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[00:01:01] <Music>

Hi friends, welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host, Annie F. Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today, we have got a great show in store for you. Our friend, Ellie Holcomb is back y'all know and adore Ellie as do I.

Her new album Canyon, this is her third full-length solo album, but it's the first one with a major label and it's just incredible. Y'all know, y'all have already been shouting from the rooftops, how unbelievable Canyon is, and I just adore it, I love the album. And I'm just going to go ahead and tell y'all, you have to stick around to the end. Because in a way that I cannot believe Psalm 23 comes up again. Y'all aren't even ready. Here is my conversation with our sweet friend, Ellie Holcomb.

[00:02:00] <Music>

You're about to play the Ryman as a headliner for the first time. How does it feel like?

Ellie: I might burst into tears of joy, I can't believe it.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: It's a dream, I was never brave enough to dream, honestly.

Annie: Ah, Ellie!

Ellie: I literally, and I don't think I would have been brave enough to hit, to say "We're doing this." I was no part of deciding that we were going to do that show.

Annie: They were just like, your manager was like, "We're playing the Ryman." And you're like-

Ellie: Paul Steele, my manager was like, and he didn't even talk with Sam, his wife, it's a married couple team that manages us. He just was like, "Hey, booked it, we are doing it." Because I think I would have been too scared, but I'm so excited. I've never been more excited probably or more nervous. It's that both like, I don't know, you just did a tour, you know how it goes? You're like, "This is my dream."

Annie: I cannot wait, please don't make me do this.

Ellie: And I didn't know...right. And then you're like, "And I'll be right back, because I'm going to go through a lap."

Annie: I go through a lap. I will only walk onstage because my legs are stronger than my brain, that's the only reason I walk on stage.

Ellie: And then I will be so happy to be there.

Annie: You've played it before, with other people?

Ellie: Yes.

Annie: But it's different when it's your name?

Ellie: It is different when it's your name. And we talked about that when you did the whole, That Sounds Fun book tour.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: It's just is like, "Oh, this is so vulnerable." To like show up and be like, "Okay, y'all are coming to just hear me."

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: What? So I just, we have so much, my husband Drew and I, we have so much history in that room.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: It was, our first date was at the Ryman Auditorium.

Annie: Oh my gosh, that's right.

Ellie: We saw a Patty Griffin Concert. When we were walking into the concert, I was like, he was like my best guy friend I swore I'd never date. So the first date, walking into that show, and I'm like, he holds my hand, he has his hand on the small of my back, and I'm like, "This is not, no, this is like my guy friend, this is too weird. This is too weird."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And by the end of the Patty Griffin Show at the Ryman Auditorium, I was like, "I'm going to spend the rest of my life with this man." How crazy is that?

Annie: Just crazy.

Ellie: I always tell people, like maybe-

Annie: The Ryman can do that to you.

Ellie: Yeah. Maybe go on a date to the Ryman, or maybe don't totally discount the person you think will not work.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Because it was a wild experience for me. So then fast-forward, we never dreamed at that... when we first got married-

Annie: Because you were teaching school, right? You were-

Ellie: I was a teacher. Yeah. I was like, "No, no, I'll never play there." So my first time to play was with Andrew Peterson, "Behold The Lamb of God".

Annie: Yes. I remember, I was there.

Ellie: I was the special guest, and I said, "Hi to my mom and dad."

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: I was so excited. And then when Drew and I headlined there, we actually recorded it, we turned it into a record.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And I will, so all our kids have fallen asleep in pack 'n' plays, in the showers backstage.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Rivers, our third took his first steps backstage right before. It just is like, it has a lot of, I cannot believe it has family history for us. Like, "What am I saying?" How is the Mother Church a place where we've had so many family memories, and then still never dreamed that I would headline. So I just cannot, and we're going to have special guests.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: We have an incredible band, The New Respects are opening

Annie: Oh, I love The New Respects.

Ellie: I know.

Annie: Oh my gosh, I love it there. So will you do a tour at some point? Is that part of the plan?

Ellie: I will be on tour, so I basically, we're in that weird year post-COVID, where I'm like fulfilling commitments from last year.

Annie: 2020, yeah.

Ellie: Yeah, that got pushed to this year. And so it's, I'm not doing like a traditional tour. I am going to go out with Lauren Daigle, maybe three dates on tour. With her-

Annie: Oh my gosh! Her arena shows?

Ellie: Yes.

Annie: Ellie!

Ellie: I know, can you believe it?

Annie: What cities? Can you tell a chic or no?

Ellie: I don't know if I'm allowed to tell, we haven't announced it yet.

Annie: Holy cow. I cannot wait. I will be in one of them.

Ellie: I will say this, it's the first three dates of her tour I'm on. And then "The War and Treaty's" opening most of that, but they couldn't do the first three dates-

Annie: You're unavailable.

Ellie: And she was like, "Anyway can you do this?" And I was like, "Let me check? Yes."

Annie: Let me check, cancelling everything, I will be there. Oh my gosh.

Ellie: I'm so pumped.

Annie: I don't care where they are, I'm flying to one of them. That is unbelievable.

Ellie: Isn't so fun?

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Ellie: I cannot wait. She's so dear, I mean, y'all know each other.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: And we've become really great friends this past year. We've been writing, and I don't know, I'm just, I'm so grateful for her friendship. We are all kind of cut from the same cloth-

Annie: Listen, we are all Sevens yes. But y'all two are the same kind of Seven.

Ellie: Yeah.

Annie: Y'all are very similar, I think.

Ellie: It is-

Annie: I say that to people a lot. I'm like, "Ellie and Lauren are my two Seven friends that are the most alike to each other."

Ellie: It's wild.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Like, and it's been so sweet. Because we've met each other before, but getting to know each other this past year, has been one of the gifts of 2020.

Annie: Wow.

