They don't even get Christmas day off.

Matthew: No.

Annie: No, no, no. You're just like Santa. Keep making it elves. Keep making it. We're recording more pods.

Matthew: That's right.

Annie: But we are getting to the point in the Christmas season where you're decorating is done, you've done all that, you've got the parties, now it's time to go home. Now it's time to get with your family. We just had a really hard election season, no matter where you land on it. You're going to be sitting around the table with people who did not vote like you voted and giving gifts to people. And there may be people who have decided they're not coming this year because of that. And so how do we come home when that wonder doesn't exist like when we were kids? And this was a really tough fall for a lot of families. How do we come home to that?

Matthew: There's a chapter called *Come Home to Forgiveness*. Each chapter is about different things that the story of the birth of Jesus invites us to come home for. And it reminds us that when you read the story about the birth of Jesus, like all the main characters in that story they were all coming home. They didn't realize it. They were all searching for something. So I think about that. Like, what are we all searching for this Christmas?

The forgiveness chapter talks a lot about the family component, like to speak to your question of like, how do we love each other well and seek to not be divisive and like soak up the time we get with the ones that we love? Those are really tough things to do. But I'll tell you, the more that the story of Christmas comes alive in us, the more we can receive the things we need to be able to pour out to other people.

Because another chapter talks about compassion, coming home to compassion. So understanding... It's why I bring that prayer wall on stage every night. When you realize that everybody's fighting a hard battle, it can't help but fill you with a little bit more compassion for somebody else's struggle, somebody else's why. I've heard it said, if everybody took their problems and put them in a big pile, you could see what everybody else was going through. You'd gladly take the ones that you're struggling with back. That's called perspective.

So almost taking that approach into the holidays can help us. But also just the reminder of how short life is, how brief it is, making the most... like, okay, is there a grudge that's worthy of being let go of in choice of forgiveness? But it is hard with family. I mean, there's going to be some empty seats at table in the West House, Gypsy, because there's division. I mean, my family's touched by that too. You know what I mean? Where, oh, I'm not as close to this person as I should be.

What does it look like to do my best to build great relationships, even if it doesn't mean full restoration? Because some of that's not up to us, right?

Annie: That's right.

Matthew: We know those truths about forgiveness. I wrote a lot about that in the past. The prisoner that it really frees is you.

Annie: That's right.

Matthew: So choosing to set that free.

Annie: It's hard, man. I listened to Pastor Mark Batterson, who's in DC, talk about it recently on the banning features.

Matthew: About the family thing?

Annie: Yeah. And about what do you do? And he said, you know, I've been in DC for 28 years or something. He said, I've seen six administrations come through or whatever his number is. And he was like, the King's still on the throne, which is a Christian-y thing to say. And also-

Matthew: Also true.

Annie: When we sit around the table with family, that being what leads... those being the glasses that I put on of like, everyone here tried the best they could this year in every way. I genuinely believe that most people do the best they can with what they have every time. Whether it's election or a funny thing that happened in the summer

or a wedding where your uncle said something stupid and you haven't let it go. All that could have happened this year.

And you go, is everybody probably doing the best they can with what they have? And did I do the best I could with what I had? Then that's where we can start. Is that God's still in control. And I bet everybody did the best they could.

Matthew: It's funny because on our fall tour, we were going right up to the holidays. One of the moments of prayer is... and the crowd starts to laugh in the middle of the prayer, which I think it's okay to laugh in prayer.

Annie: I do too.

Matthew: Sometimes I'll say something that's funny while I'm praying, but I also think, does that make God smile? Because He knows that's how He wired me as a bit of a comedian. Can you imagine what Dave Barnes' prayer life is like?

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Matthew: I mean, he's just so funny.

Annie: There's no way he's only serious.

Matthew: But I pray for the audience. I'm like, Lord, I just pray... Chances are there's a lot of people in this audience dreading the holidays because they have dysfunctional families. Lord, give them patience. Give them strength. There's an old episode of *The Office* where Andy keeps saying, like, beer me, beer me that water. And then Jim's like, Lord, beer me strength. I don't quite say that at my show. But I do think about there is... we have to pray that the Lord will help us put up with situations like that.