Ellie: There was just a little more time to hang out. We did a writing retreat, we went out to California and wrote. And I just, I am so, we wrote a song with Natalie Hemby, who's another-

Annie: Oh my gosh, she's unbelievable.

Ellie: Unbelievable.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Called "Old Friends" because it just is like, I feel like I have known you.

Annie: Wow.

Ellie: How have we not know each other well this whole time? So it's been so, I'm so excited. So it's just, there's a lot of stuff like that, it's not a traditional tour, like a headlining tour.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: But there's a lot dates on the books. We're doing Moon River Music Festival in Chattanooga.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: I still am holding everything with open hands.

Annie: Totally.

Ellie: I'm like, "You know, it's happening."

- Annie:** Ain't that a different way that we are getting to live this year. Is go like-
- Ellie:** Yes.
- Annie:** "Yeah, I mean, we're going to put all the plans out."
- Ellie:** Yeah.
- Annie:** And we seem to be getting to do most of them, but I'm also seeing things get canceled?
- Ellie:** Yeah.
- Annie:** And so-
- Ellie:** We're just still open-ended, and knowing what matters. I think what's beautiful about last year, and I think we talked about this last time we got together via Zoom, it's so fun to be in the same room.
- Annie:** Right, no kidding.
- Ellie:** But I think there is this clarity of what you love, you know?
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Ellie:** You're just like going, "Okay, I can let go of that. I can let go of that." And I love playing music.
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Ellie:** In a room with people there, I love the way it connects our stories. I loved being in the room, at the That Sounds Fun Tour.
- Annie:** It was so sweet, that y'all were there.
- Ellie:** And seeing conversation, I just, it is, there is something so beautiful of being in a room together, and being a part of a conversation or a show where you're just a reminder that we're not alone.
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Ellie:** Jeff Tweedy says it, he is in Wilco, Jeff Tweedy, says, "We go to concerts to suffer together."

Annie: Oh, yeah. That's beautiful.

Ellie: And I feel like it's so true.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: It's just there's a sense of connection.

Annie: Yeah, Shane Bernard was on, Shane and Shane were on, and he said, "When everyone in the room sings the same thing it changes everybody."

Ellie: Oh, my gosh. That's exactly right.

Annie: Right. So and he was like, "It doesn't have to be worship." But it is, obviously, it happens with worship. But when we're at your shows, or Mumford & Sons, or Dave Barnes, or Drew at the Ryman. I mean, Drew at the Ryman, I mean, I wrote about him in *That Sounds Fun*. He saved the Ryman for me after I had a really sad experience there, right? Like Drew's the one who resurrected it for me. And there's just something about when we all sing the same thing.

Ellie: We're wired for it.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: We really are, I mean, and I kind of write about this in the kids book that I wrote, *Who Sang the First Song*.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: But that whole book was born from this question, from Emmylou, "Who sang the first song?" I asked her. And she goes, "Mm, Dolly Parton." And I'm like, "You're a Tennessean, I love you, I love so much, she is a great guest. Mommy's going to go do some research and I will be right back."

Annie: That's right.

Ellie: And I'll be right back and write you a book. But that whole Tim Keller's, sermon talks about in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, how people often say they contradict each other. Because they're both sort of telling the Creation Story.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: But they tell it in different ways, and so he says "So many people when they talk about the Creation Story, they talk about the what of the Creation Story." And he's like, "I want to know why."

Annie: Mh-hmm.

Ellie: And so when you look at Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, Genesis 1, is actually that, it's written in the form of an archaic Hebrew poem. And so it's literally as if, when God was creating the earth, the first thing we see in Scripture has that cadence and that rhythm of, "And there was morning and there was evening, and it was good." And it was good.

And so why would God sing, like basically introduced the Creation Story to us and in the form of a poem? Well, it's literally as if He's saying the earth into being, and why would he do that? Because He made the whole earth and every single one of us to sing.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: To sing of His goodness to sing of what's true, and good, and lovely, and fun. And it makes total sense to me that when we sing together, something shifts in all of us.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: I love it so much.

Annie: It's beautiful. One of the things as we get to do is we tell people before, we tell people in our AFD Week in Review email, who I'm talking to the next week. So they can ask questions to you, I think we've done this before.

Ellie: Yes.

Annie: But you're leading me to one of the questions that one of our friends asked, "With Ellie starting her career not in music, and then in music with Drew, and then not regularly doing music. But now with the new album Canyon." And I mean, because you kind of have woven music and writing books. And what do you love about Drew that you wouldn't know if y'all didn't create music together?

Ellie: Oh, what a great question.

Annie: I know, I loved it too.

Ellie: Oh my goodness. What would I not know if we didn't create music together?

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Oh man. I think there is a beautiful thing that happens, there's a beautiful, I think there's a grief that I wouldn't know in him, that has been, that has come-

Annie: Do you see it when y'all write?

Ellie: That I see when we write sometimes.

Annie: Wow.

Ellie: And that's it for all of us, right? Sometimes songs are able to name things that we couldn't name ourselves.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: You're like, "Oh, you said it." And so, obviously, I've seen him grieve in our marriage.

Annie: Oh sure.

Ellie: It's like we're not, that's not like never present-

Annie: Now, the first time I saw him sad was not enough.

Ellie: No, but there's been a connection in music, and the way that he's written about some of the grief in his own life and music that is different than what I've seen just in without the music there.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And so that has been really, really beautiful. And then I think too, it's been a really beautiful thing, and we laugh about this because we actually have like a, I don't know, a dumb song that we wrote called... we always fight when we write love songs together. Because we write and create so differently.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: He is very much more of like an incubator, like he sort of creates something on his own, and then knows exactly what he's going to say. I'm more of, I love collaboration and I can, and nothing's really precious to me. Like I'm not super attached to anything, I can let things go or I'm a pitcher of a lot of different ideas.

Annie: Yeah. Yeah.

Ellie: You can take them or not. And he's honestly more on the catcher side. That's like sort of a very, it's really beautiful, so he's like, "Ah, mh-hmm, no that's what it is.

Annie: Yeah, wow.

Ellie: So we're actually a good combination, but it's been so beautiful to learn how to create together.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And we have like hit heads in it, you know what I'm saying?

Annie: Right.

Ellie: But it has been, it has been a really, really beautiful thing to appreciate, sort of the differences. And then for me, and he would say this, he does not like singing harmony.

Annie: Really? Oh my gosh, he always sings the melody?

Ellie: He almost always sings the melody-

Annie: Fascinating.

Ellie: And so recently, and I have pushed him because I love harmony.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And I'm like, and he actually has really good instincts, he doesn't think that he does, but he does. And so I think for me, he is so good at almost everything that he does, I cannot compare myself to him. Like I get into trouble. I mean, I've talked to like counseling about this, because I can get into a dark place, why not? Because he is so productive, he can accomplish fun. He is one of the most intentional people on the face of the earth.

Annie: Yes. His friends love him.

Ellie: He's intentional for our marriage, with our kids, with work, with friends, with his family.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: I mean, it just with his work, it is, with his work, I say work twice because he does music, and then he's sort of an entrepreneur too. He like he starts a new business about every year, like "What are you on this year, mate?" Right now he's learning how to be a pilot, he's learning to fly again.

Annie: So is Abner, that's not an accident, is it?

Ellie: Oh no, no, no.

Annie: Right, okay.

Ellie: We're dear, dear friends.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: And Amanda and I were like, "Oh boy, all right, what are we upto next year?"

Annie: What's the future, what's going to happen next year?

Ellie: It's so fun. That was spawned by a conversation that Drew's like, "I'm flying, man, you got to..."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Anyway, it just, everything went from there. But it's been so beautiful to see him like, do something vulnerable.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And so that's not exactly the same thing as grief, but to see him try, and grow and do something, that he doesn't feel naturally strong at.

Annie: Yeah. Wow.

Ellie: And to see him take risks. And I think that's a lot of creativity is taking risks, taking chances. And so it's been so, that has been one of my favorite things of creating music together is to, A, learn how to speak life and encourage him. Like it's easy, I'm like, "babe, just do this harmony, it's easy." And he's like, "It is not easy for me."

Annie: Wow.

Ellie: "And when you say that, that makes me feel small." So those kinds of conversations and seeing him really become a great harmony singer, like and start to trust his gut a bit.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: That has been one of my favorite things, is to see him be brave in something that is not his comfort zone.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: Because I feel like he's mainly comfortable.

Annie: Yeah, and very good. He's mainly comfortable and very good.

Ellie: And I don't love seeing him struggle. I just love seeing him do something that he doesn't feel good at and crush it.

Annie: Of course.

Ellie: Like I'm such a fan of him. So that's been fun, as we've learned to sing together on our, we do this You and Me Tour, where we sing the whole time, and it's just the two of us on this tour.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And so to see him kind of push himself and start to sing harmony, he sings harmony on one of the songs.

Annie: Yeah. Canyon, yeah.

Ellie: On my new record called "Mine" and I am just like, "Babes you're crushing this, I love your voice." It's just been a really beautiful thing and a huge turning point in our life together. And me even having a career, I was actually on bedrest with Emmylou. He was opening for NEEDTOBREATHE for the first time, first of three. And I was supposed to be on the tour like singing with him, and I couldn't be because I had to be on bed rest. So I, once I got released from bread rest, bread rest?

Annie: Yeah. I wish.

Ellie: That's exactly what I was doing, I was eating bread on the couch, I was eating bread in the bed. But I was released from it and I got to go to a show in Asheville, North Carolina, at the Orange Peel.

Annie: Aha.

Ellie: And I remember standing side stage, and he was going to bring me up for a couple of songs, but I was watching him hold an entire crowd, standing-room crowd. He's playing solo acoustic, and he was holding them in the palm of his hand, and it was the first time since we had been married, Annie, when I wasn't on stage with him.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Ellie: Whenever I was at a show, because if I was ever at the show-

Annie: You're right there.

Ellie: They were like, "Come on!" Like "Come sing." And I was watching him perform, and hold this crowd in the palm of his hand, and it was the first time I thought, "There is something different that happens when I'm not out there with you, you are so good at this." And I didn't want him to invite me up, I just wanted to watch him use this gift that God's given him. I just wanted to be an admirer.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And so we ended up having a conversation about six months after that, I was bold enough to ask him the question. We were at our friend's house in the Hamptons, and we were waiting for them to get there, we had lobster rolls, and a bottle of champagne. And I was just like, "I'm going to ask you a really vulnerable question." But when I had started writing songs, writing Scripture into songs, like he had kind of released me to do that. Not that he needed to do that-

Annie: Yeah, of course, beautiful.

Ellie: But he was just like, I kept accidentally writing songs about Jesus. And he was like, "Well, that's not what my band does, but you need to let what's in you out."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: "So don't feel like you need to write anything for me." That was a huge deal for me, it was like a fire hydrant. I could not stop writing songs. Well, I asked him, "Do you ever feel," I never have to consider your role in my songs. "Do you ever

feel like, do you ever feel like, I don't know, like kim-dim because I'm up there on stage with you. You want to tell maybe another girl's story, but people assume that it's mine. I don't know, does that ever feel limiting to you?"

And he's like, "I've never actually thought about that before, but I guess maybe sometimes it does, but that's never felt like painful or I don't know, like a huge struggle for me." And I just thought, so we started, I said, "What if I wasn't up there? What would happen, how would you write?" And it was a huge risk to take.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: What if I stayed home? Emmylou is walking, and I got to get her home. So it just has been, I feel like it's been a really beautiful thing for us to not make music together for five years and be each of us. I mean, they call it, at Porter's Call, at our counseling.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Like individuation. Like when we were talking about, I don't know, like this idea of us, me leaving this thing that we've been building together for so long. It felt, I don't know, scary, dumb, and our Al Andrews, who's so amazing-

Annie: Oh my gosh, I love him.