[00:47:23] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends, just interrupting this conversation to tell you about one of our partners, [Hiya Health](#). With all of the holiday treats and school parties and candy floating around, I know you're probably struggling to get your kids to take their vitamins too. But thankfully Hiya Health has you covered.

Hiya has created the pediatrician-approved chewable vitamin that is made with zero sugar and zero gummy junk. And my MiniBFFs are a fan. If you have some Barbie lovers in your family, now's the right time to order Hiya Health too, because you can currently get their bottles in Barbie pink with a limited edition Barbie unboxing experience.

Your first order of Hiya Health always comes with cute stickers so your kids can decorate the bottle and they're glass and reusable. So you just refill them with every new shipment. We've worked out a special deal with Hiya for my friends. You get the bestselling children's vitamin, 50% off your first order.

To claim this deal, you have to go to Hiyahealth.com/ThatSoundsFun. That's HiyaHealth.com/ThatSoundsFun and get your kids the full body nourishment they need to grow into healthy adults.

Sponsor: One more incredible partner I get to tell you about, [Aura Frames](https://AuraFrames.com). We've all been there racing to multiple stores, spending way too much time scanning shelves for the perfect present, only to settle for another gift card. Well, here's a gift idea that could make your family really happy this year. A digital picture frame from Aura Frames loaded with all your family's favorite pics.

Oprah added it to her favorite things three times. And if my family had a favorite things list, it would be on it as well. The best part, this is a gift that keeps on giving. It has unlimited storage. So you and the rest of the family can upload as many pics to the frame as you want year round. All you need is the free Aura app.

So give your mom or dad or anyone in your life, the most thoughtful gift ever this year. Save on the perfect gift by visiting AuraFrames.com. And my friends are going to get \$35 off Aura's bestselling Carver mat frame when you use the promo code FUN at checkout. That's AuraFrames.com promo code FUN. This deal is exclusive to my friends. So get yours now in time for the holidays. Terms and conditions apply.

Sponsor: Listen, I've gotten a lot of texts from friends asking if I really do like my [Helix sleep mattress](https://Helix.com) because they're in the market for a new one. And I am telling you, I sleep like the dead on that thing. You guys, I am telling you I'm sleeping so good.

My old mattress had done its time and formed a real lump that looked like I was sleeping in a ravine, but I had to heaven overslept every day for the first week I slept on my Helix mattress. It is so comfortable. It was concerning. I was late every day.

And their sleep study stats say I'm not the only one who's sleeping like a dream. Helix measured the sleep performance of participants after switching from their old mattress to a Helix mattress like me. And here's what they found. 82% saw an increase in their deep sleep cycle, including me. Participants on average achieved 39 more minutes of overall sleep per night or in the morning, as was my case. So basically this mattress is changing lives out there, including mine.

If you're looking for a new one for Christmas, or you're refreshing some things around the house before the new year, don't miss this deal, you guys. My friends get 20% off and two free pillows for all mattress orders at Helixsleep.com/ThatSoundsFun. Again, that's helixsleep.com/ThatSoundsFun.

And now back to finish up our conversation with Matthew.

[00:51:04] <music>

Annie: So many of our friends, I would love for you to speak to this. You do a little bit in the book. But so many of our friends have been praying. I mean, I am a great example. I was hoping I'd be married this year, right? Or I'd have met somebody that we had moved that to that degree. Last Christmas, I thought surely next year. There are people who think surely next year I'll have a baby. Surely next year we'll have that financial breakthrough. Surely next year that friend of ours will be clean. Surely next year. And now they're here and it's not. And they're like, but God didn't answer my prayer. And now I have to sit in front of that same Christmas tree with the same ornaments that last year, when I looked at those, I said, Next year it'll be different. And it's not. What do you say to them? I mean, you've experienced that. I've experienced that. No one is not touched by that feeling.

Matthew: Well, the way that you just painted that picture is so real for so many of us in different seasons of our lives. And like even the way I would want to answer it would be with the greatest sensitivity to go, like, it's not... there is no... like, yeah, we could say the King is still on the front throne. Like there's things that we know to be true. And they're just as true as the reality of the heaviness of the situations we face.