Ellie: ...counsels so many people here in Nashville, musicians here in Nashville. He said, "Oh, my gosh, you guys are doing something that is so important, and it's just you're individuating. You're both being exactly who God made you to be and not being bitter at the other one for it. But just leaning into what He's called you to, and that's okay if that's not together all the time."

Annie: Yeah, yeah.

Ellie: And, I mean, it has been so beautiful to cheer each other-

Annie: My gosh.

Ellie: ...on separately.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: And then to get to come back and do it all, it just feels like all the things.

Annie: And I loved him being on Canyon, I mean on the album. I mean, it was like, it's so great.

[00:20:06] <Music>

Annie: Just interrupted this conversation with Ellie really quickly, to share about another one of our incredible partners, stamps.com. For a lot of us, this summer has shown us some welcome signs of a more normal life ahead. And finally, you can enjoy some of life's little pleasures, like smiling at your neighbor, or seeing a movie, and going to the post office. Okay, listen, that's not the best part. But with stamps.com, you can skip the trips to the post office and save on postage.

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They make it easy for small businesses to mail and ship without needing to take a trip to the post office. You can print official U.S. postage and shipping labels 24/7 without having to leave your desk or buy any fancy equipment, and all you need is your computer and a standard printer. And once your mail is ready, you schedule a pickup or you can drop it off, it is literally that easy. Stamps.com is a no brainer, it's saving nearly a million small business owners, like me and you, time and money. They offer deals you can't get anywhere else, like up to 40% off USPS, and up to 66% off UPS shipping rates.

And with their switch and save feature, you can quickly compare carriers to find the best rates every time. So stop wasting time going to the post office, and go to stamps.com instead there's literally no risk. And with my promo code, THATSOUNDSFUN, you get a special offer that includes a four-week trial, plus free postage and a digital scale. No long-term commitments or contracts. Just go to stamps.com and click on the microphone at the top of the homepage and type in THATSOUNDSFUN. That's stamps.com and the promo code is THATSOUNDSFUN. Never go to the post office again, y'all. And now back to my conversation with Ellie.

[00:22:11] <Music>

What's the vulnerability level you feel about Canyon?

Ellie: Oh, just the whole thing?

Annie: Yeah, the whole record, does it feel more vulnerable? Because it, yeah-

Ellie: [Inaudible 00:22:27]

Annie: I mean it is connecting people, I mean, you should see half the questions on here, are people going, "Will you get her to talk about this song? Because it's changing my life. Will you get her to talk about this song? Because it's changing my life." People want to talk about Canyon, they want to talk about "Constellations."

Ellie: Oh, men.

Annie: They want to talk about, "Sweet Ever After" I mean, it just keep, "Mine" it just keeps going. This album must have cost you emotionally.

Ellie: Yeah.

Annie: For how much it's connecting with us emotionally.

Ellie: Yeah. It's so interesting that you say that, Annie, because I actually wrote a whole other record before this.

Annie: What?

Ellie: I mean, okay. Yeah. I shoved a pile of 35 songs off of my desk, after I went to the Grand Canyon and started over basically.

Annie: Oh my gosh!

Ellie: There's a couple of songs that made it from that original group, but I was getting ready to write. So I have been, and you know, this as a Seven, we don't like pain.

Annie: Right. I don't like it.

Ellie: Like, so and I feel like, we've grown, as we've gotten older, we're healthy Sevens.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: We can lean into that.

Annie: That's right.

Ellie: I've acknowledged pain in my life, I've acknowledged things, wounds in my life via counseling.

Annie: Yeah, same.

Ellie: Like done a lot of work, but went on in the past two years, was sort of found myself on a journey of not just acknowledging the wounds. But actually allowing myself to grieve for the first time, some of the wounds in my story.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And, I grieved, I think "Red Sea Road" that whole record felt like a process of grieving with my people. And I had never let myself grieve my own wounds in my own story. And so as I did that, as I simply let myself kind of visit some of the places in my story. Because I think may be sometimes, at least for me, grieve, if you don't grieve the wounds in your story it ends up coming out sideways later.

Annie: Always. Hashtag, always.

Ellie: Hashtag always. So that's what had started to happen with me.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: So I was writing a record about encountering as I grieved, encountering the tenderness, and the nearness, and the empathy of God. As I let myself weep, as I let myself just breathe in some of those wounded places, I was encountering the nearness of God. So I had started writing that record and it was so powerful. So I don't know if I wrote that to just process the grief that I was doing in my own story. But fast forward to, I'm getting ready to make this record, we're like in pre-production and then March 3rd, 2020 hits, and the tornado.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Scariest night of my life, went right behind our house in East Nashville, and then a week after that COVID-

Annie: Y'all those neighborhoods got destroyed?

Ellie: ...destroyed. It was like a scene, a terrible scene from a movie. And so fast-forward to this year, where I think, I maybe I had to, I don't know, I feel like I really learned to grieve in my own story. And so then fast-forward to the racial tension, which so much of that of me leaning into that story, Annie, has to do with you. And I don't even know, I can't remember if I've told you this or not, but your

conversations that you were having in the wake of George Floyd, in the wake of a Ahmaud Arbery, was it Kelsey?

Annie: Mike Kelsey.

Ellie: Mike Kelsey.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: That podcast I listened to, and it just sent me on this journey-

Annie: He was unbelievable.

Ellie: ...of educating myself, of continuing to grieve, it was so, I'm so grateful, you were so brave. And just kind of-

Annie: Thank you. Well, he was very generous with us.

Ellie: ...leaned into that very moment. Because it was so, that felt like an invitation for me to kind of lean into that earlier. So there was so much that I was grieving on a global scale, on a national scale. Started Latasha Morrison, I remember asking you, "Do you know about Bridge Builders?" And you're like, "Well you should probably just, I mean, why don't you just start a group?"

Annie: Do a group?

Ellie: Do a group. And I was like, well, "Okay, but I feel like a baby, toddler child."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: You know like in this journey, and I don't feel brave enough to start a group. And you were like, "Well, I mean, but if you're just gathering your backyard, what's to lose?"

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And so you really encouraged me like to kind of lean into that. So it has been, but the record, it's so interesting, Annie, because the record to me, it sounds more like me than I've ever...

Annie: Wow.

Ellie: Like I love all the other records I've made, but my dad, and he's the executive producer. When dad and Cason Cooley in our production meeting, Dad said, "You've always been singer/songwriter, girl."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: "You've always, if you can't play it on guitar, it's not really for you on the record." And he was like, "But you love so much music. Like, you feel music, you dance to music. Anytime you hear music, like a little bit more pop sound, and you are moving, you are dancing." And he was like, "What if you let go with a guitar sometimes?"

Annie: Oh, wow.

Ellie: I don't know, like, "I think that might sound fun to you?" And I was like, "That would be amazing." Because a lot of the songs that I love, that I was bringing into our pre-production meeting. "What are you loving, what are you listening to?" I was listening to Maggie Rogers, Tori Kelly-

Annie: Oh, Maggie Rogers.

Ellie: [Indistinct 00:27:19] The Highwomen, Kasey Musgraves.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: They were just like you. There's this girl named Sigrid who is all over my run Ellie run. I don't run often, but when I do listen to music it's so-

Annie: You have-

Ellie: I have like-

Annie: Playlist?

Ellie: Playlist.

Annie: Why can't we think of that word.

Ellie: That's the word, run Ellie run playlist, and so a lot of that stuff sounded more pop. And he was like, "What if you just explored that?"

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And that felt like the scariest invitation to me. But man, I just, I'm so grateful for that invitation, and I don't know, I just feel it was super vulnerable singing these. I accessed this other place in my voice that I didn't know existed. So all of it, it feels like new, big.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: It's been so beautiful to be like I don't know, in grieving personally and grieving globally, and exploring some new places in my voice, I'm like I feel like there's this beautiful thing. Authentic community is really important to me, and I feel like I'm just extending that in this record.

Annie: It's been out for about a month, has the response been fun so far?

Ellie: Oh, it's been great. I've never seen anything like it.

Annie: I mean, Constellation, has almost 4 million streams, do you know that?

Ellie: That's crazy.

Annie: 4 million streams? I mean, that is insane.

Ellie: It is so **[Inaudible 00:28:39]**

Annie: I know.

Ellie: I love it so much. That one, "Constellations" is so sweet, because it was one of those songs, I wrote with John Guerra, who I love, David Leonard, who I love. Artists in their own right, and we wrote that, that's one of the only ones that made it from the batch of songs before.

Annie: Wow.

Ellie: We released that before, really, I wasn't even sure exactly if I was going to make another record. But I felt we had written that in November.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Ellie: So pre-2020, looking back on dark nights of the soul.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And it just was one of those songs that you wrote looking back, not realizing how much you were going to need it in the season ahead.

Annie: Yes, Yes.

Ellie: As almost an Ebenezer, of being like, "Okay. Okay." So I remember talking to David Leonard, because the vocal on that song, Annie, is the first time I'd ever sang it.

Annie: No.

Ellie: Yeah. And so we wrote the song-

Annie: That was your first take?

Ellie: That's the first take.

Annie: Ellie Holcomb?

Ellie: Like the first time ever singing the song, we just ended up keeping it because it captured such a moment. We have been in this like kind of crazy, I don't know, sometimes you feel like you catch a song, and we were just in the studio. So David Leonard and I actually produced that song, because he had set up that track.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: I sang it, I'm just literally standing in the studio, like, kind of sitting on the couch and standing up. Singing that for, singing it down for the first time, like, "Let's see if this works?"

Annie: Yeah, let's try the whole song? Yeah.

Ellie: And that's what it is.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Ellie: Isn't that insane?

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: So I remember walking around my neighborhood, in Nashville that got hit so bad by the tornado, and there was all of this rebuilding. Like you could hear hammers on the roofs until, 10, 11 p.m.

Annie: I bet.

Ellie: There was such, beauty.

Annie: For months.

Ellie: For months and months. I mean, it's still happening, people are still rebuilding. And I just thought, "Man, I want to make a record, and I want to go ahead and release this song. Because to me, I want to make a record that sounds like rebuilding in the wake of a storm."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Having no idea, this was like, after the tornado, COVID, had not even happened. Having no idea how much all of us were going to lose in the wake of the storm of COVID.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: But I was just like, I want it to sound like community coming together and rebuilding.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Because you could eat like a king or queen in our neighborhood, after the tornado, everybody, there was so much beauty that happened in the wake of that storm. So many people, strangers loving strangers, neighbors loving neighbors. And I was like, "This song reminds me of that hope."

And there were trees that had been knocked down by the storm, and it was spring time, it's March. And so the trees literally, they were going to die, but there was still life, like there were blooms coming off of these trees that have been knocked down still. And I'm like, "That's the gospel, out of the stump of Jesse like this."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Like it is just, this is what God does, He meets us in the most devastated places. And I mean, I'll never forget being in a co-write, that's what started the whole thing, I was at the Worship Together Conference, not conference, Women Who Worship. I was just at the Worship Together Conference, it was amazing. But the Women Who Worship, they got all these women together.

Annie: Aha.

Ellie: And they, we were riding and I was with Mia Fieldes.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: You know Mia?

Annie: Oh my gosh, I love her.

Ellie: Have you ever had her on here?

Annie: Have we had her? I don't, no, I don't think so. I need to.