I think the first thing that came to mind for me when you posed that scenario is like, who's sitting there with you and coming home to Emmanuel, if I'm thinking about it in the context of what does it look like to come home for Christmas? It's like, it means you can come home with your grief. You can come home with your breakthrough you haven't seen yet. You can come home with the that you're needing. You can come home with your disappointment. And know that His name is Emmanuel, which means God with us.

It doesn't mean the answer is yet with us, but the one who holds all the answers is with us. And for now, that has to be enough. I think at the end of the day, isn't that what... I feel like, Lord, forgive me for forgetting that Jesus is the answer. You are the answer above all other answers I'm needing, that you are the fulfillment of every other void that I think I have.

There is one who can truly fill the void, right? So I may not be seeing things in this... in my reality. I may not see the breakthrough that I'm hoping to see yet, but is Jesus enough for me? I'll be honest, there's some moments where I'm like, I don't know if my heart cry is yes. Lord, let it be so though. Help me to come home to that.

Annie: I saw an influencer, a big deal influencer a couple of days ago, crying. It was a guy. He was crying on his Instagram. And he talks a lot about his mental health, which I think is really beautiful. But he kind of said, In my worst moments like this, I just wish I could go home. And he's like, but home doesn't actually exist anymore. The home I want to go to. It's like you said, the wonder of your childhood Christmas.

I mean, I wanted to write back and be like, I can, I can tell you what you're actually craving. You aren't actually craving your childhood home. You aren't actually... what you're craving is Emmanuel. You want to come home to-

Matthew: A spiritual homecoming. There it is for me. You know, me longing for the Christmases of my childhood, where it was like just that feeling, it's like, okay, we can't physically come home, but we can, in the spiritual sense, come home to like all that God offers us at Christmas time, whether from... you know, like the old Christmas song from one to 92. Whatever age we are. There's no reason why... I mean, what are we told about scripture that it's alive and it's active? In other words, it's not dead. It's not a you read Luke 2 once, but by the 100th time you read it, it's not alive anymore. It shouldn't make you feel all the feelings that you should feel. So I think that's the beauty of it, like coming home to that. But yeah, that's exactly it is the spiritual coming home has to be the first coming home.

Annie: Yeah, that's what I just thought. I don't want to remix his reel and make a thing out of it, but I wish I could DM and be like, I know what you're feeling. It's so deep and it's so real. And I actually know the answer for you, my guy.

Matthew: And it speaks to the longing in every human heart.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah. That's it. Well, as our last Christmas show or as our last show of the year today and our show before Christmas, I want you to tell me what sounds fun to you, but then would you pray for us as we go into Christmas? So first tell me what sounds fun to you. What's Matthew West doing for fun these days?

Matthew: Okay. Well, I'm going to sort of tie this into my favorite story of the book.

Annie: Oh, great. Do it.

Matthew: So what sounds fun to me these days is finding meaningful Christmas gifts for the ones I love, not just a valuable monetary sense. And the reason is one of the cornerstone stories of *Come Home for Christmas*, the book, is a gift that my grandmother gave me every year. She never had any money, but she had a ton of grandkids. She had 10 kids and they all had kids.

Annie: Oh gosh.

Matthew: But every year I would get this blunt object, like sloppily wrapped. And I knew what it was. I could shake it into a jingle and I would open it up and she would take an empty Gerber baby food jar filled with 100 pennies.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Matthew: So I'd get a dollar from my grandma. As kids, we would fake gratitude. And I never thought much of it. But as I got older, I started to realize how many kids she's like, okay, this was an intentional gift. And so over the years, I started to have a greater appreciation for the sacrifice it was. Because she would always have spare change on her nightstand. She was like storing it away throughout the year so she'd have at least something to give me.

But then when I graduated from college, I got another blunt-force object and it was bigger. And I opened it up and she had saved 30 silver dollars to give me for my Christmas gift.

Annie: Aww.

Matthew: And when I think about the most meaningful Christmas gifts I've received, it's not been necessarily the gift card to... No offense to that. If anybody wants to give me a gift card, I'll take it.