Ellie: I'm like I don't recall. She would be amazing.

Annie: We've talked about it.

Ellie: Australian accent, like that's not going to hurt anybody.

Annie: Prophetic, she does, oh man.

Ellie: Prophetic. So, Annie, here's what happened, I was in a co-write with her. I was actually, this was part of why I grieved personally.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: I was in a co-write with her, and Alex Seeley was speaking, and she was talking about how in that room, there were all these women writing in that room, the mother heart of God was represented. And so they were talking in our breakout sessions, we would have this time together, a prayer, and someone would speak. And then we would break off into these like co-writing sessions. Like writing camp, so much fun by the way. And I was nursing Rivers, my youngest at the time. So I like show up late, because I had like with a breast pump and a guitar.

Annie: Right, right.

Ellie: I'm like, "Great to be with you guys, and sorry I'm late." And they're already deep in conversation. One of the other girls in the room was just like, "Oh, hey, this my name," I'll keep her name.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Because it's her story. But we were actually just talking about how I have a hard time relating to the mother heart of God. Like, because I have a really tough relationship with my mom. And so Mia in the middle of this was like, "Do you want healing from that right now?" And the girl was like, "Okay." So I'm literally, I'm like dropping the breast pump, dropping the guitar, I'm like getting on the floor.

Annie: Yeah, yeah.

Ellie: I mean she's like, "All right, here's what we're going to do. You just get a hold your hands open like this and you're just going to ask God to give you a picture of a wound that is from your past. And when you get the picture, just tell us." And so I'm like getting on the floor, I'm so here for this.

Annie: Yeah. Oh, I know, I know.

Ellie: [Crosstalk 00:33:39] I just was, I was like-

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: I was just like, "Oh yes, Jesus prayer." And Mia is like, "You don't have to get on the floor." And I was like, "Well, okay."

Annie: You're like, "Too late, I'm on my knees all the time."

Ellie: I'm just, I'm here. Just I'm a floor dweller. So we-

Annie: I'm a floor dweller, you really are.

Ellie: I really am.

Annie: You really are.

Ellie: And I'm like, "I would be on the floor probably now, except for I wouldn't hit the mic."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: But it was so powerful. God gives her this picture, so that's good, and she's just like, this girl's just sobbing, and she's like, "Okay, now you're going to ask where were you in this moment? Where were you?" And He's going to give you another picture. And when you get that picture, just tell us. And so she gets this picture of God meeting her in this place of where He was.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And this is just like, Jesus, I mean, and so she says, "Okay, now you're going to, we're going to speak forgiveness over your mom. And we're going to forgive that wound and we're going to acknowledge how Jesus was there." And, sobbing, I mean, she is sobbing, I'm sobbing. And so she's like, "All right, moving on to your father." And I was suddenly like, "What?" I'm like, "Wait?" She's still, but when she said that, I just was like, "I am jumping on this train."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And I have an incredible relationship with my dad, but he missed a lot of my childhood, and that is part of what I was coming out sideways. I had acknowledged that, we had healed, he was like, I mean, just come and been like, "I have repented." He's like, "I can offer you repentance, I have gotten this wrong in Jesus." What an amazing-

Annie: Oh my gosh, what a gift.

Ellie: ...gift. Like, so there's been so much healing in all of that. And so I'm like going, "I don't need to go grieve that." Like we are good.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And he's given me such permission to get it wrong as a human, as a mom, as an artist. Like, because he and my mom are incredible. They have modeled out this just repentance to say, "Like, we have not done all of this right. We're so sorry, please forgive us. Here's how God's changing us. Here's how I'm making different choices." I mean, amazing.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: But I had never grieved, I had never grieved. And so I literally jumped on the Jesus prayer healing train thing.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And ended up the next day in my office, I canceled this other co-write that I had, and I got on my face and in our little office at our house. And I just had my hands opened and I said, actually I just said, "Father." And Annie, I started sobbing.

Annie: Mh-hmm.

Ellie: I didn't, know. And all I can say that it was like the Ghost of Christmas Past or something, it was just like, and I was at this picture of some things that I remembered, some things that I didn't.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Of places where I felt wounded and all of these lies that I believed about who God was.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Because my dad had not been around when I was little, and we have been in this healing. So it has been this beautiful thing of seeing God show up in wounds that I knew were there, and wounds that I didn't know were there.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: And then, in the wake of everything that we've been grieving, racial tension, political division, division even within the church.

Annie: So much, yeah.

Ellie: Of, I think, encountering God in that way, in that palpable way, of seeing him hold me and saying, "You are held, even when you didn't think that you were held."

Annie: Mh-hmm.

Ellie: "I was there holding you." I think it gave me this boldness to learn to sing from the pit, to sing from the canyon, to sing from the valley. And as it turns out, when you encounter love in that deep place of ache or pain, and when you sing because of the joy of encountering that love in the pit, in the canyon, your voice echoes off of every single broken piece that caused that canyon. It echoes off of every single piece and it's multiplied.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And that's what I feel like has happened with this record. I'm like, "I can sing in the valley too, I can sing in the canyon." And we have good reason to sing, because there's a river running through it.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: I mean, just so grateful for that. And so I think there's this boldness. I think it is maybe Tozer or Chesterton, I can't remember who says it, but he says, "Men, who have suffered, speak with an authority of the presence of God that people who haven't suffered can't speak of because you encounter Him there."

Annie: Right.

Ellie: In a way, and I was talking with a friend the other day at this Worship Together Conference, who had lost a child. And he was like, "It's so weird, I wouldn't wish this on anyone. It has been oh, hard."

[00:38:22] <Music>

Annie: Hey friends, just taking one last break to tell you about today's sponsor, that we're so happy to partner with Indeed. In small businesses, every hire counts. I know because this podcast is basically a small business, that's turned into a network of small businesses, and when talent is too important to leave to chance you need help. I need help. We need, Indeed.

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[00:40:04] <Music>

Ellie: I went to the Grand Canyon, and I was down there-

Annie: I mean, the cover is perfect.

Ellie: Oh my God, isn't it crazy?

Annie: It's perfect.

Ellie: I'm like, "Go to Big Bend National Park, it's in the middle of nowhere in Texas." But that's the Rio Grande, the Rio Grande, that's a river. What's crazy is, Annie, we were there, we did that photo shoot. We all voted early, and we were there on election day.

Annie: Oh wow.

Ellie: Which was such an intense day, it just felt like a divided day, wherever you are on the spectrum.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: It felt like a divided time in our nation.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And obviously there was a lot of tension, and ache, and pain, in the wake of that, and so fear on both sides.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: It's like there was so much fear, and it was so sweet to be in that beautiful place.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Reminded of this imagery, because Drew and I, when the numbers were low, went to the Grand Canyon.

Annie: Mh-hmm.

Ellie: Have you been, by the way?

Annie: No, I want to see it so bad. I've never seen it.

Ellie: You got to go.

Annie: I know.

Ellie: It is, so we camped on the northern rim, went down into the Canyon, and rafted the river, spent the night on the river banks, and rafted out.

Annie: Did you take the kids?

Ellie: No.

Annie: No, okay.

Ellie: This was, we were supposed to be on a cruise where we were performing with Christine Caine-

Annie: That's right.

Ellie: ...and Lisa Harper.

Annie: That's right.

Ellie: And that obviously, got canceled because of COVID, but we were taking my brother and sister on the trip. They have three kids, they hardly ever like go on trips with just them. And so they were going to come because we had an extra room on the cruise.

Annie: Right

Ellie: Well, they had already lined up childcare, asked off work, and so Drew was like, "We're doing this."

Annie: "We are going."

Ellie: Like, "I'm going to book a trip." The numbers were lower, it was almost a year ago.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: Last year in August. I don't highly recommend going to the Grand Canyon in August, it's like 170.

Annie: It's so hot, right? Yeah.

Ellie: But it was camping. So it just felt like a safer, I don't know, safer trip to take.

Annie: Yeah, of course.

Ellie: Well, our guide starts telling us when we're in that pit of the Canyon, "The Canyon walls tell a story. And it's just really a story of like disaster on disaster, landslide, mudslide, earthquake, of drought."

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: So you're literally, you can see the layers of like a disaster.

Annie: Oh Ellie.

Ellie: And I'm down there, looking up at this and I'm like, "This just looks..." and then there's this huge divide. And I'm like, "This just looks like a picture of all of our hearts." Like, especially after this last year, we all, just think of how lonely so many of us were? Of how many people lost so much jobs, people they love?

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: A sense of security, a sense of community, I mean, it was so hard. So many of us, wherever we were in life were experiencing loss on loss, trauma on trauma. The racial tension and division, and I know my black and brown brothers and sisters so much ache and pain triggered this past year, retriggered. And I just thought this is a picture of all of our hearts, especially after this last year. Because to be human is to be broken, but there in the middle, in the deepest part of the Canyon, there's this river running through.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And I was like, as it turns out, there's a current of God's love, there is a current of living water that runs deeper than our deepest ache or sorrow. And that will carry us if we'll only let it.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: To a place where we know that we're beloved even in our most broken place. And we know that we belong to love and to each other.

Annie: Yes.

- Ellie:** Like we're invited as the hope people, as the Jesus people, to join up as little molecules of water-
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Ellie:** ...and that's what you're doing here every day, Annie. And it's like we are the hope people.
- Annie:** Mh-hmm. We are the hope people.
- Ellie:** And like, that's what Jesus invites us into, to be streams, like streams in the desert. There are these like hidden reservoirs, underground reservoirs of peace, and life, and hope, and joy, that are accessible at any time, if we'll kind of breathe, and just like lean into it, and let Him carry us.
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Ellie:** And so I just thought, "Man," I left that trip and I was just weeping down there. I mean, it was probably, it was awkward at times, because I was like, "This is so beautiful." I think God was like, "Wow, this is not really [**Crosstalk 00:44:12**]" But the other thing that he told us, Annie, and I just think of how tense, and heated, and divided our world is right now. Strangers hating strangers on Instagram.
- Annie:** Yeah.
- Ellie:** In the comment section, and you're like, "Calm down." But how cold the water was. So when we went to bed it was 50 degrees-
- Annie:** Oh my gosh.
- Ellie:** ...when we went to bed that night. They were like, "So here's what you're going to want to do." You're on a little cot, you have a sheet, which you don't really need-
- Annie:** A sheet? That's it?
- Ellie:** It was just like a little flat sheet, you know?
- Annie:** Oh my gosh!
- Ellie:** And, so, they provided Arizona River Runners, they were so great. They provide the whatever equipment.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: They're like, "Before you go to sleep tonight, you're going to want to go jump in the 50-degree river."

Annie: Ah-ah!

Ellie: And you're like, "No." But it's like 95 degrees in the dead of night.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Ellie: So I'm so glad I didn't do it, I was like, "That's crazy."

Annie: Right.

Ellie: The water's freezing.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: I'm not going to do that right before I go to bed.

Annie: Right.

Ellie: But they're like, "No, it'll keep you cool." Well, I didn't do that, and I'm so glad. Because they told us they were like, "The other thing you're going to want to do is wake up in the middle of the night, because there's this thing that happens called the rim-effect."

Annie: Aha.

Ellie: And it's when the moon sets behind the Canyon wall.

Annie: Okay.

Ellie: I'd never heard of it before, but they were like, "The moon is going to set behind the Canyon wall, and here's, what's going to happen. You're actually going to be in the darkest place you've ever been before."

Annie: Oh, wow.