Annie: Get that carrot cake.

Matthew: Right. But what sounds fun to me is going in search of the beauty of small, the beauty of little, the beauty of meaningful and coming home to the wonder of that. Can I be the type? I'm not typically wired to be thoughtful in the sense of like, I know she's been eyeing this. I'm going to... or whatever. You know what I mean? Some people just have that gift.

Annie: Yeah. I don't either. It's not in my skill set.

Matthew: But this week before Christmas, like I start like... hopefully before that too, but I started thinking about like, I have fun challenging myself to find meaningful gifts

the way that my grandma gave to me and help my family see the beauty in like small.

I started writing a song the other day, borrowing from the "have yourself a Merry Little Christmas" just to focus on the Merry Little Christmas. And I was thinking about like, what does it look like to find joy in the little things? You know what I mean? The first verse says a one-bedroom apartment, a Charlie Brown tree, two kids with nothing but love in a ring, scraping for rent, but we were rich as could be. Merry Little Christmas.

I was thinking about just these moments. That's what sounds fun to me. Not the epic, you know, Lexus with a bow on top, but like finding like-

Annie: Toyotathon. All the stuff.

Matthew: So I don't know.

Annie: That's beautiful.

Matthew: That's kind of what's on my mind when you ask that question.

Annie: I love that. In our family we draw names. Everybody only gives one gift.

Matthew: See?

Annie: And there's a price max. We do \$50 or less. \$40 or \$50. I should confirm.

Matthew: So you're not getting carried away.

Annie: Just like, well, I'm going to really think about that one cousin and get them something of this. It's beautiful.

Matthew: So what sounds fun to you at Christmas? Because you're the queen of what sounds fun.

Annie: You're going to love this. We do a food competition. Danielle Kartes and I just talked about this and people just heard her episode too. And this year we're doing Deck the Balls and everyone has to make 24 balls to share. And my parents judge-

Matthew: Of what?

Annie: Anything food. Savory or sweet.

Matthew: It just has to be in ball shape.

Annie: Yeah, it just has to be in ball shape. So my parents are the judge. So it's really fun. So I'm in charge of the food competition and matching pajamas.

Matthew: What are you doing? Like, what are you making?

Annie: Well, I think I'm going to do... Danielle suggested those like rice balls with cheese in the middle. So I'm either going to do that and deep fry those or do meatballs. We get judged on whether they're perfect circles or spheres, shape, taste, and design presentation.

Matthew: Oh gosh.

Annie: So I think a lot of people are going to shape them like trees. I'm going to try to make it more like a garland look.

Matthew: That's fantastic.

Annie: It's so fun.

Matthew: And it's got to be a family? One can't just get an invite to come and taste all these. It's got to be family?

Annie: I mean, if you want to come be the celebrity judge on Christmas. We also don't do it till like... you were talking about y'all are going out of town after Christmas. We don't all get together until a couple of days after Christmas. We call it Christmas Steve instead of Christmas Eve. And so it's our Christmas Steve competition. If you're available to be a celebrity guest.

Matthew: Those are fun family traditions.

Annie: It's really fun. Yeah, it's really fun. It's great. And you know, the year it served us the most was the year my nephew died.

Matthew: Really?

Annie: Because TJ lived, you know, two months. He died in August. And that Christmas, we still laughed a lot. We still did butter boards and we still did a competition and we still had matching pajamas and it really served us to have traditions. There was a sadness overlay. There probably always will be in some way, but it really served us to have traditions that made us laugh.

Matthew: Okay. One last thing I'll say. And this is not like a that sounds fun thing.

Annie: No.

Matthew: But speaking of that, like, man, I want to be mindful and I want to help lead my family. My family leads me in this though, in having eyes to see those who are in need, especially at Christmas time, because it is such a hard time at different points in our lives. But like my wife and my daughters are just... they are constantly like... especially my youngest daughter, she's been doing this inner city project and like-

Annie: I saw the pictures that Emily posted.