Ellie: Because there's no ambient light, and you're going to be-

Annie: Oh right. From the moon, or sun, or anything.

Ellie: No moon, or something.

Annie: Nothing. Oh boy.

Ellie: You're going to be further away from the stars than you've ever been, because you're over a mile into the surface of the earth. But because it is so dark, the stars will shine brighter than they've ever shone before. And they will appear to be closer than they've ever appeared to be before. And, Annie, I woke up in the middle of the night because I was sweating my butt off. And it was like the stars were like right in front of me, and I just thought that is the gospel. That is, Jesus is the light of the world, and He is with us even in the darkest nights of our soul.

Annie: Yes.

Ellie: And so to me, I hope that the record really feels like that.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: It feels like this good cause for hope even in the deep places of pain.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: That it kind of echoes from, deep, deep valleys, and pits, and canyons, to the top of the mountains. To kind of remind people wherever you are on the journey, like you're beloved, you're held, you're not alone.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: And you're suffering, our suffering, because of Jesus and it never is the last, it's never the end.

Annie: Yeah.

Ellie: I just was reading Sandra McCracken's new book, I got an early copy of it, it is amazing.

Annie: Oh good.

Ellie: And she says, "In the end, everything will be all right."

Annie: Mh-hmm.

Ellie: "So if it's not all right, it's not the end."

Annie: Corey Asbury sings, "If the story isn't over, if the story isn't good." Right? You know what we normally do, when we finish, is you tell me what sounds fun to you. But every now and again, I have another little thing in my heart, and would you just pray for us? I just feel like there are people here, who are listening that are, that don't understand the canyon they're in. So would you just pray for us to end today, instead of, and we'll figure out what sounds fun to you another time.

Ellie: Okay. That sounds good.

Annie: Today will you just pray for us?

Ellie: 100%. Jesus, we love you, and I thank you that you entered this broken, messed up world. Because you wanted us to know that your heart is to draw us near when we are in the midst of the most broken things that we could imagine. And when the dreams that we've had don't come true. When the prayers that we prayed don't get answered in the way that we wanted them to.

I thank you, that you are still Emmanuel. You are still a man of sorrows, who is well acquainted with grief. I thank you that you are the ultimate bridge builder, who builds a bridge across any great divide. Who builds a bridge from hopelessness to hope. Who builds a bridge from alone and lonely to belonging, and beloved. Who builds a bridge from darkness to light, from death to life, Father. And I ask that whoever's listening right now, who feels like you maybe have forgotten about them, who feels like they are in such a deep pit that they may not ever come out, who feels confused and lost.

I thank you for the way that I've seen you meet me in the low places. I think of Nightbirde, that singer who is in the middle of a cancer journey, and she says, "If you can't find God, look lower, look on the bathroom floor." And so Father, I just ask in the name of Jesus, that you would send your Spirit to meet whoever's listening in the low places. That you would give them eyes to see you, and ears to hear your voice say, "I am here, and I love you, and I am holding you, and I will never let you go."

And I thank you that a canyon is the shape of an upside down mountain. And that maybe, just in this backwards, upside down nature of the kingdom of God, that you use the places, if we'll just breathe, be brave enough to breathe, in our most broken places. That we will encounter a sense of this fact that we're beloved even there. That we will encounter your Spirit, and your presence, and your healing, and your hope, even there.

I thank you that water always moves to the lowest place and so do you, you do it over, and over, and over again, you go low. And so I pray that you would meet us in our low places, and that you would give us the courage, and the bravery, and the hope, and good reason to sing even from the valley. And that our songs and our voices, as we sing together, something would be changed in us, Father. And that we would be, that from our pain, that the power of the gospel to meet us even in our most painful places, that those stories would be multiplied Jesus.

And that there will be stories even from listeners here, on That Sounds Fun. That they would know that they are going to have a story to tell, of who you are and how you brought healing to their most wounded place. So we thank you, healer. We thank you, reconciler. We thank you Prince of Peace for being a God who is steady and sure, and who we can always count on to meet us even in the valleys and in the canyons.

We love you, and we thank you for that hope that is grounded in an empty grave. Any pain that we've ever been through, you've already been there, and you've moved through it. So we ask that you would carry us through it, that we would rest in the current of your love, and that it would carry us when it feels like we can't carry on any longer. We love you and we thank you for loving us perfectly in our deepest pain, and in our highest places of joy, and rejoicing, you are with us through it all good shepherd.

And I pray that you would make us lie down by quiet waters and rest in green pastures. That you would help us relax at a table that you set for us, even in the presence of our enemies. That's an awkward scenario, God, but you set a banquet table for us there. And so I pray that we would come and feast on the goodness of your Word. The goodness of your promises, the goodness of your presence. And that we will be quenched and satisfied, and have stories of that upside-down backwards peace that passes our understanding, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Annie: Amen. Psalm 23. I love you Ellie, thanks for doing this.

Ellie: I love you. Thank you for having me.

[00:51:42] <Music>

Annie: Oh, you guys don't you love Ellie? And how about that Psalm 23? Listen, if you haven't spent any time in Psalm 23 this week, I think you should. I think we need to read it, let's maybe memorize it. I'm kind of thinking through how we keep this train going. If Shane and Shane are talking about it on Monday, Louie is talking about it on Wednesday, and Ellie prays it for us on Friday, that's no joke, you guys, that is no joke. So make sure you grab a copy of her new album Canyon, it

is so beautiful. Make sure you're following Ellie, tell her thank you so much for being on the show.

And if you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find, Annie F. Downs on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), all the places you may need me, that is how you can find me. And I think that's it from me today friends, go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you, I'll do the same. Have a great weekend, and we'll see you back here on Monday, with some of Ellie and Drew's best pals, Amanda and Abner, the duo better known as JOHNNYSWIM. We'll see you guys on Monday.

[00:52:43] <Music>

Podcast resources

- Link
 - [CANYON](#)