Matthew: And she's got this heart for these kids. And it's like, I'm watching this and I'm watching it come... I'm watching... Another way to come home for Christmas is like when you see somebody living that out and having compassion, it makes you want to be that way. But having sensitivity for those who are grieving and like looking out for somebody who needs companionship or friendship at Christmas time. My dad was always so good at that. He called us the angels of the night and we had a ton of snow in Chicago. And he would make it an adventure for my brothers and I. We would go stealth and we would shovel driveways for the elderly in our neighborhood. And the thought of them getting up the next morning and seeing that it had all been done for them. And we were called the angels of the night.

Annie: Oh, I love it.

Matthew: And we'd get hot chocolate and it was like a thing. Imagine if we all thought that sounded fun this Christmas, like whatever the equivalent of that could be. That would be... And when our family will do things like that and we don't do it to get the credit, we don't do it to... but it's like you go do those things and fun family things that are actually like, you know, the angels of the night, like stealth acts of compassion for people in need at Christmas. Those are ways that I come home for Christmas and feel like a kid again.

Annie: That's beautiful. Yeah, you're right. And watching what Delaney is doing is... I mean, it was beautiful.

Matthew: It's awesome.

Annie: It's awesome.

Matthew: When your kids start teaching you stuff, it's like, oh, okay.

Annie: Right. I can imagine. Will you pray for us as we go this Christmas?

Matthew: Yeah, this has been so much fun.

Annie: I just love when you're here. So thank you. I'm really grateful.

Matthew: You're awesome. I'll pray a special Christmas prayer for everyone.

Annie: Thank you.

Matthew: Heavenly Father, we love you. We thank you. We thank you that your word is alive and active. We thank you that it's sharper than any two-edged sword, which means in the hands of a great surgeon, you can do a great work of healing in the deepest wounds of our lives. And Lord, this Christmas, we thank you for the greatest story ever told, the greatest gift ever given.

I pray that each person listening to this can acknowledge that the invitation is there for each and every one of us to receive it. No matter how far gone we might feel, no matter how much of a distance we might feel from you, may we read the story of the birth of Jesus and be reminded that it is a story of you pursuing us, you stopping at nothing to bring us home to you.

And so I just pray for anybody who's grieving this Christmas or struggling this Christmas, lonely this Christmas, anybody in need this Christmas, may they choose to bring all of that home to you and be reminded that you are Emmanuel. For those who are filled with joy this Christmas, may they be praying prayers of gratitude for the blessings in their lives.

Lord, we just thank you. We thank you that you are so good to us. We thank you for your son, Jesus. We thank you for Emmanuel, God with us, that the road is hard, but we don't walk it alone. We pray that everybody listening to this will have the merriest of Christmases in Jesus name. Amen.

Annie: Amen. Thank you, friend.

Matthew: Thank you.

Annie: Beautiful.

Matthew: Merry Christmas.

Annie: Merry Christmas.

[01:04:32] <music>

Outro: You guys, isn't he the best? I'm so thankful for him, for his words, for his music, for his friendship. Just adore him and his family. So get your copy of *Come Home for Christmas*. Make sure you're following Matthew on social media. Tell him, thank you for being on the show.

If you enjoyed this episode, I think you'll love any of the three previous episodes when he joined us. You can find all those listed below in the show notes.

If you have any questions from this episode, just drop them in the Q&A box in your Spotify app, if you're a Spotify listener like me or send them to us on Instagram @ThatSoundsFun podcast. We'll try to answer them there.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find. Annie F. Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok. Anywhere you may need me, that is how you can find me.

And I think that's it for me today, friends. Go out or stay home, do something that sounds fun to you, and I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me is a weekend in Nashville. I cannot wait. Just a weekend. We are finishing up work tomorrow and then we are off for a couple of weeks. I'm ready. This will be fun.

Y'all have a great weekend and a wonderful Christmas. Listen out tomorrow because we're dropping a little information on this feed to tell you what is happening on That Sounds Fun podcast in 2025. And you do not want to miss it.

And then we won't be releasing any shows next week since we'll be resting and celebrating Christmas, but we'll be back Monday, December 30th to close out the year with none other than our pal, Eddie Kaufholz. Merry Christmas, my friends